

Ajri Demirovski and his Contribution to Macedonian Music Heritage

Introduction

During the extensive research on the music tradition of the Turkish community living in the Republic of Macedonia, emerged a phenomenon the value of which calls for deeper analysis. It concerns the fact that the author of several of the most popular Macedonian songs commonly regarded as anthological songs is of Turkish nationality. This being the only example of its kind was sufficient reason for further research.

This author and performer of this music is Ajri Demirovski, a musician from Bitola who had a great impact on Macedonian folk music. He is regarded as the typical representative of the music and poetic tradition of the town of Bitola in recent times, marking an entire period of the music life of Bitola and also Macedonia.

1. Biographical information

Ajri Demirovski was born in 1927 in Bitola into an impoverished family. Thus, he worked as an apprentice in a barber's shop during the WWII. Upon 1945, his achievements earned him a scholarship in the printing school in Zagreb, with the aim of helping the publishing business in Bitola. After graduating, he served as a graphic worker in the printing house "Kempuh" and "Rojamkovski" in Zagreb. He left for Pula and Rieka and then finally came to Skopje, where he began working in the printing house "Mladina". In 1949, Ajri Demirovski returned to Bitola where he continued working as a barber since he was not accepted at the "Kiro Dandaro" printing house.

Ajri Demirovski was famous for his music talent and beautiful voice even from his childhood days. After the establishment of Radio Bitola as the regional radio station in 1950, he actively took part as performer and author of many folk songs. At the audition for *Selecting young singers of Macedonian folk songs* organized by Vasil Hadzhimanov, Ajri Demirovski was chosen soloist of the music shows broadcast live on Radio Bitola.

Thanks to these music shows, most of the songs of his own authorship were distributed in the public, and thus given life over the next five decades.

Due to the political circumstances in the country, as well as the massive emigration psychosis among the Turkish population at the time, in 1955 he moved to the Republic of Turkey. He still lives there today, working in the field of publishing and printing, making music in his free time.

2. Performance and composition

From this historical perspective, after the liberation folk music played an important role in the urban music scene. Thus, the folk music shows broadcast live on Radio Bitola facilitated the diffusion of this music genre, more importantly as Radio Bitola as regional station covered the cities of Bitola, Prilep, Ohrid, Resen, Struga, Debar and Kichevo. After the region was unified, the station covered Bitola, Krushevo and Prilep (Minovski, 2000:11).



Hence the great meaning of Ajri Demirovski's performances with the Chalgija Orchestra in the "Folk Wishes" radioshow in his affirmation as a performer. This is further supported by the fact that during the broadcast of this show every Saturday at 4 pm, according to the statements of the author and the citizens of Bitola, the town was more or less empty (from the conversations with A. Demirovski, A. Sterjovski and D. Minovski on 28.03.2000).

As an author, Ajri Demirovski gave Macedonian folk heritage 40 folk songs still considered treasures of Macedonian poetic and music culture. For each performance at the show, and for other occasions as well, he would compose a new song.

The main motivation generating music creativity in this author was based on the fact that the popular repertoire regarding folk songs was most often distributed to other performers.

The process of creation always began with the devising of the lyrics, which reflected his emotions regarding events from everyday life. The verses of the songs in which autobiographical elements prevail, have a firm poetic structure and a clear idea full of symbols and metaphors (see Strejoski, 1999: 107).

In the second phase of his creative opus, he devised a melody. Due to the lack of music education, Ajri Demirovski had to repeat the melody he created until he had remembered it.

This is also why the first chord was usually taken from another popular song. It also set the intonation for the remainder of the melody of the new song.

Although an ethnic Turk, Ajri Demirovski created songs only in the Macedonian language. Strejovski, who was also a very close friend of his, emphasizes the following points as important for the description of this phenomenon (see Strejovski, 1999:103-9):

- his personality had completely adapted to the Macedonian environment, fully accepting the tradition of Macedonians
- his wish to address the entire music population of Macedonia.

3. Creative opus

The creative opus of Ajri Demirovski, according to his own statements, contains approximately 80 songs. Also, according to data in published literature, as well as the statements of his contemporaries and friends, 40 of these songs were particularly popular.

