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Children's toys and children's soundproducing toys – souvenirs and/or instruments

The paper reviews the so called traditional sound-producing toys, made by children as well as those made by adults for the children. Recent references reflect interest in children's creativity, although children's sound-producing toys are barely mentioned. This phenomenon was discussed at some length in Croatian ethno-musicological literature in the 19th century (Kuhač). The most extensive analysis of toys produced in Laz near Marija Bistrica was written by Krešimir Galin in the nineteen-seventies and -eighties. International ethnomusicological experts continue to analyse the relationship between musical instruments and toys, and emphasise the need for the continuous study of the phenomenon considering the great age of sound-producing objects. Bearing in mind different interpretations, the author concludes that sound-making toys can be identified with musical instruments, and suggests their integration in the educational process at least as an introduction to more complex musical expression.

Key words: sound-producing children's toys, toys, souvenirs, children's musical instruments

INTRODUCTION

Children's sound-producing toys were and still are an integral part of children's world. This text will review primarily the so-called traditional sound-producing toys which children used to make from various materials in their environment (wood, horn, reed, feathers, leaves and the like), and toys adults made for the children. Such toys were part of children's everyday life

throughout Croatia, and many of them are still found as souvenirs; children also produce such instruments during music classes or in special primary school programmes (ethno-groups), or in cultural and art societies.

TRADITIONAL CHILDREN'S SOUND-PRODUCING TOYS IN REFERENCES

Discussions of traditional children's toys are found in several fields - in studies written by ethnologists and ethnomusicologists (folk tune collectors, folklorists), and in the work of enthusiastic traditional culture buffs that explore and record knowledge about mainly past times. In the beginning let me mention some recent works of tradition devotees, who are not necessarily ethnologists by profession, in order to emphasise the current considerable interest in the children's world. Authors describing children's games in a specific areas single out games, the participation of children in customs, specific songs and dances, and also mention musical instruments. Thus, the Matunci family, who have spent almost their entire working age researching and teaching traditional culture, especially in their native Bilogora, mention in their book, Children Have Fun, various musical instruments used by children – well-wishers: tamburas, dude (bagpipes with triple chanter and a drone pipe), mouth organs and all the way to silk paper on combs (2010: 57). The children made various musical instruments themselves – friction sticks (guslice - maize stalk fiddles), whistles and trumpets, and used various kitchen utensils - washboards, pots and ladles. They also performed melodies on single and double duct flutes made by adults for them. Thus, on St. George's Day children went round playing trumpets made of bark, and tried to sing, play or rattle (Matunci 2010: 137). However, there are hardly any information about the organisation of sound, instrument handling and, generally, the sound/musical effect.

Slavica Moslavac describes the "folk children's games of Moslavina, Hrvatska Posavina and Banovina", and lists "the simplest musical instruments", "children's and shepherd's" instruments, including the whip, comb, grass, acorns, fresh rye stalks, dandelions etc. "with which children tried to produce sounds, tones, whistles or buzzing" (2012: 4). "Adult shepherds also made more elaborate instruments, e.g., all kinds of whistles, single and double endblown duct flutes, with which they could even express a musical thought" (Ibid.). The author also mentions children's creative endeavours, while looking after cattle, in making whistles from organic materials in their environment: e.g., they made small fiddles (guslice) from maize stalks when playing "at weddings", and played on old kitchen accessories like irons, pots and lids,

etc. (Ibid.) However, other than listing the book does not say anything about children's creativity, and mentions no detail about the children's playing, i.e., sound organisation.

The catalogue of the exhibition *Children's games and toys in Podravina* (Peršić Kovač 2004) mentions various kinds of flutes and a part of the exhibits, but no detailed instructions on use. However, Kovačić provides a detailed description of the making of musical instruments in Podravina, and mentions that children used flutes made of goose feathers to "report, call, caution, warn of danger, and call to merry collective games [when several 'shrillers' played high tones]" (1980: 319); in musical terms, he emphasised the signalling function of this sound-producing object.

Describing children's games in the surroundings of Zagreb, Maja Kožić points out that "the making of children's instruments and pop-guns should certainly be included into the games that stimulate children's creativeness" (1987: 432), and goes on to highlight the process of making; however, there is hardly any mention of instrument use, i.e., of making music.

