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Elective Course of Traditional Istrian Music at the Music School Ivan Matetić Ronjgov in Pula

The Music School Ivan Matetić Ronjgov in Pula has introduced an elective course in Traditional Istrian Music within the project of Local Heritage Education initiated by the Istria County – Regione Istriana. The course consists of listening, analysis and practical performance of the first and second traditions and hybrid musical styles. The aim of the course is to encourage creativity and critical thinking about traditional music as a living practice. Students pointed out that the course provided them with better understanding Istrian dialects, music and dances, which contributes to the preservation of local cultural identity.

Keywords: students, local heritage education, music school, close interval dyad, *kanat*, *tarankanje*, traditional music, *balun/balon*, Istria

INTRODUCTION

Today, young people most often encounter traditional music in folklore, cultural and art societies. In the past, this music was adopted within the family and local community. For many years, folklore groups existed in schools as part of extracurricular activities. For the past ten years, the Istria County/Regione Istriana has been implementing the project *Institutionalization of Local Heritage Education in the Istria County*, which aims to “form an institutional form of preserving the Istrian local identity, and preserving our regional diversity and uniqueness” (Institucionalizacija zavičajne nastave Istarske županije 2023). Almost all preschool, primary and secondary school institutions in Istria are participating in the project. Every year, the Istria County announces a tender for funding the local heritage education program. Each educational institution can propose a project to be implemented during the year. The project topics are free and diverse.



Figure 1. Local heritage education in the MS IMR Pula (photo by Noel Šuran)

The Music School Ivan Matetić - Ronjgov in Pula¹ began to hold classes of local heritage education from the 2019/2020 school year. In addition to classical music, students were given the opportunity to learn about and understand the traditional music of Istria. For three school years, local heritage education was implemented on a project basis, and in the 2022/2023 school year, as an addition to the curriculum, local heritage education was introduced as an elective course under the name Traditional Music of Istria.

FROM AUDIO RECORDINGS TO ELECTIVE COURSE...

In the 2019/2020 school year, a project was implemented in collaboration with the Rin Tin Tin preschool and the Pula Kindergarten in the form of creating a songbook, and with the students of the MS IMR Pula was recorded an album containing the Istrian lullabies *Istarske nine nane – Nine nane Istriane*. The school students played and sang lullabies based on traditional lyrics from the Istrian region, which they arranged, and some were composed by the school's teachers. The CD contains twelve vocal and instrumental compositions performed by various

1 In the following text, the MS IMR Pula.

instrumental ensembles: *Dormi mia picia, dormi* from Marušići, *Ča to šuška* from Pregara, *Fame le nine* (Istria), *Zaspala je ljuba Ivanova* from Boljunska vala, *Nina oh, nina oh* from Gradinje, *Prvo lito ki san služi* from Martinčići, *Šu je oća* from Černehov breg, *Orco* from Oprtalj, *Fa le nane* from Brtonigla, *Zibala Ane* from Pićan, *Zaspal Pave* from Premantura and *Homo spat* from Strohe. This album was nominated for the Porin Award in the category of best children's album in the 2020/2021 school year. The musical director of the project was professor Suzana Goldin, the producers were Edi Cukerić and Branko Crnogorčić, while ethnomusicologist Dario Marušić made the selection of songs.

In the following school year 2021/2022, the project *Discover, explore and document the traditional music of Istria* was implemented, which included external collaborators Dario Marušić, Noel Šuran and Nuša Hauser. Demonstration lectures and guided listening sessions enabled students to learn about the diversity of Istrian musical traditions. They encountered different musical languages that differ in sound, color, rhythm, melody, aesthetics, and other thematic content. Part of the program was also a field trip to Pićan at the Center for Intangible Heritage of Istria of the Ethnographic Museum of Istria – Centro per la cultura immateriale dell'Istria del Museo Etnografico dell'Istria², which included a presentation of the project and the promotion of a short film (*Glazbena škola Ivana Matetića-Ronjgova 2022*). The purpose of the project was to introduce students to traditional music and musical instruments of Istria.

