BOSNIA: echoes from an endangered world
Music and Chant of the Bosnian Muslims
Recorded, compiled, and annotated by Ted Levin and Ankica Petrović

1. Kad ja podjoh na Benbašu 4:09
2. Dunjaluće, golem ti si 3:10
3. Svatovsko kolo 1:04
4. Alaj volim orati 4:19
5. Ganga: Odkad seke nismo zapjevale 2:51
6. Ganga: Sto bećara u srce udara? 1:21
7. Bećarac: Selo moje leži pokraj Bara 1:35
8. Il' je vedro, il' oblačno 2:58
9. Ezan (Call to prayer) 4:53
10. Excerpt from Naqshbandi zikr 3:16
11. Excerpt from Qadiri zikr 5:47
12. Sarajevski početak/
    Sarhoš Aljo drume zatvaraše 6:51
13. Vila viče sa vrh Trebevića 2:59
14. Voljeli se Mujo i Nizama 3:49

Recorded before the recent violence and conflagration in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these rich and beautiful recordings of Muslim traditions display the unique confluence of Turkish and European influences that characterized this region. Compiled from commercial and field recordings, these are indeed echoes of an endangered world: many of the performers have been killed or displaced by war along with the rest of the population. Royalties from this recording are designated for the support of humanitarian aid in the region.
BOSNIA: Echoes from an Endangered World

Music and Chant of the Bosnian Muslims
Recorded, compiled, and annotated by Ted Levin and Aninka Petrović

1. Kad ja podjoh na Benbašu 4:09
(“When I went to Benbaša”)  
2. Dunjaluče, golem ti si 3:10
(“World and its people, you are great”)  
3. Svatosvsko kolo 1:04
(“Wedding dance”)  
4. Alaj volim orati 4:19
(“Oh, how I like to plough!”)  
5. Ganga: Odkad seke nismo zapjevale 2:51
(“How long we sisters haven’t sung”)  
6. Ganga: Sto bećara u srce udara? 1:21
(“What strikes the heart of a ‘real man’?”)  
7. Bećarac: Selo moje leži pokraj Bara 1:35
(“My village lies next to Bare”)  
8. Il je vedro, il’ oblačno 2:58
(“Is it clear, or cloudy”)  
9. Ezan (Call to prayer) 4:53
10. Excerpt from Naqehbandi zikr 3:16
11. Excerpt from Qadiri zikr 5:47
12. Sarajevski početak/Sarhoš Aljo drume zatvaraše 6:51
(“Sarajevo’s beginning”/“Aljo the bully blocked the road”)  
13. Vila viče sa vrh Trebevića 2:59
(“The mountain nymph shouts from the top of Trebević”)  
14. Vojelji se Mujo i Nizama 3:49
(“Mujo and Nizama were in love”)  

In the Latin alphabet, Serbo-Croatian uses four diaritical marks, as follows:

ś = sh (as in “sheep”)  
ć = ch (as in “child”)  
ž = soft j (as in French “Jacques”)  
c without a diaritical = ts (as in “bats”)  
dj = j (as in “jam”)  
j = y (as in “yellow”)  

Introduction by Ted Levin

Sarajevo was buried in snow when I first arrived there on a blustery January afternoon in 1983 after driving – foolishly – over the mountains from Beograd in a blizzard. I knew nothing of Bosnian music then. Like so many visitors before me, I’d come to wander in the Baščaršija, the old Ottoman part of town, to sip Turkish coffee in the crowded salon of the Hotel Europa, and to follow the route of Archduke Franz Ferdinand’s motor car toward the fateful point near the bridge on the Miljacka where young Gavrilo Princip fired his revolver at Ferdinand, setting off the events that led to World War I.

Eighteen months later, I was back in Sarajevo, seduced by the physical beauty of the city and its surroundings, and by the intricate intermingling of religions, ethnicities, and traditions that nourished a vibrant and high-spirited cultural life. At the invitation of fellow ethnomusicologist Ankica Petrović, Professor of Music at the Music Academy of Sarajevo University, I settled in Sarajevo for six months to work on a project whose focus was “Turkish influences in the music of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” Through the fall and winter of 1984-85, Professor Petrović and I traveled in Bosnia and Herzegovina, studying and recording music in the field.

My interest in Turkish influences in the Balkans was a natural outgrowth of earlier musical fieldwork in Anatolia and in Inner Asia, where Turkic peoples have their deepest roots. Turks moved westward into Anatolia only toward the beginning of the present millennium, and it was not until 1389, when the Ottoman Turks defeated Serbia at the battle of Kosovo, initiating 500 years of Ottoman rule, that Turkish cultural influences began to spread through the South Slavic lands.
Walking the streets of Sarajevo—or nearly any Bosnian city or town—before the tragic events of the past year, one could see, hear, smell, and taste these Turkish cultural influences. From the dozens of mosques, where muezzins chanted the ezan over crackly loudspeakers, to the ubiquitous sweet shops and čevapčići (grilled meatball) joints, from the rambling bazaars to the sprightly, yet slightly melancholy folk tunes that blurted from radios and cassette players in stores and shops, a visitor felt the presence of the East.

