

### **IRAM's CD *Female vocal soloists from the Firfov Collection***

The digitisation of the *Firfov Collection* at IRAM marked the beginning of an entirely new era in the development of Macedonian ethnomusicology. This was a pioneering step in the application of computer and digital technology in the digital archiving of audio cultural heritage in Macedonia. The extraordinary analytical opportunities given by this raw material are illustrated by the total number (1362) and duration (circa 52 hours) of digitised music samples.

IRAM's publication of the third CD with the presentation of the female vocal soloists from the *Firfov Collection* is aimed at the additional promotion and popularisation of the extremely valuable audio materials of this collection. The previous two CDs contained a selection of vocal and instrumental excerpts (also published in the book with the papers from the first conference *Contemporary trends in musicology and ethnomusicology* IRAM, 2002), and a selection of songs performed by the female groups *a capella*. The audio materials from both CDs are available in audio streaming format at the website of IRAM's Internet Student Radio ([www.mmc.edu.mk](http://www.mmc.edu.mk)). The fourth CD, which will be issued in 2005, will present the male singers. These publishing activities have multiple objectives: first, to enable the public use of the materials of this collection, especially through IRAM's web site; second, to encourage further research of Macedonian music folklore; and third, to revitalise some of the songs which otherwise could have fallen into oblivion.

Selecting the 26 songs presented within the CD was not a simple task, not only due to the difficulties with the definition of the principles, i.e. the methodology for selection, but also as a result of the large number of songs (over 300), most of which are real pearls from the vocal folk tradition in the region.

In our case, building the criteria for selection means establishing limits which would reduce the total number of songs, in line with the storage limits of the CD media. We already knew that the female vocal soloists performances form a very important part of the collection (if not the central one). We can only assume that female singing is quantitatively more present than male singing in the Balkans – mainly as a result of the division of labour, economic, social, religious, cultural, ethnic and other characteristics of the environment. But, this assertion could be used as an argument only after a thorough statistical analysis of the field material, which has not been done yet. The statement is disputable even more when we deal with collections done by a collector or an ethnomusicologist, who might have certain preferences for certain genres, styles, regions, singers etc.

What is not disputable at all, however, is that female singing from the *Firfov Collection* is a fascinating example of the vocal tradition in the region. We have already presented it through the published CD with the female *a capella* group singing. We also knew that behind the groups, in their real fundament, were always very talented soloists, the moving force and the pivot for the existence of the whole group.

From our previous experience, gained during the digitisation of the original analogue material, we also knew that Firfov has recorded a large number of songs with solo female singers without accompaniment. This was our starting point, which determined the final definition of the area for selection: **female-vocal-solo-a cappella** samples.

In the next step of the preliminary phase of the selection, we used the advantages of our digital database, sorting the audio samples according to the category 'performers' ensemble'. However, the preliminary results of the automated sorting were treated with great caution. From our previous experience we knew that this field contains errors related to the improper definition of its categories (Mitevaska 2004:54), as a consequence of the very first stage of the development of the methodology for the definitions of the database fields (as the textual database for the *Firfov Collectiton* was our first larger undertaking for collection of metadata for the cultural heritage stored in IRAM's archive). In addition, we knew that this field contains errors made either by the collector, or the students who were entering the data. Part of the mistakes were corrected during the finalisation of the database, especially with respect to issues such as the drone, and the soloist-group distinction (see Mitevaska 2004:54 for an in-depth discussion). Still, additional checks and comparisons with related fields (for instance, *name of the performer/ ensembles*) will be needed in the future use of this database.

