

Article received on May 16th 2020
Article accepted on November 30th 2020
Original scientific paper
UDC: 780.641.2
159.953.5

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'ROOTS IN THE AGE OF YOUTUBE': OLD AND CONTEMPORARY MODES OF LEARNING / TEACHING IN SERBIAN *FRULA* PLAYING

Abstract: During the first two decades of new millennium Serbian *frula* playing has been transformed from traditional to neotraditional practice, grew from aural to digitally mediated musical expression and shifted from a relative continuity with the past to specific revivalistic tendencies. The mode of learning of the music has also transformed from aural transmission and memorization without a teacher to combined tutoring and learning via listening to digitally available sources. This paper traces the modes of learning of folk aerophone *frula* throughout the twentieth century and up to the present, and moreover analyzes how the relation of the teacher and the pupil, although being a recent invention in *frula* practice, serves as a counterbalance to the mediatized way of learning (of) music.

Keywords: *frula*, Serbia, teaching music, learning music, digital environments, aural learning, hybrid learning, music learning and technology

From living tradition to revival

In 2007, a discussion among the cacophony of similar, quick, solution-oriented exchanges popped up in the Serbian area of the Internet: in one online forum, a person was wondering whether a 'tutorial' for *frula* playing could be

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found somewhere in virtual space, since it was not possible to locate it via the common Google Search. Suggestions followed concerning the basics of *frula* by relying on the instructions for the classical flute or for the simple toy recorder; buying a book-manual by a renowned local *frula* player; downloading a score for a particular song, and, in several instances, asking some notable *frula* player (*frulaš*) for lessons. Among the responses, somebody suggested that the inquirer should try to learn how to play on his own, by listening and letting his fingers 'do the work' – this particular suggestion wasn't, however, taken into account as a serious one. Roughly at the same time, a change was taking place in the very core of the *frula* playing scene in Serbia: older players, such as the already vanishing generational cohort whose skill was treated as somewhat remote in the overall context of Serbian music culture, were suddenly becoming highly sought-after transmitters of traditional knowledge for the young generation that started to express an interest in learning the *frula*. Since then, many recordings of the *frula* repertoire were uploaded on various Internet venues, with the highest concentration on video sharing platforms such as Youtube. Yet, the old way of learning by being submersed in the everyday presence of the sound and literally 'stealing' the art of playing by simple acts of listening and repeating, wasn't included in the recent popular ideas about maintaining *frula* practice, because the gap between the experience of old musicians and the young ones – the latter being 'digital natives', did not allow for this. The renewal of practice transfigured the past and made it into a new, sonically and experientially different present.

A small and delicate wooden wind instrument, the *frula* is a strong symbol of Serbian pastoral music with a tradition of playing that waxed and waned throughout the 20th century, but it nevertheless maintained a solid continuity with the historical past. During the first decades of the new millennium, and mostly under the influence of the budding Serbian world music community and its growing importance for the local commercial popular music scene after the turn of millenium, *frula* playing underwent a revival, as many young people expressed an interest in the *frula*, and older players (often amateurs) assumed the role of teachers, sometimes with a few selected students, and at other times with quite large groups of children and teenagers.¹ It can be argued that the 21st century setting for *frula* playing with the inevitable and growing importance of new, digital ways of storing music and learn-

¹ Iva Nenić, *Guslarke i sviračice na tradicionalnim instrumentima u Srbiji: identifikacija zvukom*, Beograd, Clío, 2019, 140–143.

ing in virtual contexts, and also a particular choice that blended older rural and the early modernized repertoire from the previous century, changed the practice considerably in a relatively short period. In agrarian, pre-industrial Serbia, the *frula* was commonly played in villages during various community gatherings that included lively folk dances, but also during leisure time or when shepherds were tending their flocks in the pastures. This end-blown instrument has six finger holes, a duct and one thumb hole at the back, and it is made of different sorts of wood (plum, cornel, black locust, the boxwood tree, etc). Its typical repertoire traditionally consisted of *kolo* (folk dance) melodies, the instrumental version of songs, improvised shepherd melodies played while herding cattle or sheep ('ovčarska svirka', 'čobanska svirka') or improvisations played on ox carts that were transporting various kinds of goods ('rabadžijska svirka', 'po putnički'). During socialism, many of the village folk music practices were either institutionalized through the cultural politics of the state as the representative and non-nationalist folk culture of various nations comprising the Yugoslav people, or they slowly tended to die out, as massive industrialization and modernization were profoundly transforming the landscape of Yugoslav culture. *Frula* playing was incorporated within the framework of socialist folklore-related societies (sing. KUD, 'kulturno-umetničko društvo'), but it was particularly affected by the rise of the modern state radio as a new and potent setting for the top-down transformation of folk music, together with other media for sound storing and reproduction like gramophone recordings. Early postwar promoters of the modernized *frula* sound, like the notable musician Sava Jeremić (1904–1989), helped forge not only a specific repertoire that is nowadays taken as the golden standard, but also introduced the instrument into a new, mediatized and sonically different medium – amplified, aired, mass-consumed music tailored to retain the 'folk spirit' and yet, to sound modern and closer to Western standards of music in terms of tempered scales, strict time measures, wider tonal ranges, etc. The post-WWII generation of famous *frula* players took part in modifying the sound of this non-tempered, small and soft-sounding instrument according to the requirements of the state radio as the chief promoter of the new folk sound. During most of the 20th century, the *frula* was supposed to fit the aesthetic and technical standards of the official radio folk orchestra made up of chiefly Western musical instruments, in order to create a modern yet locally distinct music appealing to a wider audience, and to remain concurrent with newly introduced folk music instruments of Western origin, such as the ex-