In the course of research, 28 of his songs were attained. Twelve of these were found in the catalogue of recorded materials in The Music Sector of Radio Skopje. Another 13 were found in Vasil Hadzhimanov's *Collection of Macedonian Folk Songs*. The remaining three songs created upon his departure from Bitola were provided by the author.

Several of his songs have an anthological value. The most well-known is *Bitola My Hometown*, a song which is considered the music symbol of Bitola. This song, according to the author, has autobiographical meaning. In it he sings of his love towards the town, of instances from childhood and his experiences in foreign towns. He first performed the song in 1950 at the Radio Bitola concert held at the Bitola Theater. The performance was followed by ovations from the audience.

In 2000, during the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Radio Bitola, this song was named “Song of the Century”.

The song *Over There Mother, Near Bitola* was first performed at the celebration of May First – Labor Day, in 1950. This song was inspired by the self-sacrifice of the two national heroes of Bitola, Taki Daskalot (Taki the Teacher) and Elpida Karamandi (see Manchevski, 1985:31). According to A. Sterjovski, this song played a great role in the praise of the deeds of these heroes (Sterjovski, 1999:107). The author presented this song as a gift to the mother of the dead hero, as a symbol of gratitude for the friendship with their family and especially with her son.

The last song written prior to his departure from Macedonia is *The Day of Separation is Nearing*. This song was sung by the author in the show “Folk Wishes”. He sung this same song on the railway station in front of many of his fellow townsmen before he left Bitola.

His love towards his place of birth is expressed in the songs he created after he left Macedonia. Among them are the songs *O Hear Me, Fellow Countrymen*, and *O, Macedonia*. The author promoted these songs in 1983 to mark the occasion of coming back to Macedonia after 28 years. During his stay in Macedonia, Skopje Television filmed a documentary on the life and work of Ajri Demirovski, written by Meto Popovski and directed by Dushan Naumovski.

Along with the Macedonian language, some of the songs note refrains in Turkish. Such are his first song *Last Night, Mare, I Dreamt of You, in my Dreams, Mare, I Was Happy* (with the refrain in Turkish *Sevdim seni alamadım, ben sana Mare doyamadım* meaning *it is you I loved and never got enough of*) and the song *Last Night I Passed By* (the refrain is *Ben seni severim, çok seni severim*, meaning *I love you, I love you very much*).

The remainder of the songs still popular in the Macedonian folk repertoire are *I am Proud of Bitola*, *Oh Stop You Beautiful Stojne* (a song inspired by inrequited love), *I Spend Sleepless Nights*, *Oh Nada*, *Mariche Beautiful Girl*, *I Waited for You Last Night*, *Mare*, *I Keep Marvelling at You Oh Cveta*, *For Whom Does Your Face Blook Oh Dana*, *Nada Come On Come Out*, *Magde Magdalena*, *Young Stojan Lies Ill*, *Farewell Mother I am Gone*, *Oh You Little Girl*, *Do Not Stir Donke*, *I Sit All Night Trena* and *I Think, Lena Oh Lena*, *Little Girl Red Apple* (see table 1 for other songs).

Until 1983, the songs of his authorship were considered anonymous folk songs. His creative work took place during a time when the producers of radio shows prioritized traditional folk songs. The only way for Demirovski to launch his songs was by reporting them as old traditional songs. According to the musicologist Konstantin Konstantinov, "... In the 60s, Ajri Demirovski renounced the authorship of 13 songs of his, recorded them and named them folk songs, so that they would be able to live on..." (Konstantinov, 1983, N.Makedonija:7).

Hence, part of his songs have been accepted as traditional music heritage. Nevertheless, his name as author of many popular songs was always mentioned among his townsmen.

During his visit to Macedonia in 1983, seven of his songs were authorized by the Copyright Agency of Macedonia (ZAMP): *Oh Hear Dear Countrymen*, *Bitola My Hometown*, *O Macedonia*, *Over There Mother Near Bitola*, *I am Proud of Bitola*, *Mariche you Beautiful Girl* and *Farewell Mother*.

