
Article received on November 20th 2025

Article accepted on December 5th 2025

UDC 78.072:929 Девић Д. (047.53)

DOI: 10.5937/newso2566003G

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AN INTERVIEW WITH DRAGOSLAV DEVIĆ

Our esteemed and beloved Professor Dragoslav Dević occupies a key place in the history and development of our ethnomusicology, as well as the present Department of Ethnomusicology and Ethnochoreology at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade. Please share with us, Professor, some more details from your biography. You were originally a student at the Department of Music Theory, right?

Yes, right... So, I was born in Požarevac on 15 August 1925. Already as a young boy I had a good singing voice. At school and on other occasions, they would always call on me to sing a song. My father loved music and somehow acquired a violin. In fact, he used that violin as a gusle and sang epic songs with it, accompanying himself by playing on a single string. I turned that violin into a violin. When I was in my second year of elementary school, I took private lessons with a Russian who taught singing. That was how it all started. I slowly learned the violin until I came to Stanković School of Music. This was around 1946, when I came to Belgrade. The violin helped me a lot

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in the army as well. It somehow happened that I had to report for duty here in Belgrade, although Požarevac was my hometown, and I was immediately mobilized and assigned to the 23rd Division.

How did you develop your love of folk music?

As a boy, I went to every folk celebration in our area. Around Požarevac there are many villages where my father had relatives. Gypsy music was the main kind of music in Požarevac. At every festivity, let's say a *Slava*, they would come and play the [Toreador] March from *Carmen* and, of course, folk songs as well. And that's how this love appeared already in my childhood. There are many folk songs I could sing.

When you moved to Belgrade, you enrolled at Stanković High School of Music. In the violin or the music theory department?

In Požarevac, I had studied the violin privately with the famous Vlasta, I've forgotten his last name. He had graduated with Otakar Ševčík. He got a King Alexander Scholarship and went to study in Prague. He was a good violinist. For instance, he quite quickly enabled me to play one of Louis Spohr's concertos. There weren't many etudes, although I did, under his influence, obtain some etudes by Ševčík as well. I also benefited from playing folk music and that drew me even closer to music. I wanted to enroll at the Music Academy.

When you came to Belgrade, what did you study? How old were you when you came to Belgrade?

I came to Belgrade to study architecture. However, I couldn't do that because my father was a merchant. You see, at that time, around 1945, 1946, you couldn't study whatever you wanted.

You didn't have a proper, working-class background?

No, actually my grandfather was a worker. In fact, he was a craftsman, a shoemaker in Belgrade.

So why couldn't you study architecture? Because your father was a merchant?

Because my father was a merchant. All merchants were denounced after 1944/45.

Blacklisted.

I was the son of a kulak. I couldn't enroll.

And where did you enroll then?

I was admitted to the music theory department at the Academy of Music. The important thing was that you could sing well. Vasiljević¹ was on the entrance exam committee and he said to me: "You're in".

At the Academy? That's interesting.

At the music theory department. At the same time I also joined Grbić's violin class at the Academy. But there I had to re-learn how to position my hand, going back to basics. I tried that and realized it was no good, that I was going to have to practice from scratch, including hand positioning, whereas I could already play. And then I thought about studying music history, because I was interested in it. No folklore there. However, I couldn't join the music history program, I didn't have a piano, so I started learning that, too. When I showed up for the entrance exam, Hájek,² who was part of the examining committee, told me: "No, my child, you don't have a piano, you can't, but play the violin instead". However, then it occurred to me that it might be a good idea, since I loved folk customs, to study ethnology. And I enrolled in the ethnology program³ and graduated from there. And then I had this source of capital, which was very important: the ability to engage with folk music and music history in a different way. And that's how it all began. I came to Stanković School of Music and in 1951 they introduced Music Folklore as a subject in the curriculum. And I immediately said: I'll teach that. At first I had to teach both Music History and Musical Folklore. That's how it all began for me. I started following a lot of things related to ethnology.

Educating yourself along the way?

Indeed. And then, when I came to the Academy, I was appointed a teaching assistant on the Musical Folklore course. And that's sort of how I ended up at the Academy.

¹ Miodrag Vasiljević.

² Emil Hájek.

³ At the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade.

