

IDENTITIES EXPRESSED THROUGH PRACTICE OF *KAVAL* PLAYING AND BUILDING IN SERBIA IN 1990s*

JELENA JOVANOVIĆ

Abstract: This paper discusses the circumstances under which the building and playing of the *kaval* became topical in Serbia (Belgrade) at the end of twentieth century: the work of the Byzantine choir “Saint John of Damascus” and expressions of personal and group identities participating in the process, through indication of the elements of music structure related to the principles in eastern music cultures.

Keywords: Serbia, the *kaval*, Byzantine chanting, Macedonian *ezgija*, culture of the eastern Mediterranean, the musical East

Reasons for writing this paper; the aim of the paper; theoretical concepts and methodological assumptions

It may be said that the aerophone instrument *kaval*, a long labial end-blown flute which falls into the group of semi-transverse flutes (Цуцев 1975: 17), has been promoted to a representative item in Serbian music tradition in current public discourse, which is the subject of a musicological study discussing it from its current positions (Atanasovski 2010: 1, 4). On the contrary, both the domestic and international scientific circles have been, until the present date, almost entirely unfamiliar with how interest in the *kaval* arose in Belgrade in the 1990s and the position it occupied in the given context at the time. This paper reveals some data about the environment in which the *kaval* became well-known in the period between the beginning of the 1990s and 1999, the protagonists in the process, and their motives.¹ The paper covers the period from the beginning of the 1990 until 1999. It can be said that the year 2000 marked the beginning of a new period in the life of the *kaval* in Serbia, determined by the place it won on the Serbian music scene.² The role of the *kaval* in the *World*

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² This segment of the life of the *kaval* in Serbia was covered in literature on several occasions (for instance, Atanasovski 2010). With the appearance of this instrument at the Eurovision Song contest in 2004 (in Ž. Joksimović’s song *Lane moje* with player M. Nikolić), interest in it

Music genre in Serbia at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which is more familiar to the public, will not be the subject of this study.

The context in which playing the kaval became topical in Serbia in the 1990s, even its very treatment, is so specific that it is difficult to explain it by terms used for classification relating to ‘revitalization’ of folklore practices. This phenomenon could not be called *restoration*, because at this moment there are no grounds to suppose that it is about a restored continuity of existence of this instrument in Serbian tradition. Thus, this phenomenon should be more properly treated as bringing the kaval into light in Serbia, for the reasons given in the following text.

The aim of this paper is to fill the gap in understanding of this phenomenon in the domestic and international scientific public, to try and answer the question of why kaval is so interesting for listeners and performers of traditional music in Serbia, and to offer a picture different from the essentialized ideas of Serbia and its music during the period of wars in the 1990s, especially in terms of development and use of Serbian music culture and tradition. Namely, the existing literature on music from the war-ridden territories of former Yugoslavia (see, for instance, Gordy 1999) gives very little or no attention to anything that must have preceded any possible use or abuse of tradition, which is initial / original motivation and authentic need of the very exponents of tradition and followers of the idea in the full sense of its revival. This would imply an *integristic*, as opposed to the *instrumental* approach to tradition (the terms taken from: Наумовић 1997:111).

Tackling the issues, provocative at numerous levels, the kaval and its bringing to life in Belgrade are an attractive topic for a variety of reasons. They cannot possibly be paid due attention within this paper. This is why attention will here be paid to certain parts of the topic only, primarily the role and position of the kaval in the development of identities of the group of its protagonists in Serbia in the 1990s. This is about a phenomenon occurring in specific conditions of crisis caused by armed conflicts and forced changes of political boundaries in the territory of former Yugoslavia. In Serbia, there occurred a crisis of the Yugoslav identity and search for establishment of new identities, a process the literature states as common in periods of crisis (Todorova 2006: 15, 128). The phenomenon of rekindling the interest for the kaval in Serbia will be discussed according to the model offered by Marija Todorova, from the standpoint of *perception of historic heritage*: as “articulation and re-articulation of perceptions of various individuals or groups within the group in different periods of time” (Todorova 2006: 24). In this paper, the focus is on the perception of protagonists of the phenomenon during the 1990s and nowadays, almost twenty years later.

soared; institutionalization of education in kaval playing was initiated within the Department for ethnomusicology of Mokranjac music school in Belgrade (prof. Miloš Nikolić’s class).