Consequently, the results of this field were sorted and selected only by the category *F* (meaning 'female vocal soloist'). After the elimination of some of the obvious errors we came to the total number of 311 songs. This was achieved by comparing the fields containing the names of the performers. We excluded all reports where it was obvious that the soloist was accompanied by the group, the soloist is a member of the group, or only the name of the group was quoted. In this selection we did not include the few samples by the well-known performer of Macedonian folk songs Vaska Ilieva, which were only short excerpts of songs. In addition, 265 songs contain the name of the performer, while for the others the data are missing. For some of the incomplete entries, we could assume that the song was performed by the same performer, as usually this song comes after or before other songs performed in a row by the same singer. We have concluded that we did not need an additional research for comparison and correction of the missing data, as we had already more than enough audio materials for the CD.

By a comparison of the recordings we have also eliminated the double, or multiple entrance of the same singer under similar names (for instance: Stoleva Vera or Stolevska Vera, Spasevska Rajna or Spasovska Rajna, Bardjieva Leta or Bardjieva Letka etc.), thus coming to the number of 30 female singers for the listed songs. The range of the performed songs for the 30 singers was from 1 to 47 song (the last score was the number of the listed songs for Tasheva Tina, which might not be final, having in mind the missing data for some of the songs). In fact, we were impressed both by the number of songs known by some of the singers, and by their capacity to sing a large number of songs in a continuous session.

Still, rather than represent all the female vocal soloists recorded in the *Firfov Collection*, our main objective in the preparation of the CD was to make a selection which will present the variety of styles, genres, performance techniques and other features of both the lyrics and the tunes. The CD should reflect the extreme richness of the folk music tradition in a relatively very small area of the Balkans. Also, we should

have in mind that some of the very talented soloists recorded in this collection, (for instance Zvezda from the *Kuchkovki* group) perform only in groups, which eliminated them at the very beginning of the sorting of our data. In other words, our goal was not to create a representative and proportional sample of the female vocal tradition in Macedonia. This could be a very complex and difficult task, particularly when we deal only with the recordings of a certain ethnomusicologist, i.e. collector.

On the other hand, most of the songs performed by the individual singers in the *Firfov Collection*, in the reality, or the authentic environment, were sang by groups, no matter whether they were monodic (unison), or with an accompanying drone. Although we do not have exact data where the actual recording of the songs took place, we assume that it was done mainly in the Firfov's office or the studios of Macedonian Radio and TV. In some of the recordings, the background noise contains sounds from the music practice of Macedonian Radio and TV ensembles (folk instruments, *chalgija* etc.).

One of the biggest obstacles during the formation of the textual database was the scarcity of textual metadata about the primary audio. The only available source was Firfov's notebook, some of the remarks in the cassette boxes, and in some cases the recordings of the conversation with the informants, mentioning their names, age, place of birth, occupation etc. Although the notebook provided a starting point for our textual database, it nevertheless contains very incomplete data, mainly with the names of the songs (which also may be missing in some cases). Most of the informants' names are given, but other data such as age, birthplace, occupation, family, social and cultural background etc., are missing in most of the samples. It is obvious that Firfov's interests during the recording and the assembling of the collection were focussed on the songs, not the performers (this is a common practice in ethnomusicology, see Nettl 1983:292)

We found a similar situation with respect to the registration of the date and place of the original recording. We managed to collect some of the missing data through the contact with the informants who we could find, and particularly during the video recording of the three IRAM documentaries which were devoted to the singers and the groups from the Firfov Collection (*Bapchorki*, *Kosturchanki*, *Gjorgji Donevski*). This confirmed that a majority of the songs was recorded in an exploratory manner (meaning that the informants were asked to present a specific repertoire in an artificial situation and environment, see Schüller 1993:77,8) during the rehearsals and other occasions and meetings in Radio Skopje.

What is particularly fascinating and unusual about this collection is that Firfov managed to collect an impressive number of songs without using the conventional ethnomusicological method of visiting the singers. Quite contrary, they were visiting him. Firfov's son, Milan Firfov, has passed to us his father's statement that due to rural out-migration, most of the talented singers had already moved to the cities. Also, there was migration from the smaller cities to Skopje. Zivko Firfov knew that he could find more about the old rural and urban repertoire and traditions in Skopje, than in the existing villages and other smaller cities.