4. Performances of his creative opus

Until Ajri Demirovski left Bitola in 1955, he was the sole performer of his songs. A large number of the songs were recorded for Radio Bitola, Radio Skopje and Radio Television Belgrade. Prior to his leaving, the renowned musicologist Vasil Hadzhimanov recorded many of the songs performed by Ajri. Hadzhimanov also transcribed many of the recordings. These transcriptions can be found in his *Collection of Macedonian Folk Songs* in the Archives of the Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences in Skopje. This research found a total of 47 transcriptions in the box numbered 6 and 7 with Ajri Demirovski's name noted as performer. From the 47 songs, 13 are of his authorship,

although this has not been noted on the transcriptions. The remaining 34 are traditional Macedonian folk songs (see example no. 1).

Ex. no. 1:

Брзо 1853 1488 *Степан Аџри*

Волен лежи штад Стојан,
Волен лежи и ќе угре,
Над глава му младата невеста,
С'машко дете на рака,
Солзи рони солзите и капат,
Но Стојаново лице.

Стојан се подваслуди,
И тико и презобри,
Невесто не ти добра невесто,
Иако ми кади лицево,
Дали ситна рода поросува,
Или ситни дождови.

А невена му вели,
Стојане бре стопане,
Нити ситна рода поросува
Нити ситни дождови,
Мојве солзи по лице ти капат,
Од селански неправди.

Шкојка кај чешмата,
Селани се збираја,
Збор зборнаја нога ти ќе уграи,
Дете да ти задалат,
Мене не грабај далеку однесат,

Брзо 1853 1488 *Степан Аџри*

Волен лежи штад Стојан,
Волен лежи и ќе угре,
Над глава му младата невеста,
С'машко дете на рака,
Солзи рони солзите и капат,
Но Стојаново лице.

Стојан се подваслуди,
И тико и презобри,
Невесто не ти добра невесто,
Иако ми кади лицево,
Дали ситна рода поросува,
Или ситни дождови.

А невена му вели,
Стојане бре стопане,
Нити ситна рода поросува
Нити ситни дождови,
Мојве солзи по лице ти капат,
Од селански неправди.

Шкојка кај чешмата,
Селани се збираја,
Збор зборнаја нога ти ќе уграи,
Дете да ти задалат,
Мене не грабај далеку однесат,

Од Силевско 1486 *Ше Аџри Демировски*

Брзо.

доска доска лично ле Стојане,
Служинце слугуван,
Служинце слугуван ле Стојане,
Секогаш дозруван.

Ајде, ајде лично ле Стојане,
Вегај ги за мене,
Вегај ги за мене ле Стојане,
Ја страдам за тебе.

— Не можам, бре худо иладо,
Нитого јас немам,
Служинце слугуванало,
Без мајка, без татко.

— Нитого не ти самал ле Стојане,
Засакај ме од орде,
Милосно не заборај ле Стојане,
Најскапа до гроба.

1527 *Ше Аџри Демировски*

Брзо.

Мајко мајко! Шкојка Витола,
Во ореховката иста корија,
Маки дакалов стено загина,
Со чуби загина стено дружина,
Со неговата мајка верна дружина,
Млада Ешпада Карамандова.

Тамо ле мајко близу Витола,
В, ореховката р,ога корија,
Таки дакалов ошело загина,
Со неговата верна дружина,
Млада Ешпада Карамандова.

Transcriptions of Ajri Demirovski Songs in Vasil Hadzhimanov's Collection

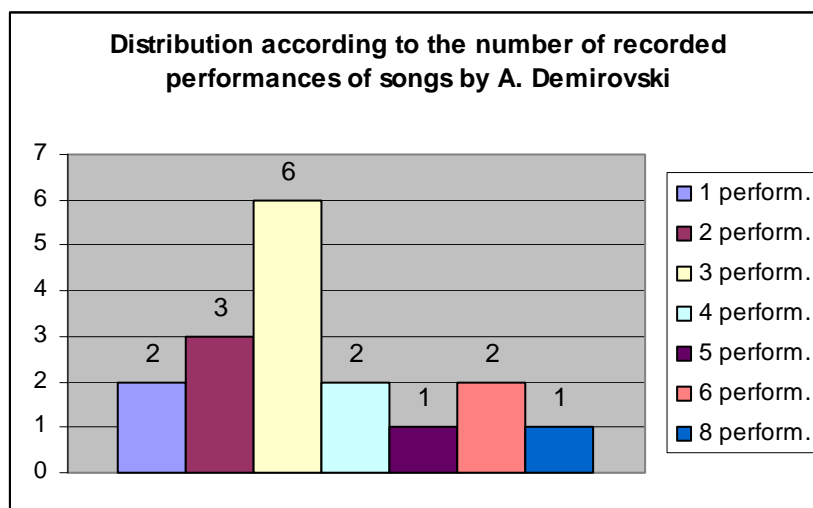
After Ajri Demirovski moved to the Republic of Turkey, his work continued to exist through the numerous performances of other musicians.