In Serbia, the *kaval* was brought to life thanks to “interactions of specific individuals” (Stock 2001: 5) who, while undergoing a difficult time of crisis in the 1990s (as were other citizens of Serbia) and at the same time seeking the way to express their own and artistic identity, had to make decisions in terms of both personal and music choice. Thus, the paper is also comprised of music biographies of the protagonists of this phenomenon, exceptionally important for its correct understanding. The paper is also partly of an autobiographic nature, because in writing it I started from an insider position, as a participant in and witness to the process that it is all about,³ as a member of the community⁴ in which *kaval* playing was ‘discovered’ and became popular, and thanks to which it gradually got to the sphere of playing in public in Serbia. The aspect of interaction between the individual and the collective is also of extreme importance for the paper, as may be observed from the following text; in brief, it is about “the individuals whose interactions imply conscious or unconscious adapting to continual development and creating and resignification of social identity” (Dženkins 2001: 100–1).⁵

For the purpose of this paper, *kaval* playing was observed with a reason, as Biljana Milanović wrote, as “the medium not only reflecting and encoding meanings related to identities, but also participating in creation thereof” (Милановић 2007: 125). Secondly, the concept of collective identity is important for this paper, according to Born and Hesmondhal, as “kind(s) of imaginary identification or discursive subjectification through music”, a type of identification connected to “*emergent, real* forms of sociocultural identity or alliance”, “when the musical imaginary works to *prefigure*, crystallize or potentialize” the emerging entity “so *re-forming* (or reconstructing) the boundaries between social categories, between self and other” (2000: 36, 35; Милановић 2007: 131). Furthermore, the case of the *kaval* in Serbia in the 1990s confirms Martin Stokes’ thesis about music as a symbol, but also as means of social boundaries, “of constructing trajectories rather than boundaries across space” (1994: 4). On one hand, *kaval* playing marked the boundaries of the social group, but also the tendency to overcome the current national, ethnic, even confessional boundaries, and to shift the meaning of the notion of ‘others’ in this context (a phenomenon also usually occurring in times of crisis; see Said 2000: 446; Todorova 2006: 20). Due to a range of circumstances which will be discussed further in the paper, here the issue of perceptions of the terms ‘the East’ and ‘east’

³ As “our reflexive, experiential ethnographies–biography, [...] can be equally reflexive, and it too can communicate a strong sense of musical experience”, (Stock 2001:16), such an approach to the topic was this time inevitable, being, at the same time, fully legitimate (also see Said 2000: 450).

⁴ This is why considerable efforts were needed to achieve the necessary distance to facilitate viewing of the phenomenon as objectively as possible for the purpose of composing this paper; particular attention was paid to positioning of ‘self’ and ‘otherness’.

⁵ This sentence has been translated into English from Serbian translation of Jenkin’s book.

will become topical in musical and verbal discourse of the protagonists of kaval practice in Serbia in the 1990s.

The perception of kaval players and builders, as well as its scientific interpretation are given in narrative forms as recorded during interviews with the protagonists (parts of the interviews relating to individual aspects of kaval playing are given in the Appendix), based on the repertoire and through analysis of musical components. The paper is based on personal experiences of the author as a witness, and even participant in the process of development of interest in the kaval in Belgrade in the 1990s; thus, this paper was written from the standpoint of a participant-observer, based on personal experience in encountering members of the community, but also in acquisition of new musical perceptions through the ‘musical being’ (Cooley and Barz 2008: 20). The aspects of kaval life in Belgrade presented in this paper include the time, place, specificities of the kaval as an instrument, its place in the community in which the restoration was initiated (in the context), emotional and spiritual attitude of the players and listeners of the kaval, the ethos it implies, and the place which, according to the perception and attitude, it occupies in music culture of the Balkans and Serbia. Documentary audio recordings are also supplied in the Appendix (Examples 1–3).

It is important to emphasize that the experience of protagonists of kaval practice in Serbia in the 1990s indicates an animated, active approach to the instrument, to the largest possible extent implemented through personal spiritual and practical test, as a form of ‘fight for survival’ in difficult conditions the country and society were faced with at that time.

About the kaval in general and literature on the kaval in former Yugoslavia

It is believed that the word ‘kaval’ is of Turkish / Turkmenistan origin (*kaval*, *qavâl*; Dević 1977), but it is more likely that its etymology may be sought for in Arabian language⁶ (Muftić 1997: 1248). In the Balkans, and not only there, the term implies a one-part (more rarely three-part) aerophone instrument with an open cylindrical body, 630–800 mm long, with seven holes on the front side and one in the back; on the bottom end there are four more holes, important for the acoustic properties of the instrument (Basten 2003: 7). It is manufactured in pairs, two identical kavals each time, to be played in duet. Equalization of the dimensions of the two instruments, as well as of the position of both players while playing, is aimed at an “adjusting of joint music making”.

⁶ According to the report of Ivan Kostić, an Arabist from Belgrade: “From the verb لاق (root: word ل و ق [qw`l]) which means *to say, to tell, to narrate* comes from the word لاق (pronounced literally *kaval!*) with regular male plural لاقون, which means *folk singer (or poet), reciter*”. I cordially thank Mr. Kostić for this information, very precious for further work on this subject in domain of Serbian ethnomusicology.