tremely popular accordion.² Following the attempts to modernize the sound and to improve the technical and ergological features of the *frula*, new, tempered instruments able to play common modulations started to be constructed³ and merchandised during the late 20th and early 21st century. The repertoire created and disseminated by the state institutions during the socialist period, consisted of modernized folk music pieces, newly composed dance tunes and songs and some old time melodies preserved as part of the still vibrant village culture, served as the basis for the contemporary reinventing of *frula* practice⁴. Notable players that had served as a link between the old-fashioned village music and the modernized 20th century *frula* sound were iconic figures promoted by the Yugoslav State Radio, for instance, Adam Milutinović

² Ethnomusicologist Andrijana Gojković noticed that the rapid modernization and the fast rise of technology after WW2 brought a substantial change in the role and function of folk musical instruments in Serbia: she warned that the centuries old musical instruments with an established role in everyday life were quickly abandoned in favour of “various factory-made instruments and even musical devices that are the latest technological fad and that require one only to press a button to get music according to one’s liking” (cf. Андријана Гојковић, “Историјски пресек друштвене улоге народних музичких инструмената у Срба”, *GEM*, 49, 1985, 129). By posing the question of whether the grouping of instruments into artistic (related to classical music) and folk will gradually vanish, but leaving it to future scholars to answer, she accurately depicted the dilemma that her generation of ethnomusicologists was facing, as they were able to evidence the impact of the first wave of modern technological development on traditional music cultures. It is interesting to note that the categories of folk and Western musical instruments did not vanish in the meantime, but that certain musical practices previously belonging to village music were modified in order to ‘elevate’ their social status more closely to ‘high’ culture.

³ The transformation towards the tempered scale started from the 1960s, and in 1978 ethnomusicologist Dragoslav Dević noted that the newly built, shorter *frula* instruments have a natural acoustic system, “with a tendency of reaching towards the tempered system, in order to play the major scale more precisely” (cf. Драгослав Девић, “Савремене тенденције развоја свирале у Србији у процесу акултурације”, *Развиџак*, 4-5, 1978, 70). The famous virtuoso player and *frula* maker Bora Dugić actually created the highest standards for contemporary instruments and raised the bar for the excellence of playing for today’s Serbian *frula* players. In his own workshop, with precise measurements and self-made tools for crafting, Dugić has created technically superior types of *frula* that have the possibility of playing two scales set apart a half tone, thus widening the technical possibilities of the instrument.

⁴ Cf. Mirjana Zakić, *Dušom i frulom: Dobrivoje Todorović*, Beograd, FMU, 2015, 39–41.

Šamovac (1886–1946),⁵ Sava Jeremić, and Tihomir Paunović (1932) or, later, major radio and TV stars like Borislav Bora Dugić (1949), who is probably the most renowned figure in the contemporary *frula* community at the present moment. However, the transformation of *frula* practice during the previous century was not solely championed by prominent stars of *mediaized*⁶ folk music, but also by the efforts of less famous musicians that were disseminating a new repertoire and impacting their given localities, while sometimes also actively working on technical and sound innovations. One of these was a distinguished player and *frula* maker, Mitar Vasić, who experimented with the technical crafting of *frula*, while his repertoire, mostly consisting of *kolo* dances and songs, also included some new melodies of foreign origin, popularized by the radio, such as Peruvian /the Andean melody *El Cóndor Pasa* or the popular Russian melancholic song *Moscow nights* (Подмосковные вечера).⁷ This model of keeping the core repertoire local (regional) and traditional, while adding certain popular pieces that are of foreign origin and/or composed, remained pretty much in place for the subsequent generation of players, up until now. For example, young *frula* players that I worked with during a longitudinal field research of the Serbian *frula* practice performed in the second decade of the new century, almost all inserted different popular tunes in the otherwise traditional and local repertoire, in a wide range from so-called 'ethno' (world music) melodies and some catchy TV advertisement music, to pop and movie songs, and contemporary classical music and jazz. This possibility to express different music idioms was strongly supported by

⁵ Adam Milutinović Šamovac was a key *frula* player who was promoted from a village musician to the status of a folk artist in the interwar period in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and who, in addition to being a pioneer figure in the promotion of the *frula* in the early days of radio in Serbia, also published for foreign record companies like Columbia and Decca records and had an international career. Cf. Marija Šurbanović, "Frula – tradicionalni dis/kontinuitet", *Putevi kulture – časopis za kulturu i umetnost*, 13/14, 2009, 2.

