

CONTEXTS OF PERFORMING ZURNACI MUSIC

Nothin' can happen without musicians.

Samir Kurtov

The description and analysis of *zurnaci* music as a complex of interacting and interdependent elements requires studying the relationship between this music and the environment that has born and nourished it. Being simultaneously a text and a context created by various social interpretations, the musical fact can be interpreted properly only in its contextual ambience. Accepting the context of performance as an analytical unit for studying *zurnaci* music, we should note that the introduction of extra-textual constructions and relationships has been a common practice in humanities for years. As Lotmann says, "...the extra-textual part of an art structure is... an actual (and sometimes very significant) component of the artistic entity. Of course, it is distinguished by an instability and flexibility greater than those of the text" [Лотман, 1970:131]. The dynamics of the context complicates its detailed description. On the other hand, interpretation of contexts is necessary in order to analyze the cultural fact as a unity of structure, semantics, and function.

The observations upon the contexts of performing *zurnaci* music have been done in Southwest Bulgaria. They confirm the established ethnomusical concept that for traditional cultures music is more important and has more roles, compared to the music of Modern Western civilization [Nettl, 1956:6-10; Merriam, 1964:214-215]. *Zurnaci* music, the subject of this study, bears the mark of both traditional and modern culture. It has archaic functions (e.g. magic-ritual) as well as contemporary ones (it is an entertainment, a media broadcast). Following the contexts of performance one can outline the variety and significance of the cultural functions fulfilled by this type of music in the social life of the locals. These contexts determine a number of phenomena, processes and changes occurring in the *zurnaci* practice itself (with regard to the style, repertoire and musical instrument).

Nowadays the characteristic features of the *zurnaci* practice in Southwest Bulgaria are determined by the current tendency to narrow the socio-cultural boundaries wherein folklore music is functioning. In the late 20th and early 21th century *zurnaci* music as a part of still existing traditional music in Bulgaria seems to be one of the exotic, small, local and ethnically coloured fragments in the multicoloured mosaic of Bulgarian musical folklore. There exists a superficial notion in Bulgaria that connects *zurnas* with Turkish music and, as far as they are part of Bulgarian folklore, with the stage performances of dance and ritual practices from the Pirin region. Even among some Romas, despite of the ethnic identity of the *zurnaci* players, this kind of music is thought of as a foreign (Turkish) and remote (a heritage from the past) practice.

However, the present day reality in the Struma and Mesta valleys is different. There are several *zurnaci* formations in certain villages to serve the festivity of the local population. *Zurnas* can be heard at traditional family and calendar feasts. On the other hand, our times offer surprising and versatile new situations of playing and perceiving *zurnaci* music. The *zurna-tapan* (drum) formations are part of the musical life of different villages, ethnic, confessional, professional and other communities in the region.