The tonal range consists of a whole tone and a range of semitones, while the whole range obtained by overblowing amounts to two octaves and a sixth (Dević 1977: 35, 36, 38). In the Balkans, the single-part instrument of the kind is nowadays widespread in Macedonia, South Serbia and Montenegro, Greece, Albania, Turkey, a part of Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania (Alexandru 1956; Dević 1977: 36; Линин 1986: 71–5; Ανωγειανάκης 1991: 62, 149, 151; Бастен 2003: 7; Чичаковски 2011; see also Gojković 1994: 40), while related instruments may be found in the traditions of Southeastern Europe (Вертков 1975), the people from the Caucasus, North Africa, Asia, the island of Borneo (Markovic 1987: 40), and in the Near East (Czekanowska 1981: 187, 201, 214–5, figures 95, 102).

When it comes to the position of the kaval in the musical tradition of Serbs and the related narrative, they are problematized by several important facts: the kaval has retained its presence in the live musical practice of Serbs only in one village in Kosovo, at the border territory of the Serb national and ethnic space, very close to the borders with Macedonia and Albania, far from the Serbian capital and out of reach of its direct influence. All this is important for the possibility to perceive the instrument as part of the national identity (compare Мациевский 2007: 166–70); it is also a fact that, despite its popularity, the kaval in Serbia has not always been unquestioningly perceived as a part of Serbian musical tradition, both in the recent past and at the present moment.⁷

From the standpoint of the knowledge accumulated in the course of the last seventeen years, this paper necessarily needs to provide a review of the data on the kaval in domestic ethnomusicological literature at the time of the former Yugoslavia. Nowadays it is clear that although these data provide a picture on geographic distribution of the kaval in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, there is nothing about its occurrence in traditions of individual nations occupying its territories (Gojković 1989: 11). In its original or skilfully moderately stylized form, traditional music of Macedonia was considerably promoted in media and in public both within the borders of former Yugoslavia and farther.⁸ The same may not be said for the Serbian music tradition, which was frequently left out of the public, even in terms of basic information. This ideology can also be followed through the programmes and general directions taken by

⁷ This text will not tackle the issue of chronology of presence of the kaval in the Balkans or its position in Serb musical tradition. This will be discussed in another paper, which is being prepared.

⁸ Here, Macedonian folklorists had an exceptional role in cooperation with the extraordinary exponents and connoisseurs of various segments of Macedonian musical tradition. A striking example of such activity, aimed at promotion of international reputation of Macedonian folklore, is the work of a renowned dancer, choreographer, and instrumentalist Petre Atanasovski (1928–1996), the leading champion of dancing, bagpipe playing, and tapan playing tradition of Macedonia and partly west Bulgaria and north Greece (for more details about his life, work, and impact see in Тодевски 2004).

amateur and professional groups in both republics. Practically, the only audio recordings of kaval playing from the territory of former Yugoslavia available for professional and broader public via media and, far less, through ethnomusicological issues were the recordings of (extraordinary) kaval players (primarily Nikola Cvetkovski, Mile Kolarov, and Angele Dimovski) from Macedonia. Recordings of Albanian players from Kosovo and Metohija were available to a slightly lesser extent. The presence of the kaval in Serbian tradition at the border areas of Serbia was first acknowledged by professional audience in the 1980s, while full interest in this topic was not raised before the late 1990s.⁹ Certain role in this process, especially speaking of younger Belgrade players of the time, had the popularity of musical numbers from the movie *Before the rain* directed by Macedonian author Milčo Mančevski (1994).

The rekindling of the kaval in Serbia (Belgrade); Byzantine chanting and the religious identity of members of the choir “St John of Damascus”

If we say that the bringing the kaval into light in Serbia in the 1990s appeared spontaneously, this must be taken conditionally: on one hand, it was caused by the general state of facts the country was faced with at the time; on the other, it was not directed by any kind of external pressure, but occurred as a result of joining of, up to that moment, individual efforts of a group of artists in their practical approach to religious and folk art. It was a part of a broader movement aimed at search for religious, national, regional, and personal identity in Serbia, as a specific personal resistance against the then state of deep political, social, and economic crisis in the country. The kaval was also rekindled as one of the symbols of a specific group musical entity. The phenomenon may be regarded as part of the global turning to traditional knowledge and a new reading of canonical work of culture (Said 2000: 465), as a reaction to globalization trends. Chronologically, it coincides with similar phenomena in other parts of the world. It was brought about by creative tendencies of highly educated artists from Belgrade, born in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