⁶ Mediaization is a concept envisioned by Krister Malm and Roger Wallis in 1984. It refers to the changes that happen when music is introduced into a new mass media context, spanning from the use of new sounds and instruments, the impact of technology on timbre, forms, formats and styles to textual changes, the inserting of certain music into new, geographically and culturally distant settings ('transplantation'), and the rise of different claims over authenticity (conservativism, 'mannerism', authenticity seeking). Cf. Krister Malm, "Music on the Move: Traditions and Mass Media", *Ethnomusicology*, 37(3), 1993, 344 et passim.

⁷ Mirjana Rakić, *Graditelj frula i izvođač Mitar Vasić*, graduation thesis, Beograd, FMU, 1987, 82.

the great technical improvements of the *frula*, but it was also made possible by players with a formal music education, who, especially at the end of the 20th century, started to introduce new interpretative and agogic features, like particular kinds of accents, the more frequent use of *staccato*, a wider range of ornaments and the use of glissando, tonal modulations and cadencing in a manner similar to classical music.⁸

The nineties saw the rise of interest in local folk music of the 'authentic' kind, as the dominant post-socialist cultural politics was centered on the re-discovery of neglected national cultural forms, and simultaneously, the newly risen world music scene exploited various genres and sounds of local, chiefly rural music, as the source for the new sub-cultural craze. It is interesting to note that although the *world* or *ethno* music of the nineties relied predominantly on rural music, *frula* playing largely remained outside of this folk music revival, instead growing steadily through institutions such as the Festival of the Frula "Oj, Moravo" in the village of Prislonica (central Serbia) since 1988, as a major event to promote the cherished local and national music heritage without cross-overs or significant contemporary influences. The first formal teaching of the *frula* was in fact organized during the annual festival in Prislonica in 1994, but the true interest in prolonged *frula* classes, in the form of private tutoring, group lessons and short-term courses started to flourish in the early 2000s when *ethno* music became highly popular and the market sought new sources to draw from, apart from village songs that were the basis for the nineties' revival. Here, I imply the musical revival in the meaning proposed by Tamara Livingston, as a social movement that restores (or believes to restore) a particular musical system that has already vanished, or that it is threatened by contemporary development.⁹ The participants of the *frula* revival of the 2000s, who have also introduced neglected or almost forgotten folk melodies to a certain extent, as part of the search for authenticity during the first two decades of the new millenium, also favor complex new pieces composed by contemporary iconic players, thus compromising between the revivalist quest for the old, on the one hand, and the advanced technical standards of playing and the choice of virtuosic contemporary mu-

⁸ Cf. Dragoslav Dević, op. cit., 70; Nice Fracile, "Promene stila i repertoara u instrumentalnoj muzici Srba, Vlaha i Rumuna u Srbiji", *International Journal of Music "New Sound"*, 18, 2001, 102.

⁹ Tamara E. Livingston, "Music Revivals: Towards a general theory", *Ethnomusicology*, 43(1), 1999, 66.

sic that elevate their social status, on the other. Local annual folk music festivals often testify to this kind of conflict, coming from two directions. Firstly, the two main categories of *frula* playing where the players can compete – ‘traditional’ (soloist and duet, authentic/‘izvorno’) and ‘with the accompaniment of the orchestra’ that were created in the early post-socialist transition of the nineties, are still in place. Older amateur players can easily fit into the first category since they were able to learn the older repertoire and style in their youth. Younger players often wish to display technical and interpretational brilliance, accompanied by the orchestra and are less inclined to preserve the older, ‘simpler’ playing style, with some exceptions; older players also like to play with the orchestra, since it was a model of success for *frula* musicians in Yugoslav culture, but a greater number of them are able to accurately present an older and ‘authentic’ style, and their non-tempered instruments that clash with the sound of the orchestral accompaniment, and the general lack of experience in playing together with an orchestra, relegate them to the first category of ‘authentic’ playing. Secondly, the dispersion of available *frula* recordings of various origin – chiefly, published radio and commercial audio and audiovisual recordings and some field recordings on Youtube and other audiovisual sharing platforms, actually form a repertoire source for younger players. Thus, the conflict between the revivalist urge to preserve and the genuine impulse to perform modern and cross-genre music on the *frula* is a direct symptom of the relative continuity with the tradition of the old, but also of the influence of new digital broadcasting and storing media that can both, as Krister Malm points out, “contribute to safeguarding music traditions and to their remodeling or even destruction”.¹⁰

A teacher and apprentice: learning the old way

In the preindustrial, premodern everyday setting, *frula* playing was almost never formally taught. In villages, young people were supposed to ‘steal’ the craft and their way of learning consisted of copying the older and more experienced players, while practicing in relative solitude until they were ready to perform during village gatherings (*sabori*), dancing events, weddings and celebrations of patron saints. Although the older men would sometimes give a brief instruction to a boy,¹¹ usually at the very beginning of playing, the main

¹⁰ Krister Malm op. cit., 351.