On Vasiljević's course on Musical Folklore?

No, that was my preference, but Konjović⁴ was my professor of folklore. I took his folklore class and learned the Finnish method from him.

It's interesting that Konjović taught folklore and not Vasiljević. How did that happen?

They didn't elect him, because there was a lot of animosity. Vasiljević had not formally graduated from the academy, didn't have a degree. He taught solfège. And it was via solfège that he made all of us aware of a lot of things. We learned those models of his, those little tunes.

Because he based his teaching of solfège on folk music. That was his background. But I'd like to know more about your experience with Konjović. Was he more of an office-based kind of professor?

He was a refined office-based kind of gentleman. Everybody had to take his folklore class, the whole music theory department. And in his classes he always cited examples from Mokranjac's *Garlands*. Because he did not write down songs himself.

Konjović didn't do fieldwork. Manojlović⁵ wrote down songs from Eastern Serbia... Did you know Manojlović?

Practically I did. I know that he published a lot of folk songs. He published songs from Krajina at the Institute of Musicology and wrote the preface.

Vasiljević published songs from Montenegro, two Yugoslav collections, songs from Kosovo, Macedonia, Sandžak, Leskovac. Whereas Manojlović published songs from Eastern Serbia.

Yes, songs from Krajina. And Živojin Stanković wanted to publish all of that stuff in some form. He gave his transcriptions to the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, in a type of notation that was unknown. Some kind of neumes. Kosta Manojlović later took that stuff and transcribed it.

So, Konjović was your professor of musical folklore. He also wrote quite a bit, essays on musical folklore.

⁴ Petar Konjović.

⁵ Kosta Manojlović.

I still have his notes, exactly the way he lectured. I think it would be a good idea to have them published.

It was instructive.

He had these little cards. He would dictate and we would have to learn that stuff for the exam.

Did he talk to you about his pieces and folklore as a source of inspiration?

No, he didn't.

At one point, when Konjović retired, Vasiljević got a chance to establish his own department. He was elected as an associate professor of musical folklore.

I was assigned to him.

Was a teaching assistant appointed immediately, or had you already been working for some time?

Stana Đurić Klajn gave me Milojević's writings, to write my so-called inaugural address. That was how they appointed me as a teaching assistant. As soon as Vasiljević died, I started teaching as an assistant. I was assigned to him in 1961. In 1962 he went to Opatija and passed away in 1963. And so I took over the department. The first Macedonians took their classes with me. Mikan⁶ was in that group as well. I inherited them from Vasiljević. Gradually, I started developing an interest in studying ethnology as well.

Did you enroll in the ethnology program only once you started working at the Academy?

Yes, yes, only then; I graduated from the Music Academy in 1951.

And when did you join the ethnology program?

Around 1958. It says in my biography.

I'm interested in your beginnings. When you joined the faculty, as far as I know, there was not a single tape here, nothing related to the department, no literature. Where did you begin? Did you have a model?

⁶ Dimitrije Mikan Obradović.

At Stanković I taught the Musical Folklore class. When I graduated, I was elected as a professor, in 1951. Rajičić⁷ was on the hiring committee. I was in that position for some four or five years. I graduated and then enrolled in the ethnology program.

When you joined the faculty, where did you begin? There was not a single book, nothing. You had your notes and had done some reading before that. Did you go to conferences in folklore studies?

Yes, yes, the first one was in Pula in 1951 and the second one took place in 1952. And then I followed every congress.

You were friends with Rihtman.⁸

I was. Žganec⁹ had published a lot of his writings. I was especially interested in Rihtman because he followed his old diaphonics and that inspired me to begin exploring and recording that type of music.

How did Rihtman treat you? Was he benevolent?

He criticized me when I spoke at the first congress about folk singing and the experience of collecting songs. My presentation was flawed. But I accepted it. It went slowly. I'm self-taught.

The beginnings.

Well, I did have a degree from the Music Academy, the music theory department. I had a degree in ethnology. And slowly all of that stuff matured in me, I kept reading, there were congresses all the time. There was a wealth of topics.

Folk creativity.

Folk creativity as well. Nedeljković¹⁰ was like a father to us. He kept asking me to write something for him. He invited me to be an associate fellow at the Institute of Ethnography, so I did fieldwork with them, traveled to Prizren,

⁷ Stanojlo Rajičić.