The initiative to bring the kaval into light was born among the members of the Belgrade congregation of artists and singers “St John of Damascus”, founded in 1989. Their leading idea was to restore East Christian, e.g., Orthodox, Byzantine (according to some interpretations, Neo-Byzantine) church art: icon painting, fresco painting, and church chanting. This is about a phenomenon which fits into a higher discourse of *Byzantinism* which implies affiliation to Orthodox denomination (this, among others, with an emphasis on the elements of art, even music, is discussed in: Todorova 2006: 311, 315–16), and which, in this case, starts from the assumption of continuity of existence of certain elements in Balkan traditions, from the time of Byzantine and Ottoman Empires

⁹ Chronology of these events will be discussed into more detail in a separate paper.

until present date (about this general position see into more detail: Ibid.: 2006: 310, 339, 342).¹⁰ The same approach was applied when it comes to restoration of church chanting: there was a tendency to restore the Byzantine singing practices as currently present in the part of the Eastern (Orthodox) Christian Church (Попмихајлов 2007: 17). More broadly, such practice in the Balkans is mostly encountered in Greece, and in certain places in Bulgaria and Romania, but also in Constantinople, Jerusalem, Syria, and Cyprus. Experts legitimately use the term *Byzantine*¹¹ for this type of singing, having in mind its origin and connection to medieval Byzantine liturgical chanting tradition.¹² Having in mind that this term is also used in everyday speech of the exponents of this practice in Serbia, but also in professional literature, in this paper it will be used in the sense of the chanting practices of part of the Eastern (Orthodox) Christian Church.

Since 1993, there are two choirs within the congregation: the male and female chanters (Figures 1, 2), under the leadership of Vladimir Jovanović (1956),¹³ composer (see also Благојевић 2005: 165). The choir members learned from him to chant after the Byzantine chanting, after the contemporary neumatic notation.¹⁴ The aim was to take active part in chanting during church services¹⁵ (Example 1). Jovanović's role model was the practice of two singing brethren at Holy Mountain: the skete of St. Anna The Little (so-called *the Spyridones*) and the monastic brethren in the skete in Katounaki area (so-called *the Danilees*). Besides affiliation to Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), the identity of promoters of Byzantine singing also implied affiliation to a broader Orthodox community, based on original scripts of the Holy Fathers where, unlike the current prevailing ethno-clerical and ethno-filetistic understanding, national affiliation is not a criterion relevant in terms of affiliation to the Orthodox Church. It is about restoration of ecumenical identity (Павићевић 2009: 1423)

¹⁰ Interest in Byzantine music also provided an important creative impulse in the ethno jazz genre in Serbia of the time; see Mijatović 2003: 207–8).

¹¹ See, for ex., Hercman 2004.

¹² The manner in which the artists gathered in the Brethren understood this term, corresponds to the interpretation of Th. Stathis: "Byzantine music is a live and inseparable part of the Orthodox liturgy, and as such, it implies a sacerdotal mood of officiating priests and believers who participate in liturgy. It should never be understood as museum art or listened to with a 'tourist' mentality and feeling diminishing value of everything [...]. Tradition is not static, but has its live presence" (Στάθης 1972: 401–2; translated from Greek into Serbian by V. Peno).

¹³ Jovanović explained his perception of the importance of restoration of Byzantine chanting in a lengthy interview (Вукашиновић s.a.: 22–8) and in a text dedicated to the topic of art in Christianity (Jovanović V. 2004).

¹⁴ Jovanović skilfully translated liturgical texts of post-Byzantine tradition from Greek into Church Slavonic. The changes were instituted within the existing: identical musical formulas were used; they were applied in corresponding places, and adapted to differently distributed accents and phrase lengths, in line with different language rules (Стефановић 1994: 28). The choir had an audio cassette issued (in 1997) as well as one CD (in 2002; see: Благојевић 2005: 165).

¹⁵ The initiators of interest in Byzantine chanting in Serbia of the period are covered into more detail in the paper of G. Vladojević (Благојевић 2005).

which implies affiliation to the transnational community of Orthodox peoples, primarily in the territories where Christianity was originally conceived, in the East Mediterranean. In its discourse, the group insisted on common elements of traditions in the whole region, including the Balkans, rather than on differences; thus, the direction was exactly contrary to nationalistic, which authors of papers dedicated to similar topics insist on (see, e.g. Penannen 2004: 2).



Figure 1. Male choir “St. John of Damascus” with friends (June 1993).



Figure 2. Female choir “St. John of Damascus” (June 1993).