And yet the Bosnian East is very much part of Europe. Bosnian Muslims are Slavs who converted to Islam during the early years of Ottoman rule. Their language is Serbo-Croatian, the same language spoken by Eastern Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats. (Serbo-Croatian has presently been sub-divided under political pressures from both Serbs and Croats into two separate linguistic identities: Serbian and Croatian. Notwithstanding different alphabets [Serbian uses Cyrillic, Croatian uses the Latin alphabet] and certain distinctive words, Serbian and Croatian remain essentially one and the same language: Serbo-Croatian.) Throughout Bosnia, churches coexisted with mosques. In cosmopolitan Sarajevo, disco bars competed with the sweet shops. Bosnia's cultural achievements were grounded in a spirit of tolerance that was a source of great local pride.

The consumption of this spirit of tolerance by the flames of nationalism has created a violent conflagration with few precedents in our century. The appalling destruction of people and property and the daily chronicle of human misery caused by the Bosnian War have been widely reported. But the systematic decimation of villages, towns, and cities and the uprooting of their populations through "ethnic cleansing" will have long-term consequences that one hesitates to imagine. Among these is very possibly the wholesale loss of a culture that evolved over centuries as a distinctive achievement of the Muslim Slavs, almost two million of whom once inhabited Bosnia. In a modest attempt to help stanch that loss, we have devoted this recording to the music of Bosnia's most endangered people: the Bosnian Muslims.

The musical voices presented on this recording have for the most part been silenced. Some of the performers have died, at least one has been wounded and one taken prisoner; the rest are scattered amidst the carnage of the War, their fate unknown, and unknowable.

In assembling the present compilation, Ankica Petrović and I have tried to present echoes from a musical world that has ceased to exist. Besides selections from our own field recordings of 1984-85, we have included three selections previously released on Yugoton (now Croatia Records, which generously provided them free of charge), two selections recorded by RTV Sarajevo, and finally, two field recordings provided by Mirjana Laušević, a young ethnomusicologist from Sarajevo who is presently a graduate student at Wesleyan University.

All royalties from the sale of this recording are to be donated to charitable organizations and designated for the support of humanitarian aid in Bosnia.
Notes on the Music, by Ankica Petrović
(translated and adapted from Serbo-Croatian by Ted Levin)

Following the Ottoman conquest of Bosnia in 1463 and Herzegovina in 1482, the local South Slavic population of this mountainous Balkan territory underwent intense Islamization (see map). Previously, these Slavs had been Catholic or Orthodox, or adherents of the heretical Christian Bogomil sect.

Elements of Islamic culture, including music, were gradually introduced and formed among Bosnian Muslims during the first centuries of Ottoman rule, primarily through prayers and religious ceremonies, and through the interpretation of the Kor’an. Ottoman administrative rule and Islamic religious traditions were concentrated in urban areas, and thus urban populations tended to be the most pious, and the most susceptible to imported musical and ceremonial practices. However, imported traditions inevitably merged with local ones.

While the cultural traditions and practices of the Ottoman Turks served as the closest model for Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter called simply “Bosnia,” following current popular practice in the West), the music of Bosnian Muslims was neither a literal copy of Ottoman musical traditions nor a simulacrum of the music of other cultures in the core Islamic world. For example, Ottoman classical music seems not to have been adopted during the era of Ottoman rule, which lasted until 1878.

On the other hand, Islamic religious chant, and in particular, the ḥaṭija-s of the Sufi brotherhoods (in Bosnia, the Qadiri, Naqshbandi, and Mevlevi dervish orders had the largest following) left significant traces in both religious and popular musical practices, both among Muslims and among other groups, for example, Sephardic Jews. The musical forms, instruments, and taste that exemplified the Turkish military orchestra (mehterhâna) and ensembles of traveling musicians from the central Ottoman lands also had a certain influence on musical practice among Bosnian Muslims. But Bosnian Muslims maintained a recognizable musical individualism, applying selected elements of Oriental music to existing local traditions, more in lyrical and instrumental forms, and less in narrative forms such as epic singing and ballads.

