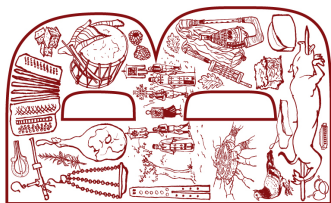
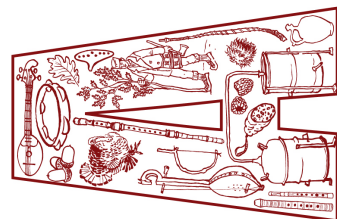


# LIVING TRADITION

Exhibition and Guide to Exceptional Roots Music in Serbia  
*Music forms from The National Registry of The Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia*



**Tomka Paunović and Dragica Žunić**  
by Predrag Todorović



# **SERBIA: LIVING TRADITION**

Exhibition and Guide to Exceptional Roots Music in Serbia

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## EXCEPTIONAL MUSICAL HERITAGE OF SERBIA

The List of Elements of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Serbia established by the National Committee for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Serbia currently includes 49 items (May 2020). The list was made in line with requirements of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage passed in 2003 and ratified by the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in 2010.

This project, involving an exhibition with a guide, presents eight elements of the musical heritage of Serbia included in the List, that are of exceptional value for the culture of Serbia and the mankind. These are examples of the living vocal, vocal-instrumental and instrumental rural and urban musical traditions from various parts of Serbia. They are forms of musical expression the characteristics of which fit in with broader cultural and musical physiognomy of the area in which they are found. On the other, they are highly specific, even endemic, and therefore regarded as „trademark” forms for certain parts of Serbia (and thus for the country as a whole). Inclusion of these items in the national list confirms their value within the context of world folk music heritage.

Ivana Tasić / Izvor Group



## VRANJE TOWN SONG

**V**ranje is a town in southern Serbia – a town with a peculiar history and culture. Through the centuries, its geographic position attracted numerous conquering armies, rulers, traders, craftsmen, peoples of different ethnicities, confessions and origins. Ottoman Turks have left a strong imprint on the cultural heritage of Vranje, as this part of Serbia remained under the Ottoman rule for more than 400 years, that is, until final liberation in 1878. The traces of Ottoman presence are evident in many aspects of local cultural heritage, including music, mixed with Serbian, Roma, and Aromanian cultural traditions... Vranje was declared a member of the Unesco Creative Cities Network in 2020, thanks to its rich and varied musical heritage and vibrant local music scene.

**A**mong the cultural traditions of Vranje, a special place belongs to the town song, a musical form that originated back in the second half of the 19th century. Townhouses, backyards, and alleys of the period witnessed the birth of a large number of songs that expressed delicate, mostly romantic feelings of the town dwellers. Some of these songs give us details of daily life in the patriarchal society or describe relations between Serbian and Turkish populations. Textual content is usually based on true historical events, places, and persons, whose fates and „snippets“ of life are encased in these beautiful verses, meandering melodies, varied rhythms, and refined vocal interpretations. The future of the Vranje town songs is secured thanks to generations of singers who developed and kept this tradition alive, as they continue to do today.

**Sinovi Krajine**  
by Predrag Todorović



# OJKAČA

In the past, many Serbian families used to live in various parts of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the Second World War, in the period from 1945 to 1948, many Serbs from these areas were moved to Vojvodina in a huge campaign for mass colonization of the northern parts of Serbia. Another wave of migration to Vojvodina happened in the nineties, when many Serbian refugees moved there as they tried to escape the war in the territories of former Yugoslavia. They brought along the songs that had been passed on for generations. Though for the most part they originated in highland areas, these songs – known as ojkača – continued to thrive in the plains of Vojvodina, thanks to thunderous voices and patriotic feelings of the singers.

