SAŽECI DOKTORSKIH RADOVA U MUZIKOLOGIJI – SUMMARIES OF DOCTORAL THESES IN MUSICOLOGY

THE LIFE OF 78 RPM RECORDS ON THE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN MARKETS: THE CASE OF ZAGREB-BASED RECORD COMPANIES[1]

Dora DUNATOV (Zagreb)

https://dx.doi.org/10.21857/y26kecdpk9

Research subject: The three Yugoslav record companies

Written in English, this dissertation was defended in 2024 within the ethnomusicological study program at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz, Austria. It focuses on the beginnings of the Yugoslav record industry, covering three socio-politically dynamic decades. More precisely, it deals with the era of 78 RPM gramophone records, commonly known as »shellac records« after the material used for their production. The shellac period of the global record industry is divided into two phases: the acoustic and the electrical. This dissertation focuses on the latter, when electrical recording techniques significantly improved the sound quality and fidelity of recordings, consequentially increasing public interest in records and demand for recorded music. This expansion reached Zagreb in 1926 with the establishment of the country's first record company, Edison Bell Penkala

[1] The doctoral dissertation was supervised by Univ. Prof. Dr. Phil. Sarah Weiss (Kunstuniversität Graz) and Prof. Dr. Naila Ceribašić (Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research Zagreb) and was defended on 16 October 2024 at the Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Graz. The thesis is available at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392601589_Life_of_78_RPM_Records_on_the_Domestic_and_Foreign_Markets_The_Case_of_Zagreb-Based_Record_Companies>.

(hereafter EBP). The last shellac record in Zagreb was produced by the Jugoton company in 1959, marking the end of my research period.

In contrast to the global West, the record production scene in Eastern Europe has been comparatively less vigorous, often viewed as one of many tributaries that eventually flow into three major record conglomerates known as the »Majors« and presently referred to as the »Big Three« (Universal, Sony, and Warner Music Group). While the history of Western record production in the 20th and 21st centuries is marked by complex developments and consolidations, the history of record production in Croatia (or Yugoslavia, when discussing 78 RPM record production) is much more straightforward. Basically, along with the aforementioned EBP and Jugoton record companies, only one more local company produced these type of records: Elektroton, originally established in Ljubljana (1933). The three record companies succeeded each other in terms of certain assets and shared headquarters (i.e. Zagreb), but they remained largely independent when it came to leadership, workforce, objectives, repertoire and business decisions. Production, dissemination and reception of records produced by EBP, Elektroton and Jugoton are the focal points of this dissertation.

Research background: Collaborative (ethno)musicological project

The limited academic research on record production, especially within musicology and ethnomusicology in the former Yugoslavia, highlighted the need for this study. Before 2020, scholarly work on EBP, Elektroton and Jugoton was sparse, with Jugoton being the most extensively studied. Institutional interest in this topic in Croatia began in March 2020 when a collaborative four-year scientific research project was launched at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb, supported by the Croatian Science Foundation.[2] Thus, the project titled »The Record Industry in Croatia from 1927 to the End of the 1950s« brought together a team of (ethno)musicologists who saw record production as a key to understanding broader dynamics in music, society and culture. The term »domestic« implies the historical context in which Zagreb was nested within larger political entities: The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (from 1929 known as Yugoslavia), the Independent State of Croatia and the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. These political contexts influenced the record production to include music from various ethnic groups existing on the territory that today comprise Bosnia and

[2] The official website of the project »The Record Industry in Croatia from 1927 to the End of the 1950s« (IP-2019-04-4175) is <https://www.ief.hr/en/research/projects/the-record-industry-in-croatia-from-1927-to-the-end-of-the-1950s/>. It was led by Dr. Naila Ceribašić, with contributions from Dr. Nada Bezić, Dr. Joško Ćaleta, Dr. Tanja Halužan, Dr. Irena Miholić, Dr. Željka Radovinović, Dr. Jelka Vukobratović and myself.

Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. As a PhD student involved in this project, my role was to explore the operations of these record companies, assess their national and transnational market influence, as well as to evaluate their impact on domestic record production and competition.

Economic ethnomusicology: Market as an analytical tool

Given the inherently commercial nature of the record industry, it was logical to ascertain the above mentioned objectives through a comprehensive analysis of the industry's »natural habitus«, i.e., the market in the broad sense of the term. The more one thinks about what the term market encompasses, the more layers of market agents are unravelled, spreading out into a range of potential aspects that can be studied. Hence, the thesis builds upon Appadurai's concept of the market as an »institutional arena« which implies broader social, cultural and symbolic dimensions shaping the phenomena of commodity exchange. In other words, it envisions the record market as a multifaceted prism that reveals interlinked dimensions, usually simplified into categories such as production, distribution and consumption. Using the prism, one can observe the life of early gramophone records on many levels, resulting in a wider multidimensional picture that enables a better understanding of micro-processes present in the development of the record industry and record exchange. To get an even greater picture with more contextual detail, it is important to examine the dynamics beyond the national market, including regional and transnational markets, reaching out overseas to diasporic communities that made use of the Yugoslav record industry.