Rural Muslims, geographically isolated by Bosnia’s rugged terrain, were less exposed to Ottoman culture, and their music remained closer to the musical traditions of the indigenous Croats and Serbs with whom they had long coexisted. Even the chanting of the Kor’an, Mevlid (in the Ottoman tradition, a chant for the birthday of the prophet) and ezan (Arabic: adhan), the Islamic call to prayer, remained close to rural musical practice and local aesthetic concepts (the ezan presented in track 9 is chanted in the florid Ottoman style that is more typical of urban Bosnia). These include a limited tonal range with narrow intervals, limited melodic movement, the use of specific melismatic tones, and singing at extremely loud dynamic levels. Polyphonic (multipart) singing, both of older and more recent vintage, is common among the rural Muslim population, but only in secular music. Oriental-Islamic influence was more strongly represented in the rural practice of the central and northern plains regions of Bosnia as a result of easy communications with local centers of religious and cultural life. Overall, however, Bosnia preserved a steadfast religious-cultural conservatism on the periphery of the Islamic world.
Into the twentieth century, professional musicians who performed in the aristocratic courts of Bosnian Muslims and in the ubiquitous urban kafana-s (cafés) were primarily Christians, or alternatively, Muslims of low social caste, or Gypsies. Singers of epic songs who accompanied themselves on the guše (a bowed lute with one or two strings) or on the tambura (a smaller type of long-necked lute with two or four strings) had a higher status as narrators of historical events. Muslims at times borrowed the epic performance style to interpret lyric songs that, until the second half of the nineteenth century, were called turčija-s (“singing in the Turkish manner”). Later, they were called sevdalinka-s, from the Turkish word sevdah (“love,” “amorous yearning,” or “passion”). Sevdalinka-s were reserved for suitable secular occasions that fostered a mood of intimacy and reflection.

For Muslim women, social laws governing the performance of music were particularly restrictive. Their musical practice, traditionally conducted in closed family quarters, included ballads, lullabies, wedding songs and sevdalinka-s, religious ilahiya-s, and forms of the Mevlud. The chanting of the Koran among religiously educated women existed only on the level of individual interpretation. Muslim women (as well as non-Muslim women) in Bosnia were prohibited from playing musical instruments. Only at the beginning of this century did Muslim girls from respectable urban families begin to play the button accordion without moral prejudice, accompanying Muslim lyric songs, but again only in hermetic social surroundings. Such playing became a new symbol of social prestige. For Muslim women, the occupation of professional musician became acceptable only in the 1940s.

Our present knowledge of the music of Bosnian Muslims stems mainly from observation of current musical practice, and from informants knowledgeable about Bosnian musical traditions. Written sources from the era of Ottoman rule remain largely uninvestigated. It seems clear, however, that in Ottoman times, the Turkish system of melodic modes called makam (Arabic: maqam) was well understood by urban Muslim (and Jewish) performers, and that this knowledge has gradually been lost. Several melodic modes recognizable in traditional sevdalinka-s correlate with the Turkish makam-s hidijaz, ušak, and nahvan (Turkish: hicaz, ušak, and niňavend). These makam-s, plus several others, also shape the tonality of religious chants.

Muslim musicians in Bosnia use the term mekam (accent on first syllable) to designate the general idea of tonal or melodic structure in religious musical forms. They use the terms kajda (Turkish kaide, from Arabic qa’ida: “rule,” “principle”) and avaz (Turkish avaz, from Persian āwāz: “voice”) for a general designation of the tonal or melodic structure of secular musical forms. Kajda is used exclusively for vocal forms and avaz for instrumental forms. Avaz also serves as a general concept for the manner of tuning instruments, primarily stringed instruments of Oriental origin, and as the general designation for the timbral qualities of the human voice or of instruments.

Present-day Bosnian musicians do not name or acknowledge individual makam-s. But the vestigial presence of the makam principle in sevdalinka-s and religious chant coupled with the actual perfor-
mance practice of some of the oldest singers suggests that both these repertoires were grounded in the use of non-tempered Turkish scales. (N.B. It is important to distinguish the legacy of Turkish scales from the autochthonous use of narrow intervals in the old rural music of Bosnia and Herzegovina that still serves Muslims as well as Serbs and Croats.) By contrast, Muslim urban lyric forms are now interpreted within the European tempered system, largely due to the introduction of European instruments to accompany the sevdalinka (for example, track 1, Kad ja podjoh na Benbašu). Foremost among these is the accordion, which has largely replaced the saz, or at least curbed the solo form of saz playing (the latter illustrated in track 13, Sarajevski početak).