In his book on children's games in Donja Bebrina (Slavonia) Mata Baboselac extols past times and children's carefree outdoor games, and only mentions toys made by the children themselves - shown nicely in the photographs - and toys bought "at fairs from salesmen of gingerbread ware". It is precisely these instruments purchased from the *luciter/licitar* (seller of gingerbread and other products) that are the object of ethnological research engaged more in the observation of toys in terms of the skill used in production and in monitoring the specific features of certain crafts, the spread of the products and, partly, their use (e.g., whether meant for boys or girls) (see, for instance, Biškupić 1991; Šarić 2002; Biškupić Bašić 2013; partly also Mustapić 1997). But even the Questionnaire issued by the Ethnological Society of Yugoslavia - Ethnological Atlas Commission at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb – lists, at the end of a group of questions on "musical instruments", several descriptions of instruments or sound-producing objects; one of the questions reads: "which of these instruments are just children's pastimes, or are they also used for another purpose" (1967: 136).1

¹ I did not research the answers to the items in the Questionnaire.

TRADITIONAL CHILDREN'S SOUND-PRODUCING TOYS IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL REFERENCES

Sound-producing objects really attract primarily the interest of ethnomusi-cologists. Almost anything children used to make in order to produce sound – from the simplest small boards on a string producing a buzzing sound when rotating, plant leaves, dug out and debarked branches to *guslice* (small *gusle*) made from maize stalks, was classified as an instrument. Depending on what produces sound, instruments are divided into several categories:² if the sound is produced by the object, the instrument is an idiophone (e.g., maize stalk *guslice* or rattles); if it is produced by a membrane, it is a membranophone (e.g., paper on a comb); if the sound is produced by a string, the instrument is a cordophone (e.g., a tamburitza); finally, if sound is produced by air, the instrument is an aerophone (e.g., a whip, bark whistle, hollow key etc.).

The importance of this part of the musical world for children was stressed already in the 19th century by Franjo Kuhač. In the *Proceedings of the Yugo-slav Academy of Science and Art* he analysed for several years various instruments, their history, and published music, recorded proverbs, songs, stories in which instruments were mentioned, different words relating to instruments and other interesting details. Along with the description of reed whistles he also touched on the world of the children:

"I deem it worthwhile to mention that our people ought to accustom children to instruments at an early date. Let the music teacher start by using instruments that are easily handled (the educational principle says: start from the easy and proceed to the toilsome, start from the simple and proceed to the complex) and which are cheap; if the child, as he learns to play it, breaks or loses the instrument, the cost can be easily made up. I would even say that frequent changing of the instrument stimulates the child's wish: children being what they are enjoy every novelty so that there is no need to look after it too attentively, the more so if the child can make the toy himself, e.g., a *guslica*, flute or whistle" (Kuhač 1877: 5).

Furthermore, Kuhač highlights the use of simple flutes in a very interesting paragraph which also reflects the public attitude towards male and female players: "Playing the flute is a very widespread skill in our people and one

² The division follows the one provided by Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs in 1914, shown to be applicable to all the instruments in the world (other than the new, electronic ones, for which, along the same line, the "electrophonic instruments" was introduced).

wonders hearing or seeing that a gentleman or foreigner is not used to it. Even girls can play it, although it is said that girls and women fail to observe decency by doing to. Any male child can learn to play it from the earliest childhood and hardly needs a teacher. As a shepherd he can play it day after day, practice his fingers until he learns to vary the melody and embellish it with trills and other sounds. As he grows up, he can recline in a grove and spin tunes for his imaginary sweetheart" (1877: 13).

After Kuhač, the next Croatian researcher who engaged most thoroughly in the study of musical instruments was Božidar Širola. He published a number of interesting studies devoted primarily to the making of instruments (along with very interesting information on songs and verses spoken during production, and names of instrument parts); the least covered part regarded the making of music. Although the playing of whistles has a limited potential (hence the few examples devoted to the making of music on that instrument), Širola nevertheless emphasises their importance:

"Actually these are toys made by little boys in springtime to their own delight and to the delight of their brothers. Although the durability of whistles made of fresh bark is insignificant because the bark taken off a branch or a stick dries very quickly or cracks, or crumples and grows rigid, so that it no longer adheres to the mouthpiece or stick together like in *sopile* (conical oboe-type shawn with fingerholes), children nevertheless enjoy making bark whistles. The wasting of such whistles actually reflects the essence of children's games: the boy will enjoy the whistle he has made, and will proudly and tirelessly blow into it even for several hours, and then he'll be satisfied with it and look for different entertainment, a new toy... Yet these whistles are worthy of attention because they help us to discern the first and original forms of some instrument the appearance of which needs to be sought in ancient times" (1932: 1).

In another publication devoted to the production of folk flutes sold at fairs, Širola also mentions specimens in the form of various animals or instruments, but also notes that these are toys (Širola 1932a: 154). There are no detailed information about their use by children.