It is important to emphasize that this is not about a politically orchestrated movement, and that the choir “Saint John of Damascus” (hereinafter: the choir) never belonged to the church mainstream. Its chanting was received with various reactions by members of the Serbian Orthodox Church, “from enthusiasm to banning and proscription” that occurred in 2001 (see Благојевић 2005:153–4, 167) exactly because intellectual and musical concepts of its members did not fit with the then current trends of ethnification of the Orthodox Church, which is why many church fathers experienced this chanting as ‘Greek’ (Ibid.: 154, 167). Because of their chanting manner, members of the choir, sometimes mockingly called ‘the Byzantines’, represented the not always welcome ‘internal others’ within SOC.¹⁶ It may be said that both the activities of this choir and restoration of traditional singing and playing – including the kaval in Belgrade of the day were anything but typical, for the current Belgrade cultural setting, the then prevailing trends at the musical scene of Serbia, and Serb Orthodox Church alike.

This is the context in which the interest for kaval was rekindled in Belgrade: in the course of an individual action in social area under specific circumstances. This is about individuality which should not be mistaken for individualism (see: Stock 2001: 10), about the personal endeavour of highly educated individuals, especially artists (see: Благојевић 2005: 166) with rich intellectual and practical experience in their walks of life, this time united by a common goal. “The wish to restore church life [...] is closely connected to the inclination to return to original values and authentic traditions of the Church” (Ibid.: 169). Having in mind that the fresco painters and members of the male choir mainly made fresco paints by themselves, using natural materials (the country was under economic sanctions and it was not possible to procure paint), it is not surprising that in 1991, wishing to play, they started constructing wind musical instruments, such as the pipe and different double pipe types; as of the second half of 1994, fascinated by audio recordings of Macedonian players, they also learned to build the kaval; at that time they did not know how or where they could possibly procure it from.¹⁷

The first champions of this practice from the 1990s were two painters, icon and fresco artists, Predrag Stojković, now hieromonk Lazarus, and Vladimir Kidišević. Their followers and pupils were the then students Marko Dabić, Vladimir Simić, and Vasilije Sekulić, including Miloš Nikolić (who is the only one of the stated instrumentalists with formal music education; see their short

¹⁶ It may even be said that their activities represented a criticism of the ‘discourse of power’ of the SOC itself (according to Милановић 2007: 128). Thus, the activity of the choir may not be connected to ethno-clericalism in Serbia (this is a phenomenon entirely opposite to the one described in: Perica 2002: 214). A brilliant criticism of the biased and essentialized outsider perceptions to the issue was provided in a paper by A. Pavićević (Павићевић 2009).

¹⁷ Kavals were built after a model instrument obtained by courtesy of Dragoslav Pavle Aksentijević, as well as after items from the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade.

musical biographies in the Appendix). Interest in the kaval was reinforced by audio recordings of playing of Macedonian kaval the players owned, and kindly extended them to friends of Goran Arsić and Jelena Jovanović. As a whole, the importance of the Brethren and the choir in the restoration of not only church, but also traditional art in Serbia, is exceptional: they generated the restored kaval and groups performing traditional Serb and Balkan music, “Moba”, “Iskon”, “Ved”, and “Belo platno” (founded among the congregation and choir).

Place; time; ethos and the social role of the kaval.

The Belgrade kaval players from the 1990s performed only privately and on occasions which could be called public: in church courtyards or presbyteries of certain Belgrade churches, after services in which the choir would perform, mostly on Saturdays, Sundays, and major church holidays. Besides church and folk singing, this spontaneous playing had the role of an important emotional and cohesive element among the members of the group, where their personal identities interacted. We can say that the sound of the kaval in this context represented a point of emotional encounter, opening the sphere of contemplation in the situation after the religious service as a specific extension of the liturgical experience of the community. This collective emotional experience consisting of a multitude of individual experiences with the aim to reach internal tranquility in the conditions of close war destruction and general crisis was of exceptional importance for the members of the community. It left a deep impression in many, helping them, in difficult conditions, to preserve faith in virtue and steadiness of virtue, reified through liturgical unity and emotional closeness. Marko Dabić, a priest, describes it like this: “We used to stay together long after the liturgy, singing and playing music, which was nice. When the kaval was being played, everyone was silent. This silence (...) was more (...) meaningful than many conversations” (Дабих 2011). Such an experience may be related to the manner in which Martin Clayton interprets a direct experience of time among listeners of music from the East (Indian *ragas*) and the importance of synchrony in listening, in this context, with listeners regarded as specific ‘bounded entities’ (2001: 3, 6). Certainly, it may be rightly said that such an experience confirms Martin Stokes’ thesis that “a society (...) might also be usefully conceived as something which ‘happens’ in music” (1994: 2).