⁸ Cvjetko Rihtman, an ethnomusicologist from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

⁹ Vinko Žganec, a Croatian ethnomusicologist.

¹⁰ Dušan Nedeljković, a Serbian folklorist.

Kosovo, etc., and collected material. I came to know and work with Milojević's¹¹ and Vasiljević's singers: they sang for me as they had done for them. Milojević's book was likewise a product of fieldwork.

Those are nice experiences. The same singers.

Well, yes. The same singers. Because they were still alive at the time.

A curious fact is that you recorded Stana Karaminga's song "Dimitrije, sine Mitre".

Yes, this was in Vranje. It was 1960, I was a permanent employee at the radio, for fifty years, and I was collecting melodies for Karaklajić.¹² I would write them down and they would be included in the programming.

In the repertory.

Right, for instance, Karaminga's *Dimitrije, sine Mitre* – that song became a hit in a way, because it was played on the radio. It was sung by Danica Obrenić. Later it was sung by Anđelija Milić.

The radio had an interest in collecting songs, because they have to keep refreshing their broadcasting repertory.

A singer from Niš had some beautiful songs. And I recorded those songs for Karaklajić. Whatever was on the radio was required for programming purposes. He then produced radio broadcasts about them; I made broadcasts on various topics. For instance, the area around Leskovac and its customs.

And when you began doing fieldwork, how did you choose where to go? What were your criteria?

We went to places that had festivals. The festivals informed my selections. For instance, the first festival in Dragačevo in 1961, where I recorded some beautiful songs, polyphonic song, wedding songs, a lot of stuff.

Was that the beginning of your exploration of Dragačevo, which you continued exploring for 25 years? You led student teams there...

¹¹ Miloje Milojević.

¹² Nikola Karaklajić, journalist and editor at Radio Belgrade.

Indeed. I explored Dragačevo with my students for more than 25 years. Did you go as well?

I did. Then I went to Crnorečje, to Kosovo, Gnjilane, Stanišor, various villages, I remember well. You went to all of those places. You also spent some time around Svrlijig. That was a rich area.

You went to Grljan.

I did. With instrumentalists.

I collected almost all of that stuff.

Now I'd like to know more about your method. Did you mostly rely on the German school of ethnomusicology and Béla Bartók, with the Finnish method?

I did indeed. I had already learned the Finnish method with Žganec and then I switched to Bartók's.

Bartók's variant, which works better for our music.

And then I taught analysis according to Bartók's system. We had an ordered structure: what constitutes a melographic list, first the lyrics, then how it's sung, analysis.

The meter, form, cadences... We had drawers full of written analyses. That was our assignment, what constitutes classic ethnomusicology: fieldwork, transcribing, analysis. The holy trinity.

Making young professionals. You also did fieldwork, like everyone else.

When you became the first professor here, how many students did you have?

I inherited five from Vasiljević. When I came here, you were my first student. There was nobody here, nobody wanted to study ethnomusicology. Everybody wanted to do musicology. But then the musicologists slowly started to gravitate toward us, you can see them in the photographs, they did fieldwork with me. Some of them liked it and studied both things, but officially you were not allowed to do that. And slowly we started getting more students. Then we introduced entrance exams as well.

And it used to be the Division of Ethnomusicology, but within a shared department, for musicology and ethnomusicology, which was called the Department of Music History and Musical Folklore. The name of the course was not Ethnomusicology but Musical Folklore.

Musical folklore is the raw material, so I reworked that when I wrote my book.

It's the field of research, not the discipline.

Very interestingly, you sat on a committee for a number of years. In every exam, it was you, Professor Hercigonja, and Professor Peričić, before Professor Pejović came. This was the exam committee, for final theses.

And then we introduced the master's program.

And the doctoral program.

When I was working on Boljevac, Srđan¹³ and Mira¹⁴ kept pressuring me – you must get a PhD. So I said, let me get the stuff I was still missing. And so I went to do fieldwork around Boljevac and made some supplementary recordings around 1987. There's a lot of fine stuff there. And then the book slowly came.

By the way, you didn't really need to do that at all.

You were the first one. You said you wanted it...

Đorđe Đorđijev was the first one.