However, in the introduction of the manuscript Single duct flute,3 Širola dis-

³ The manuscript is deposited in the Croatian State Archives under No. HR-HDA-827. The same number is found on four boxes of material, mainly containing manuscripts, Širola's printed and hectographed musical works (operas, operettas, orchestral compositions, piano compositions, an oratorium, and compositions for children). The mentioned manuscript is kept in the fourth box.

cusses the idea about how the *žveglica* (flute) could be used as a possible instrument on which children would start their musical education: "This is a flute textbook published in the hope that it will soon be possible – other than purchasing block flutes manufactured in German factories (*Blockflöte*) – to instruct our makers of such flutes (e.g., the *žveglari* in Bistrički Laz) to produce such instruments improving only the manufacturing technique, and thereby please our youth societies and other national music enthusiast with good and valuable instruments and benefit the development of Croatian national music". He also pointed out that that instrument producers needed to introduce some changes in their production practices. The basic principle applied in design, he pointed out, was actually the copying of old models, and the arrangement of the holes on the flutes was long determined according to finger span, i.e., approximately⁴ (see Širola 1942).

Such an initiative regarding the production of duct flutes on which the chromatic scale could also be played did not take root, and the children's musical world still remained on the margins of consideration of ethno-musicologists. Thus, the catalogue of the exhibition of traditional instruments held during the Zagreb Folklore Review in 1973 also mentions children's toys:

"Idiophonic instruments are numerous and widespread; some are intended for long-term use and therefore made of more resistant material (e.g., rattle-like instruments like *čegrtaljke*, *škrebetaljke*, or *raglje*), while others are short-lived and usually made of plant material (e.g., the maize stalk clapper, *klepetalo*). Whirligigs made of nutshells are only children's toys used for fun. A spoon in a glass, although both are objects of everyday use, can also become instruments if you use them to rattle, e.g., at name-day parties or on a similar occasions" (Bezić et al. 1975: 20).

However, until Krešimir Galin there was no serious ethnomusicological consideration of sound-producing toys. His interest was also focused on traditional aerophonic instruments produced in Laz near Marija Bistrica. Following the development of single and double duct flutes through history, he divided the changes into three periods. In the first period, in the late 19th century, these instruments were used to play dance melodies, and had burned ornaments. In the second period they were painted yellow with red and green

It is actually a block flute textbook preceded by an introduction written on different paper. The manuscript is not dated, and it was handed over to the State Archives together with other material by Mg. Josip Širola.

⁴ A similar procedure was applied in marking frets on the tamburas; see more in Širola 1933.

embellishments. They were still tuned and used to play vocal melodies. In the third period, since the nineteen-seventies, there were visible decorative but also tuning changes, and instruments increasingly turned into souvenirs pleasing the eye instead of remaining musical instruments. Guttural voicing also disappeared from playing, the reduced number of holes reduced the sound range, and since single flutes were no longer used as instruments, the accuracy of the tone row was no longer important (more in Galin 1977). All these features were also present in smaller instruments, e.g., those in the form of small birds. Galin concludes:

"When we observe the connection and complexity of certain phenomena and transformations, we can formulate some patterns in the processes. Thus, we note that changes in the function of the instrument result in the reduction of elements related to the old function and, on the other hand, in a hypertrophy or refining of elements related to the new function of the instruments or, let us call them that way, souvenirs or toys (in which we can also, although less and rarely, still find an instrument. i.e., a pure tone row). The changes occur gradually during the takeover and mastering of new techniques by a combination of old and new techniques or forms (which refers alike to the production of the instrument and to the playing technique and to the form of played songs), i.e., by a hybridisation of techniques or forms" (Galin 1977: 70).

This conclusion shows that Galin identifies souvenirs with toys and, in the process, takes over the thinking of the builders themselves who produce certain objects to make them as attractive for sale as possible disregarding their use.