¹¹ Girls who played the *frula* were rarer and their learning was restricted by social norms

part of the learning process was based upon repeated acts of aural memorization and practicing while being alone. This way of learning was noted by early researchers of Serbian folk culture: for example, Petar Ž. Petrović observed that a boy would start to whistle dance tunes and songs around the age of six, and would then continue to practice on a small *frula*, so finally his “self-taught (*samoučko*)” playing could be later “polished by playing together with more advanced musicians”.¹² One of the famous self-taught multi-instrumentalists from the 20th century, the *ocarina* player and maker Božidar Vekić expressed this manner of learning with a laconic phrase “I listen, I watch and I steal”.¹³ *Frula* players in the aftermath of WWII maintained this way of learning, while increasingly being able to listen to and copy songs and *frula* melodies broadcast by the Yugoslav State Radio. One of the older players from southeastern Serbia, M. Đ. (1942) spoke during a fieldwork interview about how he learned to play indirectly from an older skilled neighbor while herding sheep. However, he repeatedly compared his immediate role model to the famous radio *frula* star, Sava Jeremić.¹⁴ Many older *frula* players still remember how people were listening on early wireless devices like a crystal radio receiver popularly called ‘a wire’ (*žica*) where only one person could use the earphones: this fact was mentioned by several older generation *frula*

of gendered behavior that required women to stay out of public roles, especially after the onset of puberty. However, a number of female players, among whom many were praised for their exceptional skills, was noted in various published sources. In the contemporary context, there are many female *frula* players, from the oldest ones, who learned to play in the old way (herding, alone), to the mid-generation (influenced by the radio and, later, the record industry) and young players belonging to the ‘new media age’ (girls and young women). In the cohort of young *frula* players, girls measure equal to, and in certain instances, even outnumber boys. For more information on female *frula* playing, see Iva Nenić, op. cit., 2019.

¹² Petar Ž. Petrović, *Život i običaji narodni u Gruži*, SEZB LVIII, knj. 26, Beograd, SANU, 1948, 367.

¹³ Zagorka Marković, *Narodni muzički instrumenti* (Zbirka II), Beograd, Etnografski muzej, 1987, 45.

¹⁴ It is interesting that the metaphor of stealing the art in the particular instance of this player worked twofold, both in the figurative manner of indirect learning via listening, and in the direct meaning, as M. Đ. also, as a poor boy, literally *stole* a *frula* from a neighbour, in order to obtain an otherwise inaccessible instrument. M. Đ. later on proceeded to build instruments, and so far has made more than 100 *frula* pieces. Cf. Zakić et al., Interview with Miodrag Džunić, Archival signature: NSZ 013, Field recordings of ethnomusicological workshop „Nišnu se zvezda“ (audio recording 0072013), 2013.

players when they describe how the media influenced *frula* practice, and according to my informant M. I., elderly *frula* musicians like Mitar Vasić (1925 – 2011) were learning some melodies that way. M. I. and other middle-aged players used to make audio cassette collections during the eighties and early nineties both by buying and by creating personal mix-tapes of recorded *frula* pieces broadcast on radio.¹⁵ In these instances one can observe how the post-WWII generation of *frula* players had started to transform their way of learning from ‘stealing’ the art to the mix of indirect influences of surrounding amateur players with the direct impact of modernized folk music streamed via radio. This was a process of a gradual modification of local repertoires of the *frula* that included a specific choice from tradition by a powerful socialist ideological state apparatus, under the *credo* that broadcast music should include and further ‘develop’ the fittest examples of folk music culture that also appealed to the taste and cultural needs of the newly created Yugoslav nation. One of the greatest contemporary *frula* players who balanced between the local style from Central Serbia and the newly risen pan-regional repertoire during socialism, Dobrivoje ‘Doca’ Todorović (1934 –) can also serve as an illustrative example for the leap from village to mediated music practices. He was generally self-taught, although his grandfather would occasionally “correct a few tones”.¹⁶ Todorović was also among the first *frula* players who recorded traditional melodies with the accompaniment of the State Radio Orchestra, led by the celebrated violinist and conductor Vlastimir Pavlović Carevac. Todorović’s contribution, together with other notable *frula* players of the 20th century consisted not only of maintaining the specific local and regional style but also of creating a modernized, yet recognizably folk *frula* sound that other players embraced as a new cultural, technical and aesthetic standard. It is interesting to note that Dobrivoje Todorović did occasionally teach *frula* playing to youngsters as part of extracurricular activities during socialism,¹⁷ but this did not lead to a new, institutionalized and fully established way of *frula* teaching – successful players continued to learn the instrument on their own terms, while also picking up the mediatized and partly

¹⁵ Iva Nenić, Interview with Milinko Ivanović. 5th August 2019, Archival signature: MI_019, personal digital archive, 2019a.