Ojkača is a highly condensed amalgamation of music and poetry. Sometimes it takes but one rhyming couplet of „epic decasyllables“. Songs are traditionally performed by vocal groups that can be male or female. A solo singer performs a more intricate melodic line, while the rest of the group provides basic melodic accompaniment singing in unison. Sometimes accompaniment may include a tambura or other musical instruments. Ojkača reflects the life these people in all of its nuances. These songs express joy, sadness, humor, fear, and nostalgia for the homeland. Ojkača is a part of the daily life for these people who find the love for the homeland to be the very essence of their identity.

**Dalibor Mladenović**  
by Dejan Dimić





## KAVAL PLAYING

**T**raditional musical instruments of the past played a variety of roles in daily lives of the people – they accompanied village song and dance, played a part in communal rituals, or just helped shepherds kill some time and have fun while grazing the sheep. The shepherds used to make this simple instrument using natural materials at hand. Kaval players mostly performed well-known melodies of local songs and kolo dances, but they could also improvise using the same „musical“ idiom as the basis for improvisation. This musical form was known as „shepherd’s improvisation“.

**K**aval is one of the oldest instruments of the so-called „shepherds“ music tradition. It is a long cylindrical semi-transversal wooden pipe, held at an angle of 45 degrees to the body. In addition to solo performance, folk tradition included kaval duets in which one instrument would play the melody and the other provide drone accompaniment. Kaval can also accompany solo singing and is often used to play dance melodies. In the past, it was most popular among the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, but towards the end of the 20th century, the instrument attracted attention in other parts of Serbia as well, and is currently featured in numerous musical groups dedicated to the preservation of the cultural heritage of Serbia and the Balkans.

**Bokan Stanković**  
by Dušan Milijić



## BAGPIPE PLAYING

**G**ajde – a musical instrument well known and played all over Europe – comes in several variants, but the basic principle is always the same: it consists of a chanter, originally made of wood, and a bag made of a young goat or other animal skin. Gajde was a popular instrument in many parts of Serbia, but today it survives mostly in eastern regions and the north – that is, Vojvodina. Just like frula and kaval, this instrument in the beginning was most popular among shepherds who spent a lot of time on their own with their herds. It is primarily a solo instrument and its piercing sound made it a popular choice for village celebrations, weddings, gatherings, rites, and ritual processions. Gajde is also a popular instrument among the Vlachs living in Serbia.

**T**here are two basic types of gajde in Serbia – those in two and three voices. The players can perform a large number of popular dances and songs and can also improvise. Sometimes a player will sing and accompany the singing on gajde. Players of gajde traditionally had an important role at weddings in Vojvodina and their contribution was highly appreciated. They were expected to provide not only music but also a good measure of humour to spice up these festive occasions. Gajde remained popular well into the 20th century, however, in time, this popularity has receded. Today, it is safe to say that gajde is one of the endangered traditional instruments. Attempts at revitalization are being made by institutions, experts, and, most importantly, dedicated individuals who keep the tradition alive. Luckily, some of them are quite young.

**Neda Nikolić**  
by Srđan Branković



## PIPE-PLAYING PRACTICE

**F**rula is one of the most recognizable symbols of Serbia. As an autochthonous musical instrument of Serbia, it has roots that go far back, back to the times when it was made by ordinary peasants for daily entertainment. This simple piece of wood, roughly carved, with several holes needed to play a melody, was used by shepherds at first. In time, frula acquired many new roles in the traditional village culture. Spreading into various spheres of private and social life, frula gained popularity as a musical background for kolo dances, celebrations, gatherings, and slava festivities... As the most widely used instrument in traditional musical practice, known and played in almost every corner of Serbia, frula is regarded as the most resilient of all traditional instruments.

**T**he word frula was widely accepted only in the 20th century, as an umbrella term for a whole family of instruments previously known in Serbia under other, more ancient names, such as duduk and svirala. The huge popularity of frula contributed to many technical improvements in its construction. From a simple instrument played by peasants, it evolved into a highly polished musical instrument with standardized construction and placement of the six hole. Improvements in construction allowed further development of playing technique and expansion of the repertoire, which today includes a variety of musical genres and compositions requiring high levels of virtuosity. Thanks to large numbers of competent players of all ages, frula has a bright future in Serbia.