Accordions are also frequently played in ensembles together with a violin and bass guitar. With the introduction of these instruments, the sevdalinka has undergone a fundamental change. Not only has the Turkish modal system yielded its place to the European major-minor system, but the typical monodic concept of Muslim lyric songs has yielded its place to a harmonic concept, in which chords largely mask the expressiveness of the melodic line. In place of free rhythm and melismatic melodies, metrical rhythm and melodic rhythm converge to create a strong beat. If the saz once provided a solo accompaniment to the voice, now the voice has become subordinate to instrumental accompaniment. And as the volume of the accompaniment has become louder, vocal timbres have changed in order to adjust to louder dynamic levels and the new timbres of instrumental ensembles. Yet such changes have not diminished the value and significance of the sevdalinka in Bosnia. On the contrary, the sevdalinka has enjoyed its greatest popularity during the last decades as a traditional musical genre transformed through stylistic change and disseminated through mass mediation.

Though this discussion of the music of Bosnian Muslims has mostly focused on repertoires that stemmed from the acculturation of the Ottoman period, it is important to remember that the music of Bosnian Muslims also includes the old autochthonous traditions that rural Muslims share with Serbs and Croats. Meanwhile, urban Muslim musicians have drawn on the cultural heritage of the non-Muslim urban population of Bosnia and Herzegovina: Croats, Serbs, and Jews, particularly from the end of the last century to the present. All of these peoples shared in the preservation, evolution, and affirmation of the sevdalinka and other urban musical genres, considering them to be a kind of ecumenical urban Bosnian-Herzegovinian folk music, or simply "their" music.
A Word on Musical Instruments

Until the twentieth century, the majority of instruments that have served Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina were adopted from the East. These consist of different types of long-necked lutes – tambura, šargija, and saz – the zurna, a double reed instrument and many types of membranophonic instruments and cymbals.

The saz was primarily an urban instrument of large dimensions strung with 6-10 metal strings that ran over a large number of low frets (perdeta). It was used mostly to accompany lyric songs and, rarely, to accompany dances of an Oriental type, for example the zaybek. The saz player (sazlija) demonstrated his ability to improvise in the lengthy instrumental introductions and intermezzi that were an essential part of lyric songs like the svadilinka.

The tambura and šargija, instruments of small and medium format with 2, 4, or 6 strings, are used mainly in rural musical practice. The tambura is used to accompany Muslim epic songs or dances and the šargija to accompany dances and rural lyric songs. In the last decade, the šargija has been played in combination with violin as a lead melodic instrument (as in track 4, Alaj volim orati).

The zurna, a wind instrument similar to an oboe, was brought to Bosnia by the Turkish military ensembles. With time, it began to be used in Muslim weddings and religious rituals. In the same manner, various membranophones and idiophones were also imported. Some were used in the dervish rituals – bim-bir halka (Turkish: bendir), kudum (kettledrum), and zil (cymbal). Dervishes also played the end-blown flute called nai (Turkish: ney). Most of these instruments have disappeared from folk practice because the functions they once served have also disappeared.

Contents of the Recording

(All selections recorded by Levin and Petrović in 1984-85 unless otherwise indicated.)

1 Kad ja podijoh na Benbašu
(“When I went to Benbaša”) 
Nada Mamula, vocal
accompanied by orchestra of RTV Sarajevo
Ismet Alajbegović-Šerbo, leader (deceased)
[licensed from Croatia Records]

If the people of Sarajevo could choose their own anthem, it would surely be the lyrical Kad ja podijoh na Benbašu. Evoking in its first stanza one of the well-known regions of Sarajevo, the song identifies with this city and unfolds in a sentimental form that is in keeping with the spirit of local tradition. Tune and text are evidently of recent origin, however the melody is based on an antecedent that was originally a dervish ilahiya. The appealing melody of the ilahiya found its way into numerous local musical genres, and even into the liturgical practice of the Sephardic Jews of Sarajevo. With time, Kad ja podijoh na Benbašu has become a musical symbol of Sarajevo. Here it is presented in a popular interpretation in which the folk orchestra of RTV Sarajevo accompanies a professional singer in a new instrumental arrangement.

Kad ja podijoh na Benbašu
Na Benbašu na vodu
Ja povedoh b'jelo jagjne,
B'jelo jagjne sa sobom.
Sve od derta i sevdaha,
od tuge i žalosti.
Svud sam iš'o svud sam gled'o
Ne bi' dragu vidjeo.
Sve djevojke Benbašanke
Na kapiji stajahu.
Samo moja mila draga
Na demirli pendžeru.
Ja joj nazvah dobro veže,
Dobro veže djevojke,
Ona meni doj' do veče,
doj', do veče dilbere.
When I went to Benbaša
To Benbaša for water
I took a small white lamb.
A small white lamb with me.
Because of the suffering and passion of love
Because of sorrow and longing, I went
and looked everywhere
To try to see my darling.
All the girls from Benbaša
Stood in the door (of the courtyard)
Only my dear darling
Was at the window with the iron grill.
I told her good evening,
Good evening, girl,
She told me to come in the evening,
Come in the evening, darling.