Then, in the 2022/2023 school year, as an addition to the curriculum, local heritage education was introduced as an elective course called Traditional Music of Istria, which continues to be successfully implemented with great interest from students, and we can say that it is an example of good practice. The classes are held by professor Suzana Goldin, an advisor in the parent institution, and external collaborators – ethnomusicologist Dario Marušić and ethnologist Noel Šuran, curator at the Ethnographic Museum of Istria – Museo etnografico dell'Istria, employee of CENKI – CECII.

The purpose of the classes is to introduce and understand traditional music of Istria in an anthropological sense, following the footsteps of the contemporary ethnomusicological paradigm in considering its multi-layered levels. Bearing in mind the approach to tradition as a continuous process, and not just an inherited set of unquestionable facts, this method provides students with several opportunities for critical interpretation, thereby increasing their level of awareness of the very processes of attributing specific meanings.

Students are introduced to the diversity of Istrian musical traditions through demonstration lectures and guided listening sessions. Learning traditional singing and playing is based on listening to and imitating the performances of traditional music performers. The classes cover examples from the first tradition: close interval dyad (“u dva”/na tanko i debelo; taranjanje; bugarenje; discant), examples from the second tradition: musical forms with tendency toward the major key (musical practice of violine and bajs; bitinade; arie da nuoto; traditional urban folk songs), and hybrid forms such as perojsko pojanje and church chants.

Every year, depending on the interests of the students, we focus on certain musical phenomena of Istria. Thus, in the 2023/2024 school year, we emphasized the musical practice of the violin and bajs³ called *Gunjci u školi*. That year, a lot of students playing string instruments enrolled in

2 In the following text, CENKI – CECII.

3 The typical line-up of traditional *gunjci* includes violins (one or two) and *bajs* (*leron*), and they may be



Figure 2. Students and their mentor at the Punta Christo fortress in Štinjan during the filming of the video clip *Naš balun* (photo by Ida Skoko)

the elective course, so we decided to work more on the aforementioned musical phenomenon, which has been entered into the Register of Cultural Property of the Republic of Croatia. The project *Gunjci u školi* was also funded by the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia. The students learned and adopted the specific Istrian traditional technique of playing the violin and the *bajs*, while the other students practiced the traditional dance *Giardiniera*⁴ and singing polyphonic songs. At the end of the school year, we also recorded a short overview of our activities (Glazbena škola Ivana Matetića-Ronjgova 2024). It is worth noting that our students regularly perform at school concerts and many festivals and displays of traditional music

joined by clarinets (*klarini*), trumpets (*korneti*), tubas (*bombardini*) i sl. Recently, accordions, guitars and other instruments have also often been included. Today, it is considered that the line-up of *gunjci* must include a *bajs*, while violins are less common. Their repertoire are mainly dances: *polkas*, *waltzes*, *šaltini*, *mazurkas*, *marče*, *mafrine* and *cotići*, *vilote*, *forlane*...

- 4 The dance *giardinera* was performed by students of the school in Livade in the late 1940s. Although reduced to a dancing game, the dance contains elements that connect it to contradanza dances. It has been confirmed that in the first half of the 20th century it was still danced by adults. It is believed that the dance spread during the time of the Illyrian provinces in the form of a quadrille, with two couples dancing facing each other. The dance consists of four figures.

throughout Istria (*Zarozgajmo na Čičariji* in Lanišće, *Zakantajmo i zasvirimo po staroj užanci* in Barban, *Zakantajmo istrijske kante* in Barat, *Polivocalità di tradizione/Tradicijsko višeglasje* in Šišan, *Supci pud mavricun* in Grimalda, etc.). Last year, they performed at the national professional conference of music educators held in Pula.