¹⁶ Mirjana Zakić, op. cit., 22.

¹⁷ Iva Nenić, *Deregulacija kanona: identiteti, prakse i ideologije ženskog sviranja na tradicionalnim instrumentima u Srbiji* [Deregulating the Canon: Identities, Practices, and Ideologies of Women’s Playing Traditional Instruments in Serbia], Defended Ph.D. thesis, Belgrade, FMU, 2015, 221.

transformed *frula* repertoire and style from the radio, and later on, through the cassette culture of the late eighties and early nineties.

To sum it up, the figure of a teacher in the *frula* tradition was not a common one, as self-taught and accomplished players (neighbours, relatives or older friends) served as paragons, and not as real teachers for young interested people. The rise of modern media during Yugoslav socialism created the first 'stars' of mediatized and reconfigured *frula* practice like S. Jeremić, T. Paunović, V. Kokorić, and later Bora Dugić, Milinko Ivanović, and others. They have greatly contributed to selection from the tradition by being promoted and broadcast by media and, later, the recording industry, and their respective styles and repertoires have been copied by many amateur players. The rise of contemporary *frula* private schools in Serbia after the turn of the millennium brought substantial changes to a process of learning the instrument. Many young players could name a few of the famous *frula* performers from the 20th century whose style they value and sometimes imitate, but other circumstances regarding learning have changed considerably. Young players of today rarely 'pick' the skill of playing from a person in the context of their everyday life. The playing of traditional folk music instruments has been included only in some state and private music schools,¹⁸ as well as in university education quite recently,¹⁹ and many young people who are in search of training are not able to attend formal music education due to various reasons, so their families take them to private tutors instead. Many pupils travel to other towns to attend a lesson (Picture 1).

The discourse surrounding the *frula* often connotes a positive attitude towards national identity and culture, hence the older players who teach are often portrayed as the beacons of tradition and true mentors to their young stu-

¹⁸ For example, the departments for traditional singing and playing at the state "Mokranjac" music school in Belgrade and of the state "Mokranjac" music school in Kraljevo, where the first teachers were skilled *frula* players without a formal classic music education, and of lately, ethnomusicologists with an university degree. For private schools, *frula* lessons are included as something 'exotic' that can raise the status of a particular school on the highly competitive private education market, and institutions like the "Master Blaster" school of *frula*, led by the young prominent player Nebojša Brdarić, offer to teach a wide range of the repertoire from the old (Balkan) style of playing to new compositions, and place emphasis on virtuosic skills.

¹⁹ The Department of Ethnomusicology of Belgrade's Faculty of Music has formal lessons regarding *frula* playing at B.A. level, focused on the preservation and on the minutiae of older, authentic village folk music idioms.



Picture 1: A renowned *frula* player Dobrivoje Todorović teaches children how to play in his home in Vlaška village (near the city of Mladenovac), in 2014.

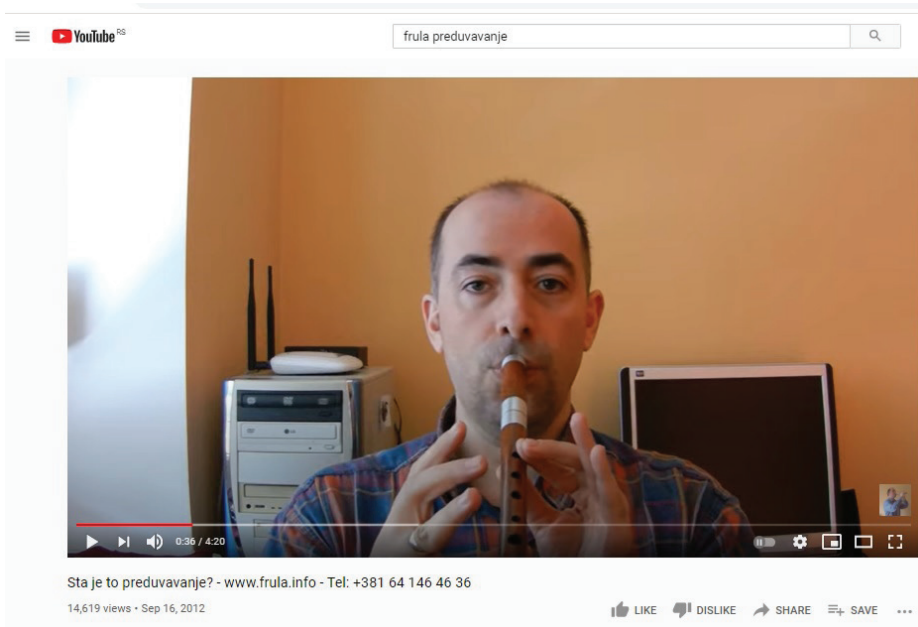
dents. Although this specific teacher – student bond is a recent invention, it is retroactively constructed as *traditio*, an old-time 'handing down of knowledge', although learning by direct teaching was not typical of *frula* practice and moreover the teaching methodologies, repertoire choices and techniques of playing vary greatly among several contemporary 'schools' of *frula* playing. The contrast between the immediacy of human agency (a real teacher and the uniqueness / transience of his/her music delivery) and the immediacy of digitized culture (instantaneously available and *repeatable* music) is something that I have repeatedly encountered during my recent fieldwork. Apart from having a 'real' teacher, many students of the *frula* also have a certain preference among the notable players and turn to Youtube and other music-sharing platforms and websites in search of a repertoire, technique and style. Among my informants of whom several young adults recently became accomplished *frulaši*, the majority rely *both* on teacher-mediated learning and exploring the sources available on the Internet. Some of them put the major accent on the