In the nineteen-eighties Galin presented a much broader insight into instruments, but also into sound-producing objects, in his master's thesis on "Aerophonic and idiophonic instruments in Croatia in the first half of the 20th century". Relying on the *Manual of European Folklore Instruments* (Handbuch der europäischen Volksmusikinstrumente), in his description of the instruments Galin follows a set model, and for each specimen presents data in six groups: terminology (name of the instrument and of its parts), ergology (description of the phase in the production of the instrument, technological procedures and tools), playing techniques and acoustic features of instruments present in traditional practice, the repertoire of the players and the highlighting of instrumental melodies typical for local traditions, and historic and iconographic sources and spread (1983: 3). Thus, he provides a very interesting description of single duct flutes – especially because it points out the tone rows of different flute forms (*tiček*, *pištolj* or *bajsek* [bird, pistol or bass]); moreover,

in the chapter on the social role of the instrument he notes: "One of the more significant forms of the social role of duct flutes was the custom of the parents' presenting flutes purchased at fairs to their children" (Galin 1983: 118).⁵

It is a pity that the project did not cover all instruments as in the former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Switzerland or Slovenia. Their common feature is that they did not deal specifically with the range of children's instruments but listed instead the customs in which the children used them (e.g., for rounds on New Year's Eve, serving at mass or playing). Interestingly, the use of all instruments is related mainly to boys and very little to girls (see Sàrosi 1966); Kunz 1974; Bachmann Geiser 1981; Elschek 1983; Kumer 1983); however, what is mentioned frequently are magic and practical uses of some sound-producing toys e.g., the buzzer - a button on a thread (see Kunz 1974: 100); or a *bull-roarer* - a small board on a string producing sound during rotation, also used formerly to catch birds (see, e.g., Sàrosi 1966: 67).

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OR SOUND-PRODUCING TOY

After such information about sound-producing objects which are part of children's world, Curt Sach's theory according to which instruments with a formerly ritual significance have remained only in children's world, and that instruments used only in rituals can now only be found in children's hands, appears to be even more interesting. Maček elaborates the idea even more deeply by claiming that children's world reflects archetypes still harbouring thoughts about older cultural history (cf. Maček 1985: 35), which is also confirmed by paleoorganology (see also Lund 1985).

In spite of all this evidence, one could easily be trapped by the following question: what is actually a musical instrument? Does this only refer to objects on which melodies can be played, or can this be extended even to the palms we have been using since early childhood to keep rhythm? If we "doubt" that our palms could be instruments, the doubt would also extend to various forms

⁵ In 1997, on the basis of Galin's study Ivana Mustapić researched subsequent changes of instruments/toys in the field, in the area of Marija Bistrica. She also dealt more with design and factographic, descriptive presentation, and provided very few data on the use of the instruments, concluding that they were still bought for the children or sold as typical souvenirs of the region (Mustapić 1997: 15).

⁶ In this regard one could also discuss the concept of *bodymusic*, i.e., playing on one's own body and by means of it, but I shall leave that for another occasion.

in which we perform the same patterns by clapping our hands – and it would be difficult to exclude drums from the list of musical instruments (cf. Maček 1985). On the one hand, keys on a ring shaken by a child are a "suspicious" instrument; on the other, we entertain no doubts about industrially manufactured metal sticks of varying length (e.g., windchimes). These facts are only a reminder that it is difficult to set a firm boundary across which an object becomes an instrument, and even more difficult in children's world. Children find it much easier than adult to "make music" on the most varied objects surrounding them (cf. Cvetko 1985), and Maček's claim that the determination whether an object is an instrument is actually a matter regarding adults rather than children is very founded (1985: 33).⁷

Yet, do we have enough data from the past bearing witness that certain objects were used by children as instruments? Were these "instruments" devised/made to imitate the adult world or were they used for personal entertainment? Therefore, when we speak about sound-producing objects, a piece of information or picture showing what the object looked like will not suffice; what we need are data describing how the object is treated, how to approach it, how to hold and use it; the organisation of sound produced on it is also important, and so is the reason why sound is produced on it (this is an especially sensitive issue for musical archaeologists; see Lund 1985: 18).

Musicologists maybe neglect such objects (bullroarers, rattles made of natural materials and the like) because of their somewhat questionable musical significance, and classify them in the domain of ethnologists dealing with the study of childhood (Lund 1985: 18). Mere musical education imposed by adults has nothing to do with the spontaneous use of anything that falls into children's hands and anything they use as instruments.

The former Federation of Yugoslav Folklorists included for a while a *Children's Creativity Section* presenting papers on children's creativity and crea-

⁷ Hickmann arrives at the same conclusion: what is important is the child's decision: is something an instrument, did the child choose it or was it forced upon the child by adults (1985).

⁸ Ellen Hickmann also raises these questions in relation to past pictorial models showing children and instruments (see Hickmann 1985).