Three perspectives permeate the entire thesis, converging within Appadurai's concept of the market as both an »institutional arena« and a »speculative tournament«. Imagining the market as a vast arena, where different geographical areas have unique terrains, atmospheres, rules and players, helps understand these perspectives. In such a heterogeneous arena, the terrain, atmosphere and rules metaphorically represent the socio-political and cultural context that shapes the market. This arena is filled with players who join or leave at their own pace. These temporal trajectories of three observed companies comprise the first perspective. Some players act as buyers, while others are sellers. Once they enter the arena, they immediately join the ongoing tournament, essentially forming their business strategies based on market speculations. Their interactions, such as selling, buying, collaborating and competing, as well as the employed strategies, are the essence of my second perspective. The third perspective highlights the unique context of each location, such as the fertile, diverse landscape of the 1950s South-Slav record market in the US compared to the »monocultural« environment within Yugoslav borders during the same period, metaphorically speaking, with regard to the

number of record-selling companies. The »terrain« and »atmosphere« naturally shift with time.

Applying Appadurai's concept of an »institutional area« to understand the market, several key hypotheses emerged as the foundation of this research. Firstly, a list of broader factors, including temporal, geographical, political, cultural, social and economic contexts, is essential for shaping exchange practices, rules and regulations of markets. Secondly, recognizing and defining these contexts enables better understanding of the role of record companies as legal entities operating within a specific market territory and their relationships with other players, whether they be other record companies or consumers. Thirdly, within the framework that sees the record market as an arena filled with market actors whose »rules of the game« depend on their geographical locations, the business strategies and market activities of the record companies are seen as outcomes of larger contexts and should be analysed accordingly.

The topics of market and economic aspects are still relatively new and underexplored within the discipline of ethnomusicology. This fact is reflected in the ongoing development of *The Oxford Handbook of Economic Ethnomusicology*. This handbook has yet to be fully completed despite gathering contributions from various ethnomusicologists since 2020. Interestingly, it will complement two other Oxford ethnomusicological handbooks – one on applied and one on medical ethnomusicology. These three handbooks indicate that the methodologies, research focuses and aims of these ethnomusicological branches do not *take from* but rather *add to* the existing ethnomusicological literature. Specifically, economic ethnomusicology incorporates »approaches and methods from economic anthropology, economic history and related disciplines«, according to the handbook's call for chapter submissions.[3] As my thesis aligns with this approach by drawing on broader multidisciplinary studies from the humanities and social sciences, it builds on market and commodity exchange theories developed by scholars such as Karl Polanyi, Clifford Geertz, Pierre Bourdieu, Arjun Appadurai and Theodore C. Bestor. Hence, this work contributes to the emerging field of economic ethnomusicology by shifting the focus from individuals – typically central to traditional ethnomusicological research – to legal entities, specifically companies operating within the market economy. By viewing these companies as social entities created for and embedded in the market viewed through anthropological lens, this study offers a way to deconstruct observed legal entities to reveal the individuals and interactions that constitute them. In other words, this work seeks to bridge two disciplines that may seem opposite due to their different focuses and methods (quantitative vs. qualitative) by emphasizing their common ground: society. Using

[3] Available at <https://www.ethnomusicology.org/news/357819/Oxford-Handbook-of-Economic-Ethnomusicology---Chapter-Submission-.htm>.

an anthropological perspective, it explores the market as a social phenomenon of commodity exchange that connects economy and ethnomusicology.

Historical ethnomusicology: Connecting bits and pieces

Despite the historical underestimation of the record industry by academic circles until the 1980s and 1990s, mainly due to Adorno's critique of the culture industry, it slowly began to unravel its potential to disclose the complicated interplay of economy, culture and society. When placed in the context of Yugoslavia, the analysis of the record industry promises a fertile and colourful landscape for the study of not just music but also people and politics. It brings out all its complexities and opposite viewpoints with divergent truths that burden the region to this day.

As an anthropologically oriented ethnomusicologist, my effort in this thesis strays away from the statistical and quantitative analysis of record production and consumption. Rather, it tends toward understanding the evolution and microdynamics of the record market in both domestic and emigrant communities. Doing my best to connect the bits and pieces preserved to this day and kept in the archives, periodicals of the time, and people's memories, I aimed to reconstruct three decades of the domestic record industry based in Zagreb, nesting them in the accompanying historical, political and cultural context of the market.