And then we expanded it, so others could get doctoral degrees as well.

That option is completely open now.

Then the Macedonians came as well. Someone called Bora...

Bora Džimrevski from Macedonia. But they were all your students.

So I sat on that committee, because they had the option of doing doctoral degrees there.

¹³ Srđan Hofman.

¹⁴ Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman.

How much influence did our department have with you as chair? Together with Rada Petrović from the Institute of Musicology, you were the alpha and omega of our ethnomusicology. For years, there was no one else. For years, you were at the helm: the festival Crnorečje u pesmi i igri ("Crnorečje in Song and Dance"), the Dragačevo Assembly (Guča Trumpet Festival), Homoljski motivi ("Motives from Homolje"). You went to Bratovoje,¹⁵ Prođoh Levač, prođoh Šumadiju ("Been to Levač, Been to Šumadija"). Then also Mokranjčevi dani (The Mokranjac Days Festival)...

Yes, the Mokranjac Days. At first, we practically had folk music there. Now they want to reinstate it.

So, concert performances of folk music on the one hand and symposia on the other. And those early booklets, which came out in the 1960s, with proceedings from the Mokranjac Days. On the other side, Razvitak ("Development"), that was important, too. In Razvitak, Toma Mijović always published papers presented at the Mokranjac Days. So it was a network of activities that was highly developed and practical. Also, you had Sabor narodnog stvaralaštva (Folk Creativity Assembly), which was likewise your work.

I took you with me. We did fieldwork there.

That's right, in Leskovac, in 1978, I remember that.

There were some great recordings.

But what did you work with at first? Those weren't some great tape recorders, some Telefunken ones, what we had at the time.

At first we used big tape recorders, we have some of them here, we've kept them.

I've seen the one Hercigonja used.

Hercigonja used a big American one, but it had to be connected to the main supply.

And Vasiljević had a Nagra with a wind-up mechanism.

¹⁵ Bratovoje Marković, the organizer of the festival *Prođoh Levač, prođoh Šumadiju* ("Been to Levač, Been to Šumadija").

He did everything by ear at first.

There is a photo of him...

Right, that's the wind-up Nagra.

Doesn't need a battery. That's great. Then for years you...

Then the Radio¹⁶ made it possible for me to record everything with a Nagra, to obtain good recordings. I made radio broadcasts out of that stuff and it was great for transcribing.

Another one of your activities was the Bemus festival. Concert performances at Bemus.

Dušan Skovran came up with that idea. It was his idea. The first one was an event at the Gallery of Frescoes. My first concert happened there, before our first performance at Bemus. And then the whole thing moved to Bemus. I was constantly doing fieldwork and bringing performers from the countryside, you know that. For instance, the famous piper Krstivoje Subotić. Then you made a book about him. It all unfolded from a single coil...

It all unfolded like a ball of thread. For years I was a participant in all of it, from 1973, and in 2013 it will be 40 years since we began working together. We've been through a lot together. There is an anecdote. They say that one night you had to stay at a villager's house and that all of you slept on a single bed, staring at the ceiling, through the roof.

The stars were coming out... We couldn't get back. We were in the field, in Dragačevo. We would come by bus, carrying big tape recorders and going from one village to the next. There were buses you could take, so we waited for them, so we wouldn't have to carry...

What did you bring with you, what kind of equipment?

¹⁶ According to the secretary of Belgrade Radio 3 at the time, Dušan Ćasić, Radio 3 provided Prof. Dević with a Nagra recorder for the purposes of making fieldwork recordings. On the waves of Radio Belgrade 3, Dević played his fieldwork recordings as part of the "Music Tradition" (*Muzička tradicija* / *Музичка традиција*) broadcast, along with his commentaries.

You can see that in some of the photos. I had a camera, two Nagra tape recorders, two microphones, and I made some high-quality recordings. There was a Telefunken one, and later an Uher tape recorder. I made a lot of recordings with the Uher. Vlada Dimkov also went with me. He was the Radio's main fieldwork sound recording operator. Radoje Dimić went with us as well. He would give me a Nagra to make recordings with it and that was my training. Everything clicked together, in succession, helping me produce good recordings and do good work.

(The interview was transcribed by the section editor Ivana Miladinović Prica)