In order to attain a more detailed insight into the recordings of the performances of Ajri Demirovski's songs, we decided to address the most relevant production in Macedonia, i.e The Macedonian Radio and Television Production.

In the documented data of the Macedonian Radio and Television Music Sector, there was data on 17 songs recorded in this production, as follows: *Bitola My Hometown* (5 recordings), *Over There Mother Near Bitola* (5 recordings), *Oh Stop You Beautiful Stojne* (3 recordings), *Mariche Beautiful Girl* (6 recordings), *Last Night Mare I Dreamt You* (1 recording), *Magde Magdalena* (2 recordings), *I Spend Sleepless Nights Oh Nada* (2 recordings), *I Keep Marvelling at You Oh Cveta* (4 recordings), *For Whom Does Your Face Bloom Oh Dana* (3 recordings), *Last Night I Passed By* (8 recordings), *Do Not Stir Donka* (3 recordings), *I am Proud of Bitola* (1 recording), *Farewell Mother I am Gone* (6 recordings), *Oh You Little Girl* (3 recordings), *I Sit All Night Trena and I Think* (4 recordings), *Lena Oh Lena* (3 recordings) and *Little Girl Red Apple* (2 recordings; see graph no. 1).

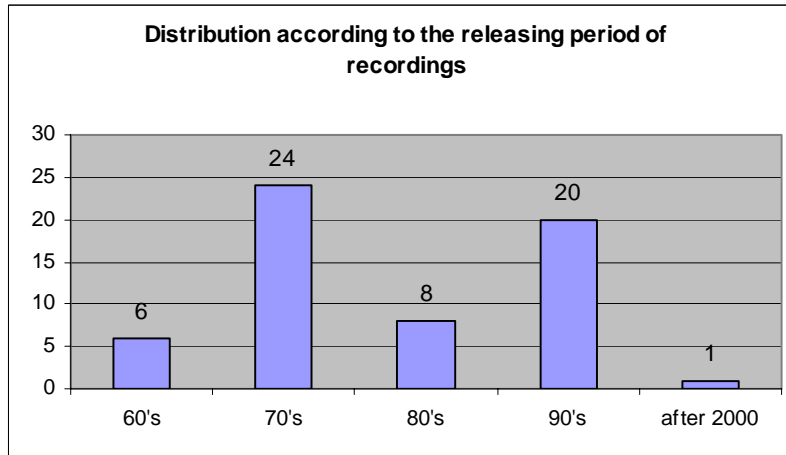
The total of Ajri Demirovski song recordings at Radio Skopje – Production for Folk Music is 59 songs.

Graph no. 1:



As far as the recording period is concerned, research shows that most of the recordings were made in the 70s (24) and 90s (20). The number of recorded performances is significantly lower during the other decades: 60s (6), 80s (8) and in 2000 (1) (see graph no. 2).