2 Dunjaluče, golem ti si
(“World and its people, you are great”)
Himzo Polovina, vocal (deceased)
accompanied by Selim Salihović, saz
(deceased)
[licensed from Croatia Records]
This sevdalinka is performed in a long bal-
lad form. The unusual beginning of the
ballad is about the Morič brothers, well-
known Sarajevo personalities of the mid-
nineteenth century, and speaks mainly of
a particular region of the old part of Sar-
ajevo and its characteristic beauty. It is in
fact one of the numerous songs that extol
the virtues of Sarajevo and present a folk
testimony to the values of diversity,
tolerance on which the city was founded.

This recording presents a professional
performance by a leading singer of Bosni-
an folk songs, Himzo Polovina, accom-
panied by saz.

Dunjaluče, golem ti si,
Sarajevo, seir ti si,
Baščaršijsko, gani ti si,
Ahaj, a Vratniče gasil ti si.

Oj, Bistričko, strmen ti si,
Čemaško, duga ti si.
Latinulce, ravan ti si,
Abahaj, Bezistane mračan ti si
Abahaj, Bezistane, mračan ti si.
Tašilhanu, širok ti si.
Ljepa Maro, ljepa ti si.
Dosta si me napojila,
Ahaj, od dušmana zaklonila.

World and its people, you are great
Sarajevo, you look beautiful,
Baščaršija, you are rich,
Ahay, and Vratnik you are heroes.
Oy, Bistrik, you are steep,
Čemaša, you are long.
Latinulc, you are flat.
Ahah, Bezistan, you are dark.
Ahah, Bezistan, you are dark.
Tašilhan, you are wide.
Pretty Mara, you are beautiful.
You gave me plenty to drink
Ahah, you protected me from enemies

3 Svatosko kolo (“Wedding dance”)
Izudin Osokić (b. 1949) and Omer Bikić (b.
1941), zurna; Rešo Kopčalić (b. 1938) and
Rašid Imamović (b. 1929), drums
recorded in village of Makoče, near Brčko,
northeastern Bosnia

One direct way in which Oriental influ-
ences penetrated Bosnia during the years
of Ottoman rule was through the importa-
tion of musical instruments from the East.
The zurna and snare drum, called in
Turkey davul, were first used in Bosnia in the
context of the mehterhans, the Turk-

cish military orchestra. Later they were
employed in Muslim wedding ceremonies
with the idea that their loud and penetrat-
ing sound would magically protect newly-

weds from evil spirits. Until not long ago,
zurna-s and drums were used only in the
northeast of Bosnia among semi-profes-

sional rural musicians with repertoires of
local tunes. We recorded this wedding kolo
from one such ensemble.
Alaj volim orati
se volovim’ rogaćim
Još da mi je cura bi’jela,
da volove tjer.
I curica mrušića
da đrži kolica,
da đrži kolica.
Ala bi se šigicala,
al’ mi ne da mama,
Vala ću se šigicati,
kad ostanem sama.
Ostala sam sama,
Odi lolo vamo,
Odi lolo vamo da se šigicamo,
i ponesi tamburicu da poigramo
da poigramo, da se šigicamo.
Moj mi lola, moja mila nane,
od prirode, od prirode nalazi mahane.
Od prirode, od prirode nalazi mahane, ej.
Sitna dika, sitna ja,
Sitna slama pod nama.
sitno dika mene ljubi poznaje se zubi.
Poznaje mi nana da sam milovana.
Moj dragane, imaš jednu manu
što ostavi, što ostavi

4 Alaj volim orati
("Oh, how I like to plough!")
violon and šargija (long-necked lute),
Izudin Osojić (b. 1949) and Osman Bikić
(b. 1941), village of Macoč, near Brčko

In recent years, some songs which are
inconsistent with traditional Islamic moral
attitudes and aesthetic values have been
included in the local music practice of
Muslims from northeastern Bosnian vil-
lages. Thus, songs with erotic textual con-
tent have become a part of the repertory
of semiprofessional musicians in Muslim
communities. During the process of trans-
mision of these songs, some older expres-
sive characteristics of rural musical style
are adapted to the new socio-cultural
milieu.

One example is this dancing song, whose
text originated in a neighboring Croatian
region. It is sung by two performers who
accompany themselves on violin and šargi-
ija, a long-necked lute of Turkish origin.

na mom srcu ranu, na mom srcu ranu
Što ostavi, što ostavi
na mom srcu ranu, na mom srcu ranu.
Eh moj dragane, moj dragane,
Imaš jednu manu, imaš jednu manu.