substantial self-exploration of digital sources in terms of repertoire, style and technique, while a lesser number of younger players strive to keep the standard of direct learning from the teacher and 'reliable' sources (e.g. the 'standards' of the older repertoire, field recordings) and thus maintain a balance 'with' tradition.

The 21st century *modes and nodes* of learning the *frula*

At present, *frula* playing is almost never learned in solitude: those who are interested do so either through private individual or group lessons with well-known older and a few renowned younger players, or to a lesser extent through state and some private music schools. The Internet is also a silent ally in this process, as the majority of today's players also reach to digitized sources. A rather telling example of the latter is an online string of lessons about *frula* playing on a YT channel linked to the website frula.info. The teacher, Dragan Jovanović from Novi Sad, has recorded a number of videos where he explains *frula* playing from scratch, starting with a lesson on the history and basic features of the instrument, giving instructions on how to produce tones, position the fingers and hold the *frula*, proceeding gradually to more advanced topics like overblowing, and, finally, and on how to play well-known songs and instrumental dances (like the Macedonian song "Zajdi, zajdi, jasno sonce" or the Serbian "Užičko kolo"). The main performer in videos is Jovanović himself, and he speaks in Serbian and, occasionally, in fluent English, since the website is also a webshop that sells hand crafted instruments (gusle and *frulas*) and Serbian national costumes, apart from being linked to a YT tutorial. (Picture 2)

This online digest of lessons with the accompanying Internet marketing of the *frula* as a product is related both to the Serbian *frula* revival, and to a recently reignited interest in Serbian traditional culture in the diasporic communities, which also produces a specific demand for those who could (rather quickly) 'train' future players in Serbian diasporic cultural societies that preserve folk music and dances. The cultural repositioning of distinguished older players into teachers has relied on a discursive entwining of the tropes of *authenticity* and *excellence*, as some of them are labeled as true bearers of old-time rural national / local music due to their knowledge and experience. For example, Srećko Perčević, a former bus driver and good *frula* player and maker, after his retirement received a teaching position in 2005 in a public music school in Kraljevo, in western Serbia. He has also published more than



Picture 2: A screenshot of an instructional Youtube video by Dragan Jovanović, that explains and demonstrates the basics of producing overtones on *frula*. Jovanović often produces explanations both in Serbian and in English.²⁰

one instructive book regarding *frula* playing. While it is not common to start a job at a state school without a sufficient teaching degree, the experience, awards at folk music festivals and the fact that this musician was recognized in the local community, helped this player, as well as a few similar ones in taking an active role in the contemporary *frula* revival. Another *frula* player of the older generation, Milutin 'Cveja' Cvejić, from the town of Brus on the slopes of central Serbia's Kopaonik mountain, worked actively on reestablishing the *frula* in the local municipality after 1996, and since the second decade of 2000s has launched a local organization where numerous children from his hometown and the surrounding villages have been privately taught how to play the *frula*, taking part collectively in many festivals and frula-related events under the label of 'the Brus school'. While I was observing his group lessons on several occasions, he insisted on showing me and letting me record only some parts, spoke about his specific methodology and highlighted the

²⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R82WDcxmLts&t=88s&ab_channel=FRULA-GUSLEDraganJovanovic Last access date: 29th December 2020.

value of the local repertoire and the local manner of playing. Another highly important *frulaš*, Bora Dugić, a virtuoso and innovator of *frula* crafting, can be credited for the standards of playing that many active younger musicians of today hold as the highest goal. His unique, highly specialized methods of *frula* making are often portrayed as an advanced and almost secret craft, with a specific discourse laden with elaborate metaphors and almost poetic language regarding the *frula* past and its future. Having said all this, it can be claimed that the master teachers of contemporary Serbian *frula* playing maintain a special status and highlight the trope of exceptionality by various gestures, in order to rise above ordinary village musicians and the institution-alized folk amateurism of the 20th century, but at the same time they display loyalty to national culture and small-scale local traditions, which is readily embraced by the discourse of authenticity typical of revivals.