**Miloljub Šaković and  
Miroljub Rakić**  
by Predrag Todorović



## CLAMOUR SINGING

This very peculiar type of song comes from Western Serbia. In the past, it could be heard clamouring from afar over the mountains and foothills in the region of Zlatař, Tara and Zlatibor. Clamour singing (pevanje iz vika) is an ancient and archaic form of Serbian vocal tradition that has been kept alive thanks to a large number of authentic singers living in the region. However, their average age is causing concerns regarding the future prospects and survival of this element of Serbian tradition. That is why special efforts have been made towards the preservation of this form through the organization of festivals, seminars, field recording trips by experts and cultural organizations.

Clamour singing requires powerful and voluminous voice, healthy heart and strong lungs, as the singers need to hold breath for prolonged periods of time. The songs are performed in duets – male, female or mixed – with one singer starting the song and the other joining in, taking care to match the voice and timbre of the first singer. They keep the flow going by taking turns to fill the lungs so the flow never stops. The songs cover a variety of themes, including love, weddings, homeland, harvesting, mowing, daily life in general, and usually consist of one or two verses only. Simple melodies intertwine, come together or move apart and in the process frequently produce the intervals of a second. These performances leave no listeners indifferent.

**Obrad Milić**  
by Predrag Todorović





## GROKTALICA SINGING

**O**jkača – the song of highland Serbs who settled in Vojvodina, the northern part of Serbia, after being expelled from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – is a very close relative of the type of singing known as groktalica, sometimes also referred to as rozgalica or potresalica. This particular song form is a subtype of ojkača, featuring a distinctive element that comes from the most archaic layers of the vocal heritage of Serbian people and therefore is an important element of their cultural identity. Groktalica features a readily recognizable singing technique known as groktanje (shaking). This protracted voice shaking comes across as an overdone vibrato using strongly emphasized falsetto tones.

**G**roktalica can be performed solo or in a group. In a group setting it usually has two soloists with two distinctive roles. The first soloist starts the song/verse, introducing a part of the song in a standard recitative manner. The second soloist adds groktanje, that is, shakes the voice on the long and protracted syllable „Oj“, producing this most exciting and most expressive layer of the song. In that shaking, soloist is supported by other singers who provide simple drone accompaniment. Many performers of traditional songs in Serbia are adding groktalica songs to their repertoire, This demanding and attractive technique allows singers to present their singing skills in good light and always incites very positive reactions from the audience.

**Aleksandar Taušan**  
by Branko Isaković



## SINGING TO THE ACCOMPANIMENT OF THE GUSLE

**E**pic poetry is the richest segment of Serbian cultural heritage. Over a long time, roughly from 14th to 19th century, a large corpus of most impressive songs was produced, mostly in the meter of asymmetric decasyllable, usually dedicated to well known historical figures and events. These verses full of beauty, style, depth, symbolism, wisdom, emotions, spirituality, heroism and tragic sense of life, have gone through numerous interpretations and variations over the time and space – fusing together historical memory, legend, and myth, producing these true jewels of anonymous poetry. The singing of songs is accompanied by gusle – a one-string fiddle instrument.

**T**he traditional form of singing to the accompaniment of the gusle – inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2018 – is highly expressive. The best gusle players produce a perfect aural mixture of the rough sound of the instrument and the piercing voice singing a tale into a highly suggestive flow of music and poetry. Singing to the accompaniment of the gusle is practiced in all parts of Serbia. The modern bearers of this tradition – including many young people – are organized in some thirty associations of gusle players. The repertoire has been expanded to include new songs addressing more recent and even contemporary themes. However, the corpus of ancient epic songs remains unsurpassable.



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