In reconstructing the record market from seventy to a hundred years ago, I had to employ historical methods not commonly used in ethnomusicology, a discipline typically focused on contemporary practices and phenomena. Thus, while this thesis is rooted in economic ethnomusicology, it also firmly sits within the domain of historical ethnomusicology. By focusing on a more recent historical period, the research allows the use of both ethnological methods, such as interviews with living interlocutors, and archival research. Additionally, as this study examines records, i.e., the musical reifications of the past eras, it contributes to the existing core of literature within historical ethnomusicology by expanding the range of archival sources. They encompass not only documents, correspondence, letters, photographs, periodicals and other printed materials but also sound recordings. In fact, the records themselves are considered artefacts rich with information that has to be interpreted appropriately.

Research methodology: Fieldwork in the past

This PhD research heavily relied on archival work that can be conceptualized as a form of historical fieldwork, given the extensive and diverse range of archival sources utilized. It was conducted within libraries, archives, museums and private

collections. It is worth adding that various online databases and digital archives also proved to be of great importance. The archival research provided a firm ground for systematic documentation of the collections and accompanying materials, which was a substantial objective of the larger project, as well as the compilation of the information gathered in an online public database (*Croatian e–discography*).[4]

In addition to primary sources, including gramophone records and archival material directly related to the three Zagreb-based companies, an important and insightful source were various periodicals kept primarily within the National University Library and City Library in Zagreb. In this regard, beneficial sources were the magazines of Radio Zagreb, as well as radio broadcasts archived within Croatian Radiotelevision. Apart from the information acquired through these materials, the foreign and domestic literature on the record industry and the three record companies proved to be a deep well of information.

Despite dealing with a period of thirty years that belongs to the past, it could be said that this research deals with the »relatively recent« past compared to other works under the umbrella of historical ethnomusicology that explore ancient or medieval history, for instance. The notable distinction when working with the recent past is the feasibility of conducting classical fieldwork. In the case of the recent past, fieldwork, or more precisely, interviews, remain a viable option. Target interlocutors for semi-structured interviews and life stories included the 78 RPM record audience, performers, composers, sellers and other people engaged in the record industry whose average age was 85. Although the number of testimonies I gathered over the past four years is severely limited, and many were collected unofficially without proper recording, they have proven invaluable for understanding the record market beyond what can be learned from written and material sources. Another objective of the fieldwork was to visit fairs and connect with private collectors in Zagreb (where I was based) to assess the presence and current status of 78 RPM records, as well as to explore online market platforms.

Aside from the domestic market, this research aimed to assess the presence of three record companies in foreign markets. Given that the record companies primarily focused their operations on the domestic market and only partially on the market outside Yugoslav borders, there is limited material to study in this regard. Consequently, my research shifted its focus towards diasporic communities, which showed greater interest in the products of the record companies based in Zagreb, especially Jugoton. As a result, a portion of the fieldwork and archive research was carried out in the United States. This choice was motivated by the country's extensive history of South-Slavic immigration, which has been well documented. The periodical *Zajedničar,* an official newspaper of the Croatian Fraternal Union (fraternal benefit society of the Croatian diaspora in the US)

[4] Available at <https://www.ief.hr/en/research/projects/project-diskograf/croatian-e-discography/>.

proved very informative in this regard. Besides being fortunate enough to get the chance to »visit« the US as a researcher, I was extraordinarily fortunate to arrange an encounter with a South-Slavic record seller who sold 78 RPMs back in the »old days« – John Filcich (born in 1924). It is worth mentioning that this remarkably valuable individual for the study of the diasporic record market has reached his 100th birthday at the time of writing this thesis.

Thesis structure: 24 hours

The first and the briefest chapter of the thesis belongs to the introduction. The theoretical framework of the thesis is introduced at the start of the second chapter, while detailed elaboration on the methodology employed follows in subsequent sections. To help the reader understand the events and follow the analysis which covers a three-decade period, the second chapter also provides a concise historical overview that chronologically traces developments in the global, European, and Yugoslav record industries.

The integration of economic and historical ethnomusicology forms the core foundation of this work, elaborated in the third chapter, which is also the longest. I wanted to harmonize two theoretical pillars (historical and economic ethnomusicology) through a narrative approach and a distinctive structure inspired by the metaphor of a 24-hour day. The thesis unfolds retrospectively and cyclically, as detailed at the end of the second chapter. Consequently, the »core narrative«, as I have named the third chapter, is organized into 24 sections. These sections are designed to provide a comprehensive picture of the Zagreb-based record industry, allowing readers to fully understand the complexities of the historical, political, economic and societal threads involved in its development. By the end of the present thesis, the reader should have a clear understanding of shellac record production in Zagreb, the dynamics of the record market at home and in the diaspora, as well as a thorough overview of the early period of the record industry in Yugoslavia. The thesis should also contribute to a better understanding of contemporary musical life in the region, illuminating the development of particular genres and the canonization of specific repertoires that continue to influence the music industry today. Finally, through the lens of the record market and its inherent distortions, this study offers an insight into the thirty years of the history of a country that was »twice a country«.[5]

[5] This is a nod to the witty title of John R. Lampe's book *Yugoslavia as History: Twice There Was a Country*, Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, ²2000.