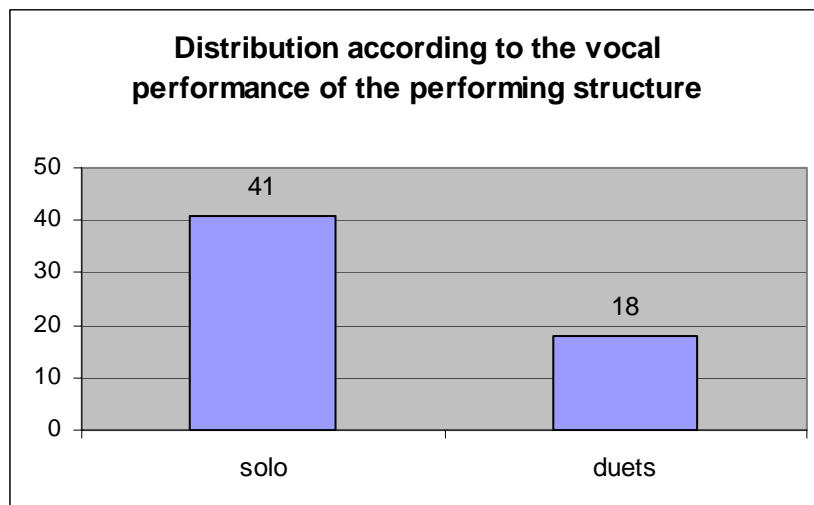
Graph no.2:



In terms of the performance structure of the recordings, out of a total of 59 performances, 57 are vocal-instrumental, and only two are only instrumental.

The analysis regarding the vocal part of the performance structure indicated that 18 recordings of vocal duets were made, and the remaining 41 are of solo vocal performances (graph no. 3).

Graph no.3:



Regarding the instrumental accompaniment, most of the performances note the accompaniment of the three orchestras of Macedonian Radio and Television: *The Folk Orchestra* (30 songs), *The Orchestra of Folk Instruments* (11 songs) and *The Chalgija Orchestra* (6 songs). The remaining 12 recordings are performed with the accompaniment of external ensembles with various structures.

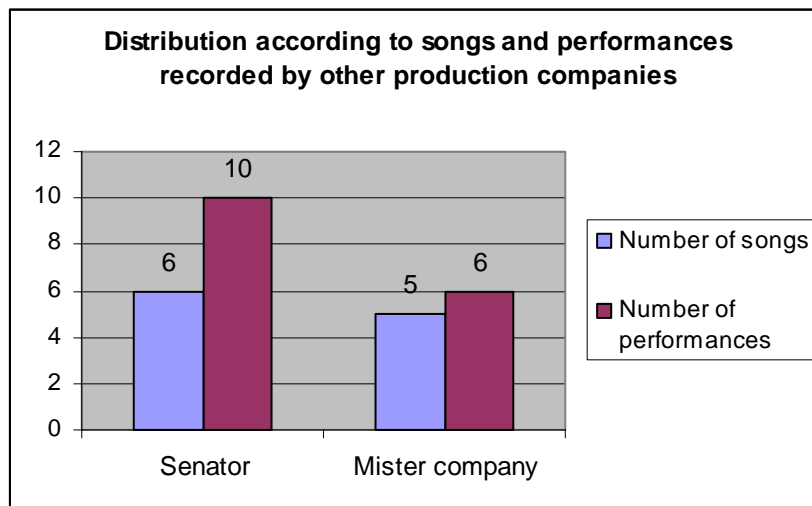
The recordings note 37 performers. Many of them are amongst the most renowned performers of Macedonian folk music: Nikola Badev (8), Vaska Ilieva (6), Violeta Tomovska (4), Dobri Stavrevski (4) and Aleksandar Sarievski (3).

Apart from the production of radio Skopje, during the past two decades part of the recordings were made in private studios, as well. Bearing in mind that there is no register providing information on studios in the country working in this field, we addressed those that are more frequently used – the 'Senator' production company from Bitola and the 'Mister Company' studio in Gostivar.

We did not manage to receive full data regarding the number of recorded Ajri Demirovski songs in these studios, so we present the data obtained on the basis of the issued CDs.

According to our research, the 'Senator' production company issued six songs by Ajri Demirovski recorded in ten performances. The 'Mister Company' studio has recorded five songs in six different performances.

Graph no. 4:



Although the data regarding the recorded songs in private studios are incomplete, based on the remaining data it can be safely stated that the existence of 18 Ajri Demirovski songs today, 50 years after his leaving the country, indicates the strong popularity this author enjoys. Thus, it is evident that Ajri Demirovski is a significant music figure in the sphere of contemporary Macedonian folk music. Due his work as a performer, composer and poet, he is regarded as the typical representative of Macedonian urban music and poetic tradition.

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