In terms of the process of learning, there is also a change regarding the way music is perceived, observed, memorized and practiced. Aural learning / transmission was typical of village music, but today's players, especially the younger ones, utilize audiovisual recordings for the sake of both learning the basics (e.g. melodic skeleton) and more advanced research into the matters of style. I have observed on several occasions how young *frula* players create video recordings of their older or more skilled friends' playing, in order to master the use of the holes, fingering and hand positions by visual inspection. Some teachers also expect their pupils to repeat the melody by both listening and *observing* the movement of fingers. In addition to aural and aurally-visual learning, however, is the case of written music notation. As already mentioned, several *frula* teachers wrote and published textbooks with a brief description of the instrument and its history, and laying the basic principles of playing coupled with scores of the most common *frula* music pieces. This gesture also entails the ambition to elevate the role of the instrument from a 'simple' one tied to village practices, into a more serious music tool capable both of expressing authentic national music, as well as being modern, technologically advanced and apt for more complex music endeavours.

Yet, although the presence of music notation was intended to give more ground to those who learn *frula* in terms of authenticity and style, music transcriptions and written instructions haven't become a favoured way of learning. Written melodies are intended to ensure the *stability* of a sound-object, instead of the *fluidity* typical of aurally transmitted traditions. However, a tendency to value written scores in comparison to aurally perceived and learned music, for a present cohort of *frula* players largely remains a 20th

century thing, since their exposition to today's prevalence of digital visual cultures also dictates a supremacy of mediated aurality of *frula* learning and playing. Younger players use Youtube as a non-biased source, and although some of them were in a situation when they would hear a dance tune or a song that couldn't be found on the Internet, they nevertheless maintain a stance that the present body of digitized *frula* recordings is a reliable foundation, sometimes even claiming that the 'authenticity' of their playing directly comes from the practice of dedicated listening to a good, 'authentic' recording. The belief that the use of recordings that directly show a *frula* player's fingers helps in learning the music at home with more ease, and that the slowing down of recorded melodies also serves the same role, is something new and common in the group of young players. Some teachers thus also prepare detailed video lessons, either on DVDs or on their own blogs or YT channels. The present entangling of aural, recorded and notational sources of the *frula* repertoire, indicates that the music's "main modes of storage and distribution"²¹ have changed and likewise, that the music tradition is being pulled back and forth by different forces, belonging simultaneously to several socio-musical domains and experiential fields. This change from the already lost and yet craved immediacy of aurally and orally transmitted music culture to present the *visuality* of the *frula* sound is close to what Marshall McLuhan described as an opposition between "acoustic" and "visual" space: "Acoustic space is organic and integral, perceived through the simultaneous interplay of all the senses; whereas 'rational' or pictorial space is uniform, sequential and continuous and creates a closed world".²² To indeed see whether the shift from the purely acoustic space to present the multimedialisation of *frula* practice is making it more uniform, it would also letting go of the discourse of authenticity, and instead taking into account the different layers of maintaining, learning and perceiving of the *frula* sound that shape its present practice.

²¹ Philip Tagg, "Analysing popular music: theory, method and practice", *Popular music*, 2, 1982, 4.

²² Marshall McLuhan, "The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan", *Playboy Magazine*, March 1969.

<https://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/spring07/mcluhan.pdf>

Last access date: 3rd April 2020.

Who is the Teacher and what is Taught? Human vs. digital agency

Although many contemporary tutors of the *frula* would readily let the pupils record their playing and later use it, some accomplished players are not comfortable with this way of learning, and instead rely on the pupil's aural memorizing or refer the young student to a published recording source. The less known or older pieces that can't be found online, guarded and elaborated the instrument's craft techniques, or the fact that certain older players are simply seen as the last who were able to directly learn the *frula* as part of a living village culture – all point to the special, almost auratic status of contemporary teachers that the contemporary *frula*-related community sees as true masters. The 'old masters' thus employ certain gestures to ensure their specific position as keepers of tradition and highlight the trope of exceptionality, in order to rise above ordinary players. In a typically revivalist ideology, the older players are, as Livingston states, "the source musicians",²³ who enable revivalists to actively (re)construct the authenticity of a given music genre or practice. Apart from that, younger players, as well as some older ones strive to incorporate novel techniques, compose and play pieces 'in the spirit' of authentic folk music, and thus balance between tradition and novelty. In terms of learning and regarding the aid of technology, the older generation players tend to work directly with their students, while the middle and younger generation *frula* players use technology, but in a cautious manner. It is worth noting that the members of the oldest generation nowadays active in the role of teaching, were described by D. Dević more than four decades ago as the bearers of a "new generational style", who introduced more complicated ornaments (double grace notes, *glissandi*, longer trills), experimented with the introduction of new thematic, musically contrasting materials in one piece and became able to perform modulations, among other things,²⁴ so that novelty was already something incorporated in the 'tradition', observed from a present point of view.