NAŠ BALON

In the 2024/2025 school year, we focused on traditional lyrics. We tried to explain to students how lyrics are created, how they are transmitted and how they change. It is important to emphasize that in the folklore milieu, the view that still prevails is that the authors of traditional songs are unknown, anonymous, however, this is not entirely true. Rudan points out that among the people, and even in science, the question of who was the creator of a folk song was not raised, but rather who and how performed the song or music. Due to such circumstances in which attention was mainly focused on the success of the performance, the question of creating, shaping songs or melodies was completely neglected (Rudan 1979: 128). There were attempts to mystify folk songs and attribute to them an age greater than their actual age. It was believed that a song whose author is unknown was more archaic and therefore more valuable. *Istrijska kanta* is an example of an archaic musical language, however, a large part of the melodies and lyrics of traditional songs that are performed today are not actually as old as one would like to believe or try to present. In his book *Narodna čakavska poezija (Chakavian Folk Poetry)*, Ive Rudan states that “only rare examples of very old songs have been preserved” (Rudan 1979: 132; Šuran 2021: 113).

In the last thirty years of the 20th century, there were numerous groups in Istria that competed in terms of the quality of singing and playing, skill level, and devising new tunes. *Roverci*⁵, led by the lead singer Milan Orlić Bižulin, were among the first to create their own specific style called *roverian*. In the 1960s, new lyrics and new melodies were written. There were only few performers of the older generation who cultivated the repertoire of their elders. Like every new generation, they aspired for something new and, in their own opinion, better and more advanced. Every performer wanted to stand out. Young singers strove for a new repertoire, especially a more modern one” (Šuran 2021: 109), of course with themes that were close to them at the time. So, as an example, we played the song *Zrušili se baladuri* written by Josip Bilić Gašpar from Režanci, performed by numerous traditional singers and musicians such as Slavko Celija and Pero Brgić, which actually celebrates social changes after the World War II (deagrarianization and industrialization), the abandonment of the old way of life and the transition to a new one, the expansion of the new, and the contempt and shame for the old way of life.

*Zrušili se baladuri pale su bankine
rodili se kantaduri z naše mladetine.*

*Ne pleše se drugo po staroj užanci
klate se na metar dugo i skaču kako janci.*

*Klateći se vajak kantaju kante svačigove
za ke ni ne znaju odkud su ni čigove.*

5 *Roverci* are the inhabitants of Roverija. “The easiest way to locate Roverija is “somewhere out there” north of Vodnjan and south of Svetvinčenat. To the east are Barban, Divšići and Filipana, to the west in the direction of Bale is uninhabited wasteland” (Orlić 2014: 5).

*Kušeta njen se laskaju, na njih bičve bile
matere he praskaju ča su učinile.*

*One fatapošte još i kraće šiju
ki zna foši još će sve da se utkriju (Bilić Gašpar 2014: 105).*

The students' task was to write lyrics for the existing melody of the traditional dance *balun* that would be close to them and their peers, showing how they live today and what problems they face. The students adopted new words but did not identify with the lyrics. The conversation with the students led to words that were closer to them and with which they could identify. Boredom was the first word that the conversation prompted, which opened up a discussion on various topics, from social to anthropological. After the word "boredom", the students relaxed, opened up and began to string together other words that we then wrote on the board: mobile phone, surfing, discrimination due to diversity, generational gaps, mental health, media, politics, capitalism, globalization, Anglicism, English, dialect, like, bro, the elderly expect us to be on the *kampanja*, and we are on our mobile phones.

For their homework, they had to write lyrics that included these words in the traditional form of *taranjkalica* (rhymed couplet). After the students were encouraged to be "themselves" and to think freely, they wrote new lyrics – their lyrics from their time. The students brought various rhyming couplets that we then put together into a meaningful whole which we titled *Naš balon*⁶:

*Došli su nan mobiteli dosta nan je svega,
mediji su prevazišli svega i svačega.*

*Svi smo sad na mobitelu i ne gre nan škola
kušeljamo engleski, a hrvacki na pola.*

*Vrimena se mijenjaju lita vred prolaze
generacije za generacijom dolaze.*

*Internet se širi napro mladež zuri u luče
Neki sriću pronalaze dok se drugi muče.*