In fact, Firfov's position as a music producer at the Radio Skopje was very convenient for this contacts, as this was the central and—to a certain extent—the only folk music-recording institution in the 60s and 70s in Macedonia. The talented singers were approaching him in search of career opportunities through the recording of the songs for the music production of the Macedonian Radio and TV.

Having no written documents why Firfov created this collection, we assumed that one of the reasons for the recordings of this collection was the building of the repertoire of the ensembles of Radio Skopje, especially by discovering unknown old folk songs and also new singers. In addition to this, the recording process allowed Firfov to collect materials for transcriptions which later could be used for further ethnomusicological analysis and dissemination.

That's why we have to take into consideration that: neither the singers are "average" folk singers (if this category could be determined at all, as usually the folk singers in the region are the talented individuals, not the ones with average music abilities), nor the performance reflects the real environment. Most of the singers possess marvellous voices, with perfect control of the pitch and the rhythm, extraordinary capacity for creation of ornaments, refined dynamic nuances, and other interpretation means, which at the end result in brilliant music products. It is obvious that they are doing their best during the recording, probably because this was a kind of audition for them. Only one singer from our selection for this CD, named *Evdokija* (her family name is missing), is closer to the traditional concept of an informant. The cassette with her recordings was separated from the numbered cassettes, which could point out to Firfov's preference in the selection of the materials for his collection.

We could only assume the custom environment for these songs. As mentioned above, most of them could have been performed by groups of singers, which is evident even in the recordings of this collection, as in the background of some of them, we could hear that there are attempts from the other singers to join the soloist. We could also assume that some of the songs were used as a music fundament for the circular dancing ("orovodni" in Macedonian language) and for that purpose, they would definitely be performed by a group of singers (sometimes depending on the lyrics and local tradition in a responsorial manner). Completely opposite example is the song "Lozano devojko" which comes from the tradition of the long epic ballads, accompanied by a *gusla* (possibly *kemane* in eastern and northern Macedonian regions). With their narrative character, these songs were a real "solo" repertoire.

The missing metadata are a kind of disadvantage, but also they create a significant challenge in the further reconstruction and analysis, which will probably have to rely to a greater extent on comparative methods. Despite the missing data and the open questions and dilemmas related to the raw material from the collection, we did not want to eliminate entirely the *representative* character of the selection. Having in mind our central objectives, our first criterion was to represent at least the majority of the female vocal soloists. The final number of 23 singers in our selection (from the total of 30, without counting Vaska Ilieva), was a result of some additional criteria which we applied during the selection process.

The following table includes key data about the represented singers (informants) in our selection. The question marks next to the year of birth indicate that we were not sure about the correctness of such data. Namely, Zivko Firfov often registered only the age of the singers at the moment of the recording, for instance *40 years old*. As the date of recording is missing for most of these cases, we approximated the year of birth by comparing the quoted years of recording of the adjacent songs or cassettes. We found the missing data about some of the singers in Gjorgji Donevski collection of songs "Sokol mi leta visoko" (Donevski 1978).

<b>Name of the informant</b>	<b>Year of birth</b>	<b>Place of birth</b>
Bardzieva Leta	1929	Bapchor, Kostur r.
Damatova Kata		Voden r.
Dimovska Zora	1944	Penica, unknown r.
Evdokija	1917	Debar
Gaceva Mara	1932	Tresino, Voden r.
Gjorgievska Ratka	1959	s. Konjuh, Kratovo r.
Ilieva Nikolinka	1954	Istibanja, Kochani r.
Kirova Ratka	1954	Skopje
Kitanova Stojna	1949?	Kocani r.
Kljanzova Vaska	1930	Drenoveni, Kostur r.
Miftarova Nedzmija	1951?	Skopje
Palazova Kostadinka	1939	Idomeni, Gevgelija r.
Pametkova Savka		Dalibush, Kriva Palanka r.
Petrova Lenche	1934?	Kavadarci
Pivkovska Dobrica	1950?	Erekjovce, Prilep r
Plaskieva Vaska	1917	Veles
Pop Trpeva Para	1940?	Skopje
Shankova Lefterija	1933	Sarakinovo, Voden r.
Smilevska Jordanka	1943?	Kadino, Skopje r.
Spasevska Rajna	1933?	Dalibush Kriva Palanka r.
Stolevska Vera	1934?	Gjugjanci, Sv. Nikole r.
Tasheva Tina	1925	Tresino, Voden r.
Todorovska Violeta		