Oh, how I like to plough
with horned oxen
And would that I had a light-skinned girl
to pull away the oxen
And a dark-skinned girl
to hold the oxcart
to hold the oxcart.
Oh, how I’d like to make out,
but my mother doesn’t let me,
I swear that I’m going to make out
when I stay home alone.
I stayed alone,
Hey, fellow, come over here,
Come over here so we can make out,
And bring your tamburica to dance
to dance, to make out.

It’s in his nature, in his nature to find my
faults.
My darling is tiny, I am tiny,
Tiny is the straw under us.
My darling gives me tiny kisses
the toothmarks will be recognized.
My mother will recognize that I was
caressed.
My darling, you have one fault
that you left, that you left
a wound on my heart, a wound on my
heart
That you left, that you left
A wound on my heart, a wound on my
heart.
Eh, my darling, my darling.
You have one fault, you have one fault.
5 Ganga: Odkad se ćemo zapjevale
("How long we sisters haven’t sung")
Rahima (b. 1939), Mejra (b. 1930), and
Habiba (b. 1941) Sultanić (maiden name),
recorded in village of Podorašac, Northern
Herzegovina.

Odkad se ćemo zapjevale
Sada ćemo kad smo se sastale
Zapjevamo seke i rodice
Jedno pleme, jedne porodice.

How long we sisters haven’t sung
Now we’ll do it, because we’ve come
together.

Let’s sing, sisters and cousins.
One tribe, one family.

Ganga is probably the most controversial
musical form in Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is
sung in the mountainous regions of Herze-
govina among members of all autochthon-
ous groups, including Muslims. Urban
dwellers tend to dismiss ganga as simply
unorganized (or disorganized) sound,
while rural people consider it their most
expressive form of music. Condensed into
the compact ganga are all the most char-
acteristic elements of the music sung by
the livestock breeders and farmers who
inhabit the Dinaric Alps, and beyond: lim-
lited melodic movements based on narrow,
non-tempered tonal relations; the use of
characteristic melismatic tones; singing
with great dynamic intensity and corre-
responding vocal timbre, and finally, a poly-
phonic texture produced by a small group
of singers of the same sex among whom
the major second is enjoyed as a conso-
nant interval. Thus, by our Western
understanding, the singers and their
active listeners achieve maximal harmony
through dissonance.

The women’s group that presents the
ganga in this recording explained to us
that it is important in the course of
singing that all members of the group
have the same physical experience of the
music’s “harmonic dissonance.”

6 Ganga: Sto bećara u srcu udara?
("What strikes the heart of a ‘real man’?")
Safet Elezović (b. 1961), Muhamed
Elezović (b. 1964), and Zeynül Mašša (b.
1959) [all in Gornji Lukomir]. Recorded
August 6, 1989 in Gornji Lukomir, Mount
Bjelašnica by Mirjana Laušević.

Što bećara u srcu udara
ličar vina i djevojka fina

What strikes the heart of a “real man”?
A liter of wine and a fine girl.

Mirjana Laušević writes about her field-
work on Mount Bjelašnica:
“Unlike Mount Bjelašnica’s Olympic
slopes which received the world’s atten-
tion in 1984, the villages of the plateau,
often referred to as ‘the other side of the
mountain,’ have remained unknown to
the Western World. Ganga is the most
popular vocal genre among male high-
landers. The singers cultivate a sharp,
vibrant sound that enables them to domi-
nate the vast space which surrounds
them and feel a physical closeness from
the shared experience of the vibrations in
their bodies. As in this track, men’s ganga-
s often express ideas of manliness.”

7 Bećarac: Selo moje leži pokraj Bara
("My village lies next to Bare")
Samka Catić (b. 1966, Razašije), Rahima
Skujić (b. 1968, Mat), and Džemila Deić
(b. 1972 in Žulje). Recorded at Razašije,
Mount Bjelašnica, August 24, 1990 by
Mirjana Laušević

Selo moje, leži pokraj Bara,
A lolino kraj grada Mostara.

My village lies next to Bare
My darling’s, next to the city of Mostar.

About bećarac, Mirjana Laušević writes:
"Bećarac is a form of newer secular
polyphony that emerged under the influ-
ence of exposure to Western European
music. This exposure is reflected in the
singers’ sense of tonality and in the
genre’s characteristic cadence on the fifth.
This recording demonstrates the bećarac
in the process of transition from an older
polyphonic style that emphasizes horizon-
tal movement of the voices to a newer harmonic style that emphasizes vertical chords. Although the name of the genre is derived from the word bećar, meaning ‘a real man,’ bećarac is sung both by men and women.

“Samka, Rahima, and Džemila are shepherdesses from the Herzegovinian village of Žulje. At the beginning of May, they migrate, as did their great-grandparents, to the seasonal settlement at Razašije, on Mount Bjelašnica, seeking better pasture for their flocks. With the first cold night that heralds the onset of winter, their thoughts turn toward their homes and sweethearts in the lowland villages to which they will soon return.”