In the period between 1994 and 1999 there were very few public concert performances of Belgrade kaval players in the full sense of the word,¹⁸ for a very simple

¹⁸ The first performances of the players, in cooperation with singers, were organized at the club of the Bureau for studying of cultural development, named “Radionica za popravku grada” (‘City repair workshop’) at the end of 1995 and beginning of 1996; it was followed by a performance of kaval players and the choir at the opening of the icon exhibition of Marina Stojković in Ethnographic museum in 1996.

reason: publicity was neither their motive, nor their goal.¹⁹ A guest performance of “Pece Atanasovski”, a young orchestra with traditional instruments from Skopje, Macedonia (in 1997) had major importance for further affirmation of the kaval and its use in concerts, as well as the experience of joint playing of members of the orchestra and Belgrade kaval players and singers (Figures 3–6). The young Macedonian group was following the model of arrangement of traditional melodies which were developed and covered by media in the second half of the twentieth century.²⁰ At the same time, a number of choir members founded a vocal-instrumental ensemble in which the kaval had an important role. The acquaintance and friendship with the young players from Skopje, as well as the discovery of numerous possibilities to play music together, encouraged preparations for concert appearances: in December 1998, Stojković and Simić had a guest appearance with their kavals at the concert by the Music school “Mokranjac” Department of Ethnomusicology; the group, under the name “Iskon”, had its only concert in December 1998 (which was exceptionally well attended and accepted by the audience; a year later, the group was renamed to “Belo platno”).²¹ The repertoire of this group, songs and instrumental melodies of the ‘Slav South’, i.e., south Serbia and Macedonia, was composed after the repertoire of the young Macedonian orchestra, but with emphasis on a non-stylized traditional sound, unlike their Macedonian counterparts. The selection of songs was made not according to the ethnomusicological, but aesthetic and ethical criteria (the criterion of virtue according to both traditional and Christian perceptions). These were the kaval *egzijas*²² (Example 2), round dances and songs with accompaniment of the kaval (Example 3), drum, and handmade *tambouras*, as well as songs *a cappella*. The role of the kaval in the ensemble was identical to that in Atanasovski’s arrangements.

The repertoire of the Belgrade kaval players at the time was comprised of melodies learned after the recordings of Macedonian players. Their favourite melodies were improvisations – *ezgije*, where the sound and nature of the kaval could be fully exercised. It was not clear that this instrument indubitably belonged to Serbian tradition too (today we can respond to this question affirmatively).²³ However,

¹⁹ This is, at the same time, the main reason why the story about rekindling of interest in the kaval from the 1990s till the present date remained so little known in Belgrade.

²⁰ At that time, the average age of the members of the ensemble was about twenty. The ensemble consisted of direct students of Petre Atanasovski, who followed the path treaded by their teacher in conducting arrangements. The orchestra issued one CD (in 2002) and soon after that ceased to exist.

²¹ This concert featured guest performances of singer Pavle Aksentijević and his sons Damjan and Rastko (voice and tamboura).

²² The term *ezgija* originates from the Arabic-Turkish word *ezgi* (tune, melody, tone) and is used at the territory of Macedonia; it implies an “ancient form of musical expression based on improvisation” (Николић 2004: 3; Џимревски 2002: 101-2).

²³ In 1998, upon explicit request of J. Jovanovic, the archive of the Institute of musicology SASA obtained recordings of kaval playing by Serbs from Kosovo, from the colleagues from Radio Priština. This, as well as the course of familiarizing of the Belgrade players with the Ser-

beside fascination with the kaval, awareness of the religious, cultural, ethnic and regional closeness of the peoples of Serbia and Macedonia, along with Byzantine singing, were of crucial importance, and it was the Macedonian manner of playing of the kaval which was experienced and adopted as a part of own identity, to confirm affiliation to common religion and unique cultural surroundings.



Figure 3. A photograph taken during the concert of ensemble “Pece Atanasovski” from Skopje, Macedonia (Belgrade, Ethnographic Museum, 27 December 1997).

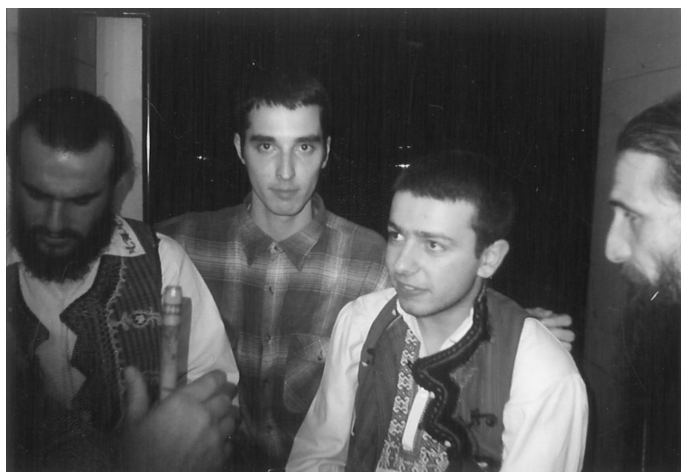


Figure 4. Acquaintance of *kavalists* from Skopje and Belgrade: Gjorgji Donev, Vladimir Simić, Risto Solunčev and Vladimir Kidišević (Ethnographic Museum, Belgrade, 27 December 1997).

bian repertoire played in Štrpce, at the south of Kosovo, will be discussed into more detail in a paper dedicated to this topic, which is being prepared.