Middle-aged *frula* teachers allow for the use of recordings on the Internet to a different extent, and prefer to show and teach the music directly, thus seeing technology as an aide. Some well-known and highly esteemed *frula* players and teachers, like Milinko Ivanović 'Crni' perform intense private and group lessons, but also offer a combination of video step-by-step tutorials

²³ Tamara E. Livingston, op. cit., 70.

²⁴ Dragoslav Dević, op. cit., 70.

with the recording of an orchestral accompaniment, which is a simulacrum of the 20th century coupling of the *frula* with the radio orchestra (Picture 3).



Picture 3: Back cover of the booklet *The school of pipe* – saint Nikolaj Velimirović by frula player Milinko Ivanović (a shortened version of an instructional booklet of the multimedia publication *Škola frule “Sveti Vladika Nikolaj”* (škola za štimovanu frulu) by M. Ivanović, translated into and published in English)

Other *frula* musicians like to put tutorials online more frequently. On the other hand, the approach of younger respected *frula* players to technology and the Internet sources is split between the all-encompassing use of digitized sources and the preference for strictly relying on aural transmission and trustworthy sources (e.g. ethnomusicological and radio-based archives). During my interviews with young musicians, the issue of intimacy was brought up frequently. While many of them appreciate their chosen tutor as a role model, the Internet is a silent 'second tutor', as the repertoires, communication and 'checking' or upgrading of a given style or a piece is frequently sought online. Young players of the *frula* frequently point out that the relation with a skilled teacher forges closeness and a specific bonding both to the person and the music, while listening and acousmatic learning lack the warmth of

human interaction. On the other hand, the repeatability / reproducibility and the possibility to easily slow down the sound are cited often as the supreme advantages of digital technology. Young musicians record the 'fingers' of more skilled players of the *frula*, show preference for certain YT recordings with an important visual aspect (appealing video), and learn to play complicated parts of the melody by slowing it down in music software. These new modes of learning are becoming common nowadays, and present a stark contrast to the previous, aurally and memory-based ways of grasping the music. Mediatization dictates not only repertoires, it also creates a specific perception and relation towards playing and listening, on a subtle, but important level that dwells in the territory of an intimate, bodily *knowledge of music* with an impact that is yet to be shown. A fleeting melody becoming a frozen artefact in time by the act of recording, and tender *frula* music now can be stretched and observed in detail, as young players frequently do so – however, the act of 'stealing' is not something preferable anymore, and old players with their 'imperfect' tones, non-tempered instruments and old-fashioned melodies either adjust to the demands of the new markets and new cohorts of budding performers, or their skills and music pass unnoticed, as aspiring *frula* musicians sometimes confess that it is too bothersome to 'remember' something imperfect and so different in every instance of repetition. Or, perhaps, unworthy if not presented and stored publicly? It seems that the whole ontology of listening and *observing* the sound has been transfigured, as the *act of listening* is paradoxically less valued due to the increased availability of digitally stored sound. On the other hand, the combined practice of learning where the act of playing is coupled by written and recorded sources, now seems prevalent for the generation of mature players-turned-teachers who had the chance to participate in both worlds – in the late culture of auditory learning and in the age of the Internet, thus forming a hybrid soundscape for contemporary *frula* playing. The newly created 'traditional' role of the *frula* teacher, albeit a specific construct in a recent tradition invention, might help in sustaining the fragile, but important aspect of the immediacy of music's transmission, against a colossal tide of artefacts of sound that digitized culture brings about.

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Summary

Frula is Serbian rural folk aerophone strongly connected with the symbolism of national culture and pastorality. The practice of *frula* playing has maintained a relative continuity with the historical past, as it has been gradually transforming from aurally transmitted folk music to mediatized living tradition / neotraditional music throughout the twentieth and the early twenty first century. Although the technical mastering of *frula* and the acquiring of the repertoire in the past had primarily relied on individual learning by aural transmission and the acts of frequent repeating of music in solitude, today the construct of a relation between the teacher (a skilled master) and a student has frequently been framed as a true and genuine traditional way of learning, though being a recent invention. In addition to that, the ongoing depositing of the recordings in digital environments (YT) and the inclination of the cohort of young players to search and listen to music via digital / online contexts, has also added a new interpretative and ideological layer to the changed mode of learning of traditional *frula* playing. The paper outlines the history of *frula* playing since its *mediaization* in socialist Yugoslavia in the aftermath of WWII, throughout its 'ethno' revival after the turn of the century and up to the current hybrid model of combined taught playing and learning by relying on the iterability of digitally transmitted sound available online. The testimonies of historical and contemporary *frula* players have been analyzed, and the issues of human and digital agency in teaching and learning of this Serbian traditional music instrument have been tackled as well, with a significant attention paid to imagined construct of 'traditional' role of *frula* teacher and his mentoring stance, and to the coupling of tutoring with the self-teaching in form of mediatized learning / listening.