

Zivko Firfov's Role in the Foundation of Macedonian Ethnomusicology

The collecting and research activity in the area of Macedonian musical folklore is based on the pioneering efforts of several culture and art activists and folklore enthusiasts which during the middle of the 20th century set the basis for future ethnomusicological research.

Among them, the most prominent founding position belongs to Živko Firfov. He is the crucial figure in Macedonian musical culture and a versatile culture and education activist in different areas of the social life. He responsibly accepted the task of his generation which required manifold commitment by people with competencies such as his, in circumstances of accelerated cultural rise in which the Republic of Macedonia found itself in the second half of the 20th century.

Živko Firfov was born in 1906 in Veles. He died in 1984 in Skopje. He began his music education in Veles, where he studied violin and elementary music theory with the teacher Kočo Matov-Čaušot. In 1927 he left for Belgrade, where, until 1931, he studied in the secondary school of music "Stevan Mokranjac".

Having completed his education, he worked as a teacher of music and violin in the Institute for Defective Children in Zemun until 1941. During the same period he was also the conductor of a renowned student choir and a violinist at the City Philharmonics. He studied composition with the composer prof. Josip Slavenski. In 1937 he began his studies at the Department of Composition and Conducting at the Music Academy in Belgrade, in the class of prof. Stevan Hristic, but a year later he had to leave the studies.

Even as a young man he was a part of the culture and art activities in Veles. For his beginnings Firfov had said: "I was born in an environment with extremely strong music

and folklore tradition. In 1923, together with few friends, we developed the culture and art activities in the city. It is then that I began my activity of collecting musical folklore, quite accidentally, for the needs of the repertoire of the amateur choirs and orchestras that I worked with as a conductor and arranger."

After the Second World War, in the period 1944-1945 he worked as an ex officio collaborator and from 1945 to 1948 as a folk music and choreography editor in *Radio Skopje* (present *Macedonian Radio*).

Živko Firfov is one of the founders of the ensemble of folklore dances and songs "Tanec" and was its artistic manager from 1949 to 1953.

From 1953 to 1957 he worked as a collaborator in the Institute of Folklore, and from 1957 to 1962 he worked as its director. He retired in 1962, but continued to work as an ex officio collaborator of MRT (Macedonian Radio and Television) until 1982.

It is through his professional activities in MRT that Živko Firfov realized the idea of dignified presentation and conservation of Macedonian musical folklore. The years he spent in the production of Radio Skopje as a producer of music recordings created in the MRT recording studios and as an editor of the radio music programme resulted in the enormous influence Firfov had on the final image of Macedonian musical folklore media presentation. He set the direction for folk music in the then present conditions of living. The idea of finding and validating an authothonous Macedonian musical expression was the guide of his founding activity.

His influence on the program policy of MRT in the period from 1945 to 1982 is especially great and significant. It is mostly due to the fact that Živko Firfov strived for the broadcast of musical contents originating from the Macedonian musical folklore and which have not been authorized.

As an advocate of the preservation of Macedonian musical folklore Firfov had a profound cooperation with the orchestras and the vocal groups performing authentic Macedonian songs and dances. He is directly deserving for the formation of the three MRT orchestras: the MRT Folk Orchestra, the *Calgii* Orchestra and the Orchestra of Folk Instruments. Moreover, he was the iniciator for the establishing of several vocal-instrumental groups: the group Biljana, Kuchkovki trio, the group Bapchorki, the group Vodenki, the group Kosturchanki etc.

It is important to note that Firfov particularly emphasized the national presentation of the Macedonian folklore in its geographic unity. He especially strived for the restoration of parts of Macedonian musical folklore that due to military and political circumstances affected the displacement of Macedonians from areas of the geographic territory of Macedonia and caused interruption in the continuity of the tradition. Consequently, he initiated the formation of groups performing musical folklore from the Aegean and from the Pirin part of Macedonia. This idea was brought to life only for the Aegian folklore, primarily through the vocal groups: Bapchorki, Kosturchanki and Vodenki. Parts of the songs performed by these groups he recorded while working in the MRT production, and he later published melographed in the collection "*Sokol mi leta visoko*" ("My Hawk is Flying High") (Firfov. 1978). The groups Bapchorki and Kosturchanki have a video material recorded in the production of IRAM.

His striving for quality of the MRT production resulted in the awards he received during the 1970s at the festival of recordings of the European Radio in Bratislava.

Živko Firfov also had interest in the field of music pedagogy and the creation of textbooks for music education. He was the author of the textbooks: in 1953 "Elementary Theory and Solfeggio, a Textbook for Primary Schools" and in 1961 "A Textbook in Music Education for 4th Grade", created in the spirit of folklore, but still unpublished.