The table indicates that we could not find any data about Todorovska Violeta, and we assumed that Pametkova Savka and Damatova Kata must be close to the age of the other singers in the groups that they performed with, i.e. they could have been born sometime in the mid-1930s (as usually the singers of the female groups are close friends or relatives with persons of a similar age).

For some of the singers, the place of birth is also questionable, especially in the cases where only the city was given. As we have mentioned there was a substantial migration to the cities and particularly to Skopje, in the 50s and the 60s of the last century, and it is possible, that some of these singers came from other regions. Hence, this field could not be used for the further categorisation of the regional origin of the songs. While the dialect of the lyrics in addition to the genre and the style of the songs, did provide further guidance, these features were insufficient to verify whether some of the songs were adopted and adjusted from other regions by the singers.

But even with the incomplete data regarding the region of origin, the dominance of the singers coming from the so-called 'Aegean Macedonia' (now part of Northern Greece) is very evident (6 singers with confirmed origin, or more than a 1/4 of the total population of the selection). It reflects a very important characteristic of the structure of

the *Firfov Collection* where we have noticed a large number of the songs from this region. We know that Firfov was particularly interested in the songs from this region. Due to the civil war in the region in the late 40s, most of the Macedonian Slavic population particularly from the villages, together with the defeated communist army, left Greece, and was transferred in the countries of the former Eastern bloc (Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and Romania). Later on, in the late 60s, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, reunified part of these population, offering them jobs and housing. Firfov's interest for the songs from the 'Aegean' region was a typical for an experienced ethnomusicologist: he knew that soon, due to the gap established by the disappearance of the original cultural environment (some of these villages were totally destroyed and depopulated), their tradition will be entirely lost. That is why he was looking for singers who still remember some of the songs and local customs.

In the IRAM documentary movie about Gjorgji Donevski, a central figure for the formation of the several vocal groups and particularly the group *Bapchorki*, the ensemble *Goce Delchev* etc., from the same region; Gjorgji Donevski described the first meeting of the *Bapchorki* group with Firfov taking place in Radio Skopje. It was a gathering of enormous enthusiasm and joy. Firfov was very happy that finally, he found someone who is ready to sing. As he told Donevski, most of the older women who he approached earlier, did not want to sing to him at all, as they had lost close family members in the civil war.

We could assume Firfov's bias for this particular region from another reason, too. Being at the most southern rim of the Macedonian Slavic population, and in general Southern Slavs, Macedonians from this region had direct contacts with the other ethnic groups of the same area: Greeks, Albanians and Aromanians. Firfov has inevitably noticed that this interaction could have had very productive and creative consequences. This is evidenced by Firfov's enthusiasm and interest in the actual recordings, where we could hear him singing with the group *Kosturchanki* in the background.

The cross-cultural influences in this region, or the acculturation, is very evident in the song *Stani mi Sovke* performed by *Vaska Kljandzova* (also included in our selection). With its pentatonic structure and *a glissandi* in the interpretation, this song is a typical example of the blending of the cultures at the crossroads of Albanian, Greek, Macedonian and Aromanian traditions.