Figure 5. Viktor Siljanovski and Predrag Stojković
(Belgrade, Ethnographic Museum, 27 December 1997).



Figure 6. Jelena Jovanović, Predrag Stojković and Gjorgji Donev
(Belgrade Ethnographic Museum, 27 December 1997).

Structural elements linking Byzantine chanting and kaval playing

The members of the choir were attracted to the Macedonian kaval and permanently attached to it because of the structural elements of Macedonian music which indicate a large level of similarity with Byzantine chanting. These are as follows:

Two-part texture which includes bourdon (drone / ἴσον / ἰσοκρατημα), the phenomenon of a long-retained tone which accompanies the melody, encountered in folklore and religious traditions in various parts of Europe and worldwide; after one assumption, it was established in the early period of development of musical systems of western Asia (Baines 2001: 598). The champions of rekindling of the kaval in Serbia recognized bourdon as an element that occurs in the music traditions of a large part of the Balkans as well, which is subject to ethnomusicological studies (Vukičević-Zakić 1994/1995:18–19; see also Deutsch 1981), but also as a link with traditions of non-European nations, members of different religions, in territory including the Middle East all the way to India. In Byzantine chanting it was interpreted by Orthodox theologians as the “mystic depth of inexpressibility” (Lazić 1984: 240). Beside this description, we shall also mention the view of theoreticians that interpret drone in Indian tradition: the “timeless absolute” (Brandl 1976: 2).

In Macedonian tradition, the kaval is played in duet; one player plays the main melody (‘male kaval’), while the other is accompanying him usually on one long tone (‘female kaval’).²⁴ According to Rudolf Brandl, it is about a constructional, arrhythmic, changeable bourdon. As this element is of exceptional importance for our topic, it is necessary to provide a full Brandl’s description of the given phenomenon here. According to him, such type of bourdon is “tonal (...) externalized construction (structural element) of the melody which does not change over a longer span of melodic flow [...] and forms an inseparable unity with the melody (in performance and reception). The constructional bourdon is a psychophysical subsidiary system constantly referred to by all melodic tones, thus presenting the character and hierarchy of tones and melodic segments. Its melody tends towards improvisation and is generally directed not toward pregnant melodic material, but rather toward larger melodic segments. The constructional bourdon from the point of view of its reception, fuses with the melody and often has a psychologically stimulating effect on the performer” (Brandl 1976: 10).

Non-tempered intervals: By changing the intensity of air emission, the kaval may generate tones of different tempered pitches with the same finger position. This

²⁴ It may also be played so that the parts are separated from unison into a two-part bourdon singing, to be reunited in one-part (Dević 1977: 36); such practice occurs more frequently with Albanians. With Kosovo Serbs, according to available data, unison and bourdon playing occur equally as frequently.

provides a wide range of non-tempered intervals specific to Byzantine chanting, but also scales in traditions of the Balkan and eastern ethnicities (в. Baines 1991: 181; Czekanowska 1981: 180–3, 192–8, 206–7; Touma 1975: 38–56).²⁵

Scales. It has already been said that the kaval stands out in Serbian and Macedonian sets of traditional instruments as a specific aerophone instrument with a chromatic tone series and exceptionally broad possibilities of obtaining scale structures of natural intervals in a very large tone range. The practice of our players, which implies experience in terms of listening, singing, and playing, confirmed that the scales Macedonian *ezgijas* were founded on, are fully compatible to the modal system of standardized scales of the Byzantine chanting tradition: diatonic, chromatic, and, hypothetically, enharmonic, which, in turn, originate from ancient music (Пено 2008: 102–3 and Fn. 6, 108). This experience is a very precious argument in favour of my hypothesis that the kaval and Byzantine chanting belong to mutually related music idioms, without a trace of influence of west-European music tradition (which was extremely important for the protagonists of this artistic movement; also see Пено 2008: 104–5).²⁶ This fact was of most decisive importance in establishment of the perception that it was the exceptionally rich tonal possibilities, i.e., potential of the kaval, that preserved the lost continuity of Serbian church singing tradition using Byzantine chanting scales – more precisely, its specific 'oriental timbre', as characterized by Stevan Mokranjac.²⁷ The richness of scale structures in the kaval considerably surpasses the reach of all the known scales used so far in shepherds' melodies in free rhythm in Serbia (compare for ex. Вукичевић-Закић 2001).

The modal scale system used in Byzantine chanting and Macedonian kaval playing is compatible with the systems in traditions existing at a broad geographical area from the Balkans via the Middle East, all the way to India.