He was member of the Association of Composers of ex-Yugoslavia since 1934. Also, he was a member of the federal jury for the selection of folklore ensembles for participation in international festivals. He was a member and a president of committees for republic folklore festivals, parades and reviews. He headed the committee for music life and folklore within the Association of Culture and Art Societies in Macedonia. He was a member of the International Council for Musical Folklore (IFMC). He became an honorary member of the Geographic Society of USA and a honorary president of the English Society for Songs and Dances of Various Nations.

For several years he was one of the organizers of the folklore festivals: "Balkan Folklore Festival" in Ohrid, the "Days od Ilinden" festival and the festival in the village of Dolneni. Due to his knowledge of folklore dances he was also active as a professional collaborator and educator in several folk dance clubs in the Republic of Macedonia.

During his longterm varied and distinguished carrier Živko Firfov has received numerous awards and recognitions. They are a result of his activities in several fields: collecting, social action and organisation, production and editing, education and most of all, ethnomusicology.

All of the abovementioned certifies that Živko Firfov was a complex person and represented a kind of pillar of Macedonian culture.

The collecting activity of Živko Firfov creates the basis for his *ethnomusicological activity*, characterized by the pioneering scientific works through which he played an especially important role in establishing the basic components of ethnomusicological research activities in the Republic of Macedonia.

Speaking of the reasons for his attachment to Macedonian musical folklore Živko Firfov said: "Being in love with music, it is quite realistic that I have taken interest in the music side of our popular creativity. But my inclination towards folk music is conditioned by many things. In the years before the war and during the NLS (National Liberation Struggle), folk songs were in a close relation with all the events leading to the liberation of our people. After the liberation, folk songs played an important part in the affirmation of the national independence of the Macedonian people. Folklore and songs remained in my soul. Eversince I started loving them, I could never abandon them."

Thus, we can say that the collecting activity of Živko Firfov, apart from being the basis for his ethnomusicological research, is also directed towards the preservation of the Macedonian musical folklore. Even though, due to the segmentation in several archives of the material gathered, there is no precise figure of the total number of collected and melographed folk melodies and songs, in 1983 Firfov himself estimated that he had collected and melographed about 10,000 songs.

An indicator of the enormous fund of collected materials is the *Firfov collection*, dating from the 1970s, which is completely digitalized and catalogued in IRAM and thus protected for further use and additional elaboration.

This very passion of Firfov towards the Macedonian musical folklore, mediated through the lively collecting activity, is the stimulus to his ethnomusicological activity.

This resulted in his first paper in 1939, the article "How to Collect and Interpret Folk Songs from the South" published in Belgrade.

However, the scientific thought of Živko Firfov obtains its true research precision in his following works. The collection "Macedonian Music Folklore, Songs 1" from 1953 contains 208 one-part examples from several regions of the Republic of Macedonia and has a cultural and historic significance since it represents the first ethnomusicological collection by a Macedonian author published after the Second World War.

In the preface to this collection, Firfov underlined: "...We are obliged to stress that we have made some bold conclusions in this work, not necessarily meaning we are being immodest, since this is the first work of its kind in our Republic, and should its appearance cause controversy and objective criticism in our country or abroad, we shall consider that we have given a modest contribution to our young culture in general, and especially to musicology in our country, which is still forming..."

Firfov explains the structure of the collection: "...The songs are distributed in three sections. The first section contains songs whose melodies have a distinct major tonic character. The second section has songs the segments of whose melodies lead to the conclusion that they have been formed under the influence of West European music, but have nonetheless preserved the core of the folk style. Each of these melodies begins and develops into a major, and makes a cadence into minor, in this case dorian tonality. This section also contains several melodies with two tone series (dvoladovi), the first tone series corresponding to a major, the second one corresponding to a minor tonality, and separated by a main melodic caesura. The third section includes songs with melodies having an exceptionally minor tonality..."

The second collection "Macedonian Music Folklore, Songs 2" from 1962 made in cooperation with M.Simonovski and R.Prodanov, represents his even more serious ethnomusicological undertaking. It contains 481 melographed folk songs, professionally systematized and analysed.

In the preface to this second collection, Firfov explains its release: "...The publication of this second book was imposed primarily because of the need for a more considerable result from the work of the Institute's Department of Folk Music and Choreography, even at the cost of certain drawbacks. In this case, the drawbacks are a result of the mainly

heterogeneous material which, nevertheless, is selected in a way as to present the character of the Macedonian folk song as a whole..."