⁹ All these questions were raised at the meeting of the research group dealing with the study of traditional musical instruments within the scope of work of the International Council for Traditional Music (see www.ictmusic.org) in the mid-nineteen-eighties. The papers were published in the serial edition *Studia instrumentorum musicae popularis*.

tivity for children; however, the scope of its work was limited compared with the other themes covered by the Federation. Because of that, Elly Bašić drew attention – at the 1985 Congress of the Ethnomusicological Section in Sokobanja – to the fact that children's creativity is "a complex phenomenon, and must accordingly be studied on a scientific basis in order to find out what we could save, out of this children's wealth, during the child's socialisation and development, for the child and for the future adult. That is not only a sociological problem, it is definitely also a culturological problem and a problem regarding humanisation with respect to the future human being." Furthermore, continues Bašić, the child needs to be observed and approached as "a spontaneously emotional being, a being having a richer fancy than adults, a being from whom we still need to learn a lot in order to be able to understand that wonder" (1989: 509). In the process we must also look at our curriculums which often teach children something they have mastered a long time ago." 10

As highlighted by Igor Cvetko (1985), modern society is distinguished by a continuous reduction of free time in which the child can express himself/herself creatively being bound by school programmes and modules. Children are "spellbound" by school programmes and the issue is the degree of freedom they enjoy in finding their own solutions, that is, developing their own creativity. 11 However, even he suggests the presentation of simple traditional instruments to the children in order to, I would like to add, stimulate creativity. We are all aware that today children would find it hard to find elder-wood, reed or a pig's bladder, but quite a few things can be replaced by man-made material like plastic pipes, boxes, cardboard and the like. Organic materials have been replaced by man-made ones, but they are all part of our everyday life, and that is their common feature. Formerly these toys were very shortlived, partly because of their origin and partly because they were replaced by something new as soon as they had fulfilled their role, and the cycle kept repeating itself (cf. Emsheimer 1985), just as Kuhač had claimed. At the same time their use was simple and they were accessible (they were either free or

¹⁰ As an example, Bašić mentions rhymes the rhythmic chanting of which fascinates children already at the age of two, in the phase when they still don't know how to sing – and according to the curriculum rhymes are not "learned" before school (Bašić 1989).

¹¹ The question becomes even more appropriate if we look at musical culture textbooks used in primary schools: they offer ideas for making different instruments, in most cases from materials that surround us, but such instructions rarely refer to the making of traditional instruments.

purchased at fairs for a trifle), and one did not have to fear damage because they could easily be replaced with new ones. This simplicity of use was a pivotal issue for children because otherwise they soon lost the will and the pleasure.

In this connection there is an especially interesting consideration regarding the common ideal of sonority developed by children in a greater geographical area. This is related with the sounds that follow them in development, e.g., the sound of maize stalk rattles, which are very widespread, or little fiddles (guslice) of the same material, or whirligigs, as Maček pointed out (1985), which differed in the past depending on living conditions in specific areas. This phenomenon is gradually disappearing in the present-day age of industrially manufactured toys. Nevertheless, there is still one deserving attention: sound-producing objects belonging to the sphere of children's toys are also found in archaeological material and (close) variants of the same products are manufactured today industrially from man-made materials unlike most objects currently called instruments. Therefore, the study of all these new variants of "old" toys/instrument and their current application would certainly be interesting.

CONCLUSION: THE INSTRUMENT AND THE TOY

Returning to the theme of souvenir toys, let me quote Krešimir Galin's conclusion: "Transformation from poly-functionality to mono-functionality: at this level we can follow the change from several functions of the instrument related to heterogeneous musical life (all forms of use) and a firm value system towards the reduced function of the toy and souvenir as a mass culture asset (because, in spite of the nuances of name and meaning, the toy and the souvenir have the same essential significance and psychosocial function as mass culture goods)" (1977: 68).

In line with all these facts, I would not fully agree to the identification of toys with souvenirs, although I have to admit that this might perhaps be true in the case of the products made in then surroundings of Marija Bistrica; after all, an object, especially a sound-producing one, in the hands of a child, fulfils even as a toy a part of its function (it plays, it sounds). If hung on the wall or displayed in a showcase, it does not matter if it has any holes and what the holes are like because in such cases its sound is fully ignored and colours take over the main role. Therefore, I think that by returning these instruments to chil-

dren we would again give them an opportunity for a "flight of fancy" on their instrument (Bašić 1989: 510), for "speaking" with sound (Kuhač 1877: 13).

Finally, the questions are the following: to which extent is the existence of such traditional toys justified, and do they only constitute evidence of intangible heritage, that is, skills and phenomena inscribed on registers of intangible goods? Or could we restore to these products the functions of toys and instrument, and use them in the educational process, at least as a simple introduction to more complex musical expression?

Translated by: Janko Paravić

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