Neither is it clear nor cloudy,
Neither is it dark night
But it is Sokolović
The young Ibrahim-beg.

He was carried away, he was caught up in his own higher world
Because he loves the wife of the sultan Sultan-Zulejha.

Let’s say, Zulko, let’s say, soul,
What am I to you?
You are, Zulko, precious stone, the burning sun
That lights us up.

This unusually expressive sevdalinka illustrates well the psychological intertwining of poetic and musical language that characterizes the best examples of the genre. The singer’s challenge is to evoke the contrasting imagery of the poetic text in her treatment of the melody. Rare are singers like Alma Bandić, member of a wonderful student ensemble at the Sarajevo Music Academy, who bring artistic imagination and inspiration to such deceptively simple songs.

9 Ezan (Call to prayer)

Allah-u akbar
Ashhadu an la ilah-a illa 'ilah
Ashhadu anna Muhammedan rasul Allah
Hayya’ala 'l-salat
Hayya’ala 'l-falah
Allah-u akbar
La ilah-a illa 'ilah
Allah is most great
I testify that there is no god besides Allah
I testify that Mohammed is the apostle of Allah
Come to prayer
Come to salvation
Allah is most great
There is no god besides Allah

Traditional explanations about the origin and development of the music of Muslims in Bosnia cite the ezan (Arabic: adhan) or “call to prayer,” chanted from the mosque before each of the five daily prayers, as the most typical adoption of an Oriental-Islamic model in local musical practice.
In Bosnia, the older manner of chanting the ezan was based on the Istanbul practice, while a more contemporary style follows the Cairo practice. The recitation of Kasim Mašić, muezzin, imam, and muallim (teacher) from Travnik, one of the seats of the erstwhile vezir of Bosnia, is considered one of the most beautiful Bosnian variants. In his performance, the muezzin uses maqam hidjas, although the muezzin himself is not aware of the identity of this maqam.

10 Excerpt from Naqshbandi zikr

The Naqshbandi order of dervishes takes its name from Bahauddin Naqshbandi (d. 1389), a great religious teacher who lived in Bukhara, in present-day Uzbekistan. Naqshbandi dervishes appeared in Bosnia in the fifteenth century, and the tekke (dervish meeting place) in Visoko where this zikr was performed was founded by mufti and sheikh Husnija Numanagić around 1920.

Zikr (Arabic: “remembrance”) is the collective ceremonial medium through which Sufi dervishes strive to achieve a state of sacred ecstasy. To this end, the dervishes employ various techniques. Most involve strongly rhythmic chanting of sacred textual formulas accompanied by forceful physical movements. The Naqshbandi, however, are known for their use of the “silent zikr” (zikr-i khafii), in which dervishes seek union with the Divine through silent meditation and prayer. The zikr that we recorded in Visoko, a small town not far from Sarajevo, resembled more the verbal zikr of other dervish orders in Bosnia. In this excerpt, a hafiz (religious singer) chants a solo line above the rhythmic refrain La ilah-a illa 'Lah (“There is no god besides Allah”).

11 Excerpt from Qadiri zikr
recorded during a zikr in the Qadiri tekke in Travnik, January, 1985.

This excerpt from the Qadiri zikr is from the second part of the ritual, which is performed standing. It relates first to the repetition of particular names of God (Esni), from which this part of the ritual received its name. The text repetitions are gradually transformed into an expressive musical pattern, and as the chanting accelerates and moves towards a climax, the textual repetition contracts from Entel hadi entel hak, Leyni’-hadi illâ Hu (“You are the True guide, You are the Truth”) to the essential syllable “Hu” – one of the names of God. During the chanting, one voice diverges from the group and resumes the chant at the interval of a minor third above, perhaps an indication of the strong influence of polyphony in the Balkan countryside. Throughout the world, Muslim religious chant is invariably performed in unison.

12 Sarajevski pođetak/Sarloš Aljo drume zatvaraše (“Sarajevo’s beginning”/“Aljo the bully blocked the road”) vocal and sax, Kadir Kurtagić (deceased)

[Ah, sarhoš Aljo, aman, drume zatvaraše Na djevojke, aman, zulum učinio!
Aj, samo nije, aman, od lijepe Hajrije, već je njojzi Aljo govorio:
“Aj, nećeš proći, aman, dok te ne poljubim.”
Aj, progovara, aman, lijepe Hajrija:
“Aj, nemoj Aljo, aman, poznaje mi majka!”
Aj, krisonu Aljo, aman, kao ljuta guja
I poljubi lijepu Hajriju.
Aj, koi’ko ju je, aman, Aljo poljubio
Četiri joj dagme napravio.