Our selection includes another song within Vaska Kljandzova's repertoire: *Veterot due*. This is mainly because the tune of this song is still known and popular, but with other lyrics, related to the uprising in 1903 against the Turkish rule in Macedonia. Having in mind that *Veterot due* is a love song, we can assume that this is an earlier version of the tune, which was later borrowed and used with new lyrics. It is unlikely that a tune of a revolutionary song would be used for a love one. Meticulous research in the popular and urban repertoires from the same period, especially having in mind the diatonic structure and the range of the song, might lead us to its real origin.

Unfortunately, *Firfov's collection* mainly consists of songs in Macedonian, and there are only 52 songs in other languages (Aroumanian, Romany, Turkish, Serbian and Albanian), mostly sung by men. Having in mind all other criteria, we managed to select one song (*Ale temangenma*) in Romany language. This song is particularly interesting because it illustrates the cross cultural influences, and on the other hand, some of the

features of the Roma folklore in the region. Roma musicians had played very important role in the traditional music genres in the region, performing the repertoire of different ethnic groups. As they were the “professional” musicians of the past, they had to know all local repertoires. Thus, this song is a rare example of the folklore existing among Roma population.

We used a number of additional criteria in the selection of the songs. One of them was to select songs where at least majority of the lyrics are preserved. We say *majority* as some of the songs belong to the “open lyrics pattern”, where the pattern enables adding of new verses or stanzas, depending on the environment and the function of the songs (for example songs which are used for circular dances, thus contributing to the prolongation of the dance). Typical example is the song *Ostana ti kriva koza* where the basic pattern is repeated three times, with use of three different pairs (male/female) of names. This open pattern enables continuation of the songs with a combination of any pair of other names.

During the transcription of the lyrics, which in Macedonian version are given in their integral use in the songs including the phonetic and lexical specifics, we observed certain irregularities in the repetition of the lyrics. One of the characteristic feature for the songs of the region is the three-part formal structure, where the first two parts form a music sentence **a** consisting of two half-sentence structure (half –sentences **1** and **2**) and the last third part is repetition of the **2** half-sentence (resulting in the structure **1-2-2**). Usually the repetition of the part **2** uses the same lyrics, but this is not a rule. For example the songs *Veterot due* and *Snoshchi otidov kaj libe* the last repetition includes the same music phrase but different lyrics. We could notice similar irregularities in the principle of a chain repetition of the lyrics, where the ending part of the previous verse or stanza becomes the beginning of the next. Such example is the song *Stani mi Sofke*.

We can not determine exactly whether this *skipping* of some of the repetitions is a common irregularity during its performance, or a result of the specific conditions of the recordings of the songs. It is possible that some of the singers became tired or bored to sing all the repetitions and started shortening the songs, due to performing in an artificial environment. On the other hand, the missing part of the lyrics in some of the songs of the collection was a result of other factors: the end of the tape, erased part by mistake, singers started laughing (such example is the *Cvete k't si doma*) the singers were tired and they stopped singing, or they were interrupted by Firfov himself etc.

Having in mind all the restrictions on the *completeness* of the songs, our criteria included the variety of genres and styles. We knew that these two categories would be reflected in the interval and melodic structure, the rhythm, the ornamentation, interpretation and the subject of the lyrics. This was main reason why three singers (Pametkova Savka, Spasevska Rajna and Kljandzova Vaska) are included with two songs each.

One of the final criteria for the selection was the quality of the recordings. We decided against making any interventions to the original audio, keeping all the samples with the original noise of the environment and the tape. Thus the selection within the CD consists of excerpts from the audio files of our digital archive. It is worth noting that the digitisation of the collection was finished in the winter of 2002. It was completed in the first IRAM studio, with the aid of the Marantz Stereo Cassette Deck SC-57, Yamaha 02R mixing console, G3 Macintosh computer, MOTU 2408 interface and Logic Audio software. The files were recorded in SDII format, 44.1KHz/16 bit.