²⁵ This property of the kaval and the new experiences of Belgrade players stemming out of it chronologically coincided with the time when interest in micro-interval values and non-tempered tonal systems generally grew in Serbia among scientists of different profiles. In 1995, at Belgrade Faculty of music arts, doctoral dissertation of Mihajlo Đorđević was approved under the title *Дискретне тонске релације детерминисане феноменом чујности у оквиру петодимензионалног звучно-музичког континуума (Discreet tonal relations determined by the phenomenon of audibility within a five-dimensional sound-music continuum)*. The singers involved in the restoration of traditional Serb rural singing, including the members of the group "Moba", participated in the experiments the author performed for the purpose of his work.

²⁶ This practical experience was so clear that the Belgrade kaval players used the terms taken over from Byzantine chanting in their communication during the process of learning how to play; thus, it was easier for them to understand certain scale structures, which they played on their kavals, and sang as well.

²⁷ See also the explanation Mokranjac provided by his transcripts of Serbian *Octoechos*, about specificities of the scale systems that were difficult or impossible to transcribe in the Western European music system (which put Serbian chanting at a significant distance from the Western European tonality; see: Ст. Ст. Мокрањац 1964: 6–8).

Melody and form: For the moment being, the issue of mutual relationship between melodic and formal shaping in Byzantine singing and Macedonian *ezgijas* has remained undiscovered; a comparative analysis that could prove or refute relationship of these parameters has not been done until the present date. However, it is the presence of the principle of modal scales with more or less variable tones which, as Brandl put it, becomes “a given melodic structure as in the cases of *taksim* or *raga*” (Brandl 1976: 9; also see Touma 1975: 57–9, 63–8; Zannos 1994), which may be encountered both in Byzantine singing and Macedonian *ezgijas*, that provides grounds for research in this direction. Furthermore, it is important that in Eastern traditions the manners of melodic and formal shaping are inseparable (Powers, Widdes 2001: 830), such a creative principle being named in science as the “*maqam-principle*” (Szabolsci 1959). This is a principle general for Eastern musical systems, including contemplative systems of Christian, Moslem, Jewish, and Hindu traditions; they are closely connected by the manner of melodic and formal shaping in Byzantine chanting. The fact is that the roots of Byzantine singing may be found in the traditions of the Middle East (Благојевић 2005: 155) and that development of Orthodox *Octoechos* is closely connected to “the calendar, rites, theological and musical conception” is Assyrian culture; namely, this is about a principle in composition based on melodic and scale patterns carrying a certain ethos: in Byzantine tradition, the pattern is called *the mode* (ἤχος), in the Middle East it is called the *makam* / *maqam* / *meqam*, and *raga* in India. This principle, “which first occurs in Asia, encompasses the whole Mediterranean civilization where from it stretches northwards” (Петровић 1982: 3–5). This is why the assumption about melodic and formal likeness between Macedonian kaval *ezgijas* and Byzantine eight-part tunes is not unfounded, even though for the time being there is no concrete evidence to corroborate it.

The ethos of the kaval play: Based on their own experience, the players have a unanimous position about this aspect, which may be summed up in the following manner: kaval playing has some specific captivating power, it is calming, pervading, contemplative, and generates an impression which may be compared to the praying state. This is corroborated by *Excerpts from interviews* provided in the Appendix, from which we shall here state but one statement: “They [Macedonians] call the kaval the ‘angel instrument’. (...) The kaval is frequently successfully encountered as an accompanying tone for male and female songs which speak about deeper conditions and relations of human soul.”

On the notion and content of notions ‘the East’ and ‘eastern’ in this context

The coinciding of certain elements identified as ‘eastern’ in numerous musicological and ethnomusicological studies, which exist in the kaval playing in the Balkans – more precisely, in the territory of Macedonia, but in Byzantine

singing as well – presents a large and intriguing topic. Belgrade kaval players expressed certain perceptions on the issue. The most important features of these perceptions coincide with the positions of researchers of culture and tradition of the Balkans as part of a broader cultural area.

It is an undeniable fact that there is a long continuity of cultural and economic contacts of the Balkans with settings of the Middle East, and from there on with geographically considerably farther cultures of Persia and India. Certain papers point to six millennia of history of culture in the Middle East, crossroads of various influences through history and mutual contacts of the cultures of Greece, Iran, Caucasus, India, even North Africa and the Balkans,²⁸ with foundations in cultures of old civilizations (Czekanowska 1981: 159–61, 214–5, 218, 415); here both the ancient Greek culture and theory of music had an important role in such crossings (Zaks 1980: 304; Ростовцев 1990: 163–4, 201; Hiti 1988: 169, 244, 255, 257, 389; Ђурић 1955: 80, 81, 91; Touma 1975: 34). Kurt Sachs describes such