However, he points out the significance and the practical application of the work: "...On the other hand, this book should also be viewed as a preparation for systematic regional study of our folk music. At the same time, it should mark the beginning, in our country, of a new practice of publicizing the folk songs. So far, there hasn't been, and still isn't, a practice of sound documentation of the publicized material. Today, in a time of mechanized musicological work, this practice should be completely abandoned. In this way numerous older and recent misunderstandings concerning various questions referring to the characteristics of our musical folklore could be avoided. Therefore, the song alphabet register also contains the register number of the tape recording of each song, under which it is kept in the sound archives of the Institute. In this way, at any time one can listen and check the degree achieved in decoding the given song – whether its melody or its text..."

Firfov also gave an explanation of the melody examples from the collection, namely that the method of distribution is according to their metrical composition, and each *melody* has information on: the melody ambitus, metrical composition of the melody expressed in numbers and the formal structure of the *melostanza*.

He explained the manner of their melographing: "...The circumstance that the melodies are transposed into a common finalis, enables their tonal material to be presented in tone series not named particularly, but their character is already implied with the very manner of their arrangement. At the same time, the hesitant tones are marked with signs of alliteration or resolution, and less real tones – with full notes..."

Both collections have deeply penetrated the wider ethnomusicological literature and are highly regarded manuals for scientific research.

The greatest part of Živko Firfov's scientific works is dated from the period of his employment in the Institute of Folklore "Marko Cepenkov" in Skopje. During his work in this institution, with his already acquired collecting experience and professional music training he contributed to the systematic organization and classification of the large fund of folklore music materials gathered in the institute from the numerous field research.

This research resulted in his ethnomusicological works, all of which have in common the introduction of a precise methodological approach that includes:

- consistent analysis of the characteristics of the metrical and rhythmical particularities of the musical material under research;
- a formal analysis;
- introduction of the *Finnish method* (Umari Krohn & A.O.Vaisanen) for notating the melody line by transposing the tone *finalis G*, whose practical aim was to serve in further analyses and comparison,

Owing to Živko Firfov this methodology has been established not only in his works, but is the starting point for the beginning of the Macedonian ethnomusicology development. This certainly reflected strongly on further ethnomusicological research of his followers and colleagues at the Institute.

Other publications by Živko Firfov include the first Macedonian work referring to the problem of the folk dance tradition and its choreographic notation: "Macedonian Folk Dances with Choreography Signs and Terminology" published in 1953 in collaboration with G.Pajtondziev.

As the preface itself states, the work includes 20 Macedonian folk dances notated in special choreography and musical signs, so that each of them represents a musical and choreography score. The manner of notating the examples is the work of Ž.Firfov and G.Pajtondziev and is a result of their longterm work in the area of music and folk choreography.

In the introduction to this collection the authors present the basic elements which make up their choreography signs, and whose combination gives the so-called *choreography signs* used for notating all the movements of the legs. As far as the notating of movements of other parts of the body are concerned, the authors explain that is has been justly ommited. As an addition, they also explain each of the choreography signs used in the collection and the terminological description of the folk dances with a description of each movement separately.

The book "Macedonian Melographers from the End of the 19th Century" from 1962 which Firfov wrote together with M.Simonovski has a particular importance for the Macedonian ethnomusicology and was awarded in 1963 with the "November Award" from the Council of Culture and Education of the Skopje City Hall. This work has double importance due to the fact that it encompasses the melographic activity of a line of the most prominent Macedonian musical activists from the 19th century (Aleksandar Konev, Georgi Smichkov, Todor Gavazov, Georgi L'zhev, Todor Netkov, Ivan Klinkov i Angel Bukureshliev) who originally published their records of Macedonian folk songs in the 1890s, and because of the introductory part which analytically treated a segment of the musical characteristics of the songs and gives information connected to the work of the melographers included.

From the line of significant works by Živko Firfov we can also point out the 1951 article "Metric Characteristics of Macedonian Folk Music" which initiates the problems connected with the origin of the characteristics of Macedonian folk songs. Also quite important are the articles dedicated to Macedonian folk songs from the NLS and to Macedonian folk instruments.

Živko Firfov was particularly active in promoting Macedonian musical folklore through participation in numerous ethnomusicological conferences, folkloristic congresses and folklore festivals in the Republic of Macedonia and abroad.

The ethnomusicological works of Živko Firfov represent an unequivocal proof of his role in establishing the basis of contemporary Macedonian ethnomusicological thought. When the remaining activities addressed in this paper (collecting, social action and organisation, production and editing and education) are also considered, 100 years from his birth we can be proud that Macedonian music has a figure of this size in its history.