By the presentation of the songs in their archiving format, we give the optimal possibility and freedom to the professionals who would like to do filtering or other processing of the sounds for research or other reasons in the future.

It is obvious after all these remarks, that we could not be very strict in the application of our criteria, and that the final selection of 26 songs is a kind of compromise between all of them.

Our last dilemma was the order of the songs at the CD, especially because of the different criteria which were applied during the process of selection. To avoid any discrimination, we decided to keep the order of the songs in line with Firfov's original numeration. This order was entirely reflected in the IRAM's archiving numbers of the samples.

	<b>Name of the song</b>	<b>Performed by</b>	<b>IRAM Nr.</b>
1	Mori dobro vecher Bojano devojke	Kitanova Stojna	185
2	Ne plachi Stanche, ne zhali	Smilevska Jordanka	209
3	Ale temangeman	Miftarova Nedzmija	266
4	Sednala mi Jana	Pop Trpeva Para	269
5	Gjurgjelin stano ubava	Pametkova Savka	411
6	Gjino Gjince mlada le mejandjika	Damatova Kata	551
7	Oj dzvezdo, dzvezdo denice	Petrova Lenche	575
8	Veterot duje gora se luje	Kljanzova Vaska	627
9	Snoshchi otidov kaj libe	Bardjjeva Leta	629
10	Stani mi Sofke, Sofke so sevda	Kljanzova Vaska	633
11	More brale se sobrale	Shankova Lefterija	636
12	Ostana ti kriva koza	Stolevska Vera	738
13	Aj otvori Ceno mori drenovski kovchezi	Plaskieva Vaska	785
14	Karamfilo mammo mori kara li te mama	Gjorgjjevska Ratka	834
15	Kazi Jano, kazhi bre kjerko	Tasheva Tina	840
16	Niz korija zelena boso moma sheta	Palazova Kostadinka	878
17	Stojan i Stojne rodnini	Kirova Ratka	884
18	Demush na kula sedeshe	Dimovska Zora	947
19	Mita mete ramni dvorja	Pametkova Savka	980
20	Cvete k't si doma	Spasevska Rajna	981
21	Oj Lozeno, Lozeno devojko	Ilieva Nikolinka	986
22	Izgore selo Trnovo	Spasevska Rajna	988
23	Bratche le more Bozhine	Dobrica Pivkovska	1188
24	Prosheta se ludo mlado	Todorovska Violeta	1246
25	Moma vrve kraj gora zelena	Gaceva Mara	1287
26	Aj reka gazid maloj mome	Evdohija	1330

Once again, we would like to thank the Firfov family for providing access to the collection. Also we would like to express our very special gratitude to Professor Dr. Ernst Lichtenhahn and Dr. Dieter Ringli, for their work, assistance and advice on the ethnomusicological and other matters related to the digitisation and the archiving at



IRAM. In addition, we would like to express our gratitude to the SNF (Swiss National Foundation) and the EU Tempus Programme, for their financial support for the publishing of the CD *Female vocal soloists from the Firfov Collection*.

#### References:

- Donevski, Gjorgji. 1978. *Sokol mi leta visoko*. Skopje: KUD "Goce Delchev"
- IRAM. 2002. *Contemporary trends in musicology and ethnomusicology I Struga Conference*. Dimitrije Buzarovski ed. Skopje:IRAM
- Mitevska, Irena. 2004. "The distribution of secondary data in the Firfov Collection". In *Reflections on Macedonian - Past and Future - III London Conference*. Skopje: IRAM pp.42-67
- Nettl, Bruno. 1983. *The Study of Ethnomusicology - Twenty-nine Issues and Concepts*. Urbana Chicago London: University of Illinois Press
- Schüller, Diterich. 1993. "Methodik und Technik der phonograpischen Feldforschung". In *Sommerakademie "Volks Kultur" 1993*. Walter Deutsch und Maria Walcher, eds. Wien: Osterreichisches Volksliedwerk, pp.86-91