[Aj, prva dagma, aman, izpod obrvica
Druga dagma nasred b’jela lica.]
Aj, treća dagma, aman, nasred b’jela vrata
Aj, četvrta, aman, dji kiša ne pada.*

[Aljo, the bully blocked the roads
And demanded tribute from the girls.]
Aj, he didn’t only demand tribute from beautiful Hajrija,
But Aljo spoke to her:
"Aj, you will not pass before I kiss you."

"Aj, beautiful Hajrija started to say,
"Don’t, Aljo, my mother will notice."

"Aj, Aljo screamed, like an angry snake.

And he kissed beautiful Hajrija.

Aj, how much he kissed her.
He left four marks [on her face].

[Aj, the first mark was on the eyebrows. The second mark was in the middle of her white cheek. Aj, the third mark was at the middle of her white neck. Aj, the fourth, was where the rain doesn’t fall.] *Text in brackets is omitted on the recording for technical reasons.

One of the last performers of sevdalinka-s in the traditional Sarajevo style was Kadir Kurtagić. In this style, the saz player, or sazlija, begins his sevdalinka with a lengthy instrumental introduction (Sarajevo početak) that presages the mood of the texted sevdalinka that follows. Like the majority of songs from the repertory of Kadir Kurtagić, Sarhoš Aljo drume zatvaraš has an erotic character, but the erotic elements are expressed exclusively through metaphor.

**13 Vila više sa vrh Trebevića**
(“The mountain nymph shouts from the top of Trebević”)

Emina Zečaj, vocal
Tamburaški Orkestar, RTV Sarajevo
Drago Trkulja, leader
[licensed from Croatia Records]

Vila više sa vrh Trebevića
"Jel’ Saraj’vo gdje je nekad bilo?,
Jel’ mehana kraj Morića hana?
Piju l’ vino mlade Sarajlije?
Služi li ih krčmarica Mara?
Nosi l’ Mara tri [name of flower – indiscernible]
Prvi plavi što begove mami,
Drugi žuti što hanume ljuti,
Treći bijeli što djevojke d’jeli."

The mountain nymph shouts from the top of Trebević,
"Is Sarajevo where it used to be?

Is the inn near the Morić’s house?
Do boys from Sarajevo drink wine?
Is Mara, the barmaid serving them?
Is Mara wearing three flowers?"

The first, a blue one, is the one that attracts the boy [nobleman].
The second, a yellow one, is the one thatangers the ladies.
The third, a white one, is the one that the girls divide.

This sevdalinka is sung by Emina Zečaj, one of the most popular and gifted performers of sevdalinka to emerge in Sarajevo in recent years. Like many other sevdalinka-s, this one begins by mentioning prominent landmarks associated with Sarajevo, for example, Mt. Trebević, whose summit offers a spectacular view of the city. Also included in the text are historical figures from Sarajevo’s past, like the nineteenth-century Morić family.
Mujo and Nizama were in love
Aj, Mujo and Nizama
Aj, they've been in love for three years.
Aj, when the fourth year began
Aj, the year began
Aj, the beautiful Nizama died on Mujo.
Aj, Mujo mourned for beautiful Nizama
Aj, beautiful Nizama
Aj, and he went to visit the grave.
Aj, there was beautiful Nizama bowing
Aj, beautiful Nizama
Aj, and in her hand was a rosary of coral.
Aj, Mujo started to kiss Nizama
Aj, to kiss Nizama
Aj, she lost herself to him in the darkness.
Aj, Mujo took the rosary of coral
Aj, the rosary melted in his hand.

In this sevdalinka, Emina Zečaj condenses and musically transforms a long narrative ballad into a shorter lyrical song. As an active concert and recording artist, Emina Zečaj had to shape her repertory to conform to the conventions of the performance venues in which she worked. In retelling the story of Mujo and Nizama, she shortens the text, skipping many of the details present in the longer ballad narrative, while embellishing the music. If in the ballad tradition the interest of both singer and listener is oriented first and foremost toward text, in the sevdalinka, text and melody stand as equals. Here, Emina Zečaj adds textual repetitions and exclamations to fill out the delicately contoured melodic phrases which seem well suited to the romantic subject of the text.

Credits
Field recordings by Ted Levin and Ankica Petrović were made using a Technics SV-1000 Pulse Code Modulator and Beyers 260 condenser microphones. Mirjana Laušević used a Sony Walkman Pro.

Ted Levin teaches in the Music Department at Dartmouth College.

Ankica Petrović was, until November, 1992, Professor of Music at the Music Academy of Sarajevo University. She is presently teaching in the Music Department at University of California, Berkeley.

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