*Mediji i surfanje te E AJ nan vladaju
BRO, lajkaj, šeraj, svašta ljudi sad spikaju.*

*Ne štimaju ninega ki želi svoj će biti.
Od diskriminacija tih živci su nan siti.*

*I na kraju, sustav je slobodu zagušija,
e moj brate u ča se sad naš svit pretvorija.*

The students listened to an audio recording of the song *Zrušili se baladuri* and then made a cover of the melody by ear. After writing down their lyrics, they sang it to the given melody. The students performed the lyrics accompanied by various instruments: accordion, *roženica*, clarinet, trumpet and violin in an arrangement by Dario Marušić. They performed the tune in two-part singing in thirds with unison endings which are common to *tarankanje*. After rehearsing the

6 *Balon* or *balun* is the most famous traditional dance in Istria. Today, it is performed by numerous folklore groups. The dance is often accompanied by traditional singing called *taranjkanje*. *Taranjkanje* is the singing of rhyming couplets into which neutral syllables such as *ta-na-na*, *taj-naj-naj*, and similar are inserted, while maintaining a rhythmic pattern.

tune, we decided to make a music video. Recording and mixing were done by Edi Cukerić and Branko Crnogorčić. The music video was made at two specific locations (the school premises and the Punta Christo fortress in Štinjan), which allowed the students to see and participate in the process of creating a musical piece from the lyrics, arrangement, rehearsals, recording audio and all visual aspects of creating a music video (video recording, costume design, makeup, etc.). The authors of the lyrics are students of the MS IMR Pula: Nada Pliško (1st grade of the MHS), Katarina Perišić (2nd grade of the MHS), Tatjana Čeko (2nd grade of the MHS), Teodora Marčeta (4th grade of the EMS), Andrija Bužleta (1st grade of the MHS), Armando Glasnović (6th grade of the EMS). Their mentors were Suzana Goldin, Darijo Marušić and Noel Šuran. Production: IMR and Dokumentarist plus, camera and editing by Ida Skoko, assistant Mladen Đaković.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the classes was to introduce students to the traditional music of Istria through a contemporary and creative approach. We consider tradition as a living practice that is constantly evolving, as a kind of continuity of change. Traditional music can only survive if there are active creators – singers and musicians who develop, enrich and adapt it. Without them it becomes static and gradually disappears. Every performer who is well versed in traditional patterns adds their own improvisations during the performance, while preserving the traditional form. Ultimately, every traditional song – both the lyrics and the melody – is the product of someone's creativity and passion for music.

By implementing this practice in school, the goal was to encourage students to use the traditional model to build something new - what is here and now, what surrounds them and what they live with. By reflecting on their lifestyle, students were encouraged to be creative, imaginative and most importantly, to express their opinions and attitudes through lyrics. They also became aware that what was foreign and strange to them was once close to someone and part of everyday life.

The students understood the concept of tradition on the example that they created with the help of their mentor. By creating their lyrics, the students fathomed the world they live in and expressed their thoughts and their attitudes.

This approach allows students to think critically about the process of assigning meaning to music, increasing their awareness of cultural and social contexts. Through active participation and practical activities, the students gained a deeper understanding of the role of music in shaping culture and everyday life.

And finally, a few thoughts about the local heritage education that the students wrote from their own perspective:

My impressions of the local heritage education:

- *I learned new Istrian words*
- *I heard some Istrian songs for the first time*
- *I learned new ways of singing*
- *I heard some instruments for the first time*
- *I got to know the Istrian tradition a little better*

- *We often sing, dance and listen to Istrian traditional music :-)*
M. J.

The student Teodora summarized the evaluation of the elective course in the form of an acrostic:

*Zavičajna nastava predmet je zabavan,
Ali uz to i malo naporan!
Vajka ništo delamo
I nikad nan ni dosadno!
Čakavski jezik govorimo,
Ali i tradicije čuvamo!
Jako se zavičajnoj nastavi veselimo,
Na njoj pjevamo, igramo se i plešemo,
Ali također i učimo!*

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