Thesis contributions

The present work is the first doctoral thesis in Croatia to explore the aspects of the early record industry and was built upon a large four-year research project conducted at the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb, the first scholarly project to systematically address this topic. As such, it integrated a broad range of available primary and secondary sources, not only consolidating the activities of all Zagreb-based companies from the shellac era but also placing them within a broader social, cultural, political and economic context. In doing so, it corrected long-standing inaccuracies, introduced a wealth of new information and deepened the understanding of the companies' operations. Its scope reflects the richness of the record industry topic.

In addition to presenting historical facts and new insights, the thesis clarifies the roles of various historical figures, uncovers overlooked contributions and adds depth to certain biographies. It also explores an under-researched aspect of the South-Slavic diaspora, underscoring the importance and potential of this yet underexplored research area. Furthermore, by viewing the market as a social phenomenon, the thesis reconstructs the thirty-year historical period at a micro level, navigating through a complex historical era with three different political systems. The extended timeframe provides significant advantages, offering valuable insights through a longitudinal ethnographic approach. By shedding light on the three-decade evolution of the record market and the business decisions made by record producers (i.e., their managers), it reveals the changes and influencing factors that might not have been as apparent in a shorter, more focused study period.

Additionally, the thesis unfolds through two interconnected layers – one narrative and functional, the other aesthetic and aural. Thus, apart from the written analysis, it also provides an aural history, carefully selecting musical examples from Jugoton, Elektroton and Edison Bell Penkala.

Regarding its contribution to the international history of the record industry, this work reconstructs the Yugoslav shellac era in *lingua franca*, making it available to a broader audience. Besides that, it offers a wider historical context of Yugoslavia, which can facilitate comparison between the Yugoslav and other national record industries for future researchers. By exploring the competition of Zagreb-based companies, the thesis integrated the roles of various foreign companies and labels, contributing to the field with new insights.

While many ethnomusicologists today explore topics related to the record industry, this research distinguishes itself through its unique focus on the market and record companies as legal entities – an angle that is less frequently examined in traditional ethnomusicology. As a result, it contributes to and supports the newly established field of economic ethnomusicology. Furthermore, by investigat-

ing a historical period and employing historical methods, it also falls within the domain of historical ethnomusicology, offering a case study on a more recent past.

In presenting the topic from both ethnomusicological perspectives, I aimed to ensure that a straightforward historical narrative did not overshadow the market's anthropological aspects. To achieve this, I developed an unconventional concept that moves beyond a linear chronological listing of facts and provides room for a number of in-depth case studies. It emphasizes interpreting the market through an analysis of evolving economic conditions, political climates, social divisions, historical influences and cultural contexts. As the concept effectively integrated two distinct ethnomusicological branches, I hope it might provide inspiration for ethnomusicologists facing similar challenges.

My initial task of reconstructing events and operations using an enormous amount of archival material required a comprehensive approach before I could proceed with detailed analysis. In other words, I had to build a new foundation before diving into a deeper breakdown of the material. Now that this groundwork and initial analysis is laid, future researchers are positioned to explore the topic more thoroughly. Notably, as this study had the task of concentrating on record producers, it partially overlooked the perspectives of consumers. Incorporating consumer insights in future research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the overall market and shed light on the transition from a predominantly agrarian to a consumer society within the Yugoslav context. Additionally, the current analysis of musical genres offers a foundation for future researchers to explore further. Such exploration could yield valuable ideas and inspiration, enriching our knowledge of both historical and contemporary musical achievements.

While the interdisciplinary theoretical framework has undeniably enriched this study, it also presents challenges due to my ongoing learning and primarily traditional ethnomusicological background. Nonetheless, this exploratory approach has profoundly broadened my perspectives and has made significant contributions that, I believe, outweigh any potential drawbacks. It enhances understanding of historical processes, reveals hidden aspects of music production, improves insight into contemporary music phenomena and positions the record industry as a key element within the broader musical landscape. It contributes to the diversity within the ethnomusicological field and offers new approaches to managing multidisciplinary research. Ultimately, by demonstrating how the »ethnomusicologist's eye« – a perspective that balances individual experiences with broader historical contexts – can be highly adaptable and valuable in reconstructing a complex and layered history, I hope this research will encourage future scholars to embark on similarly challenging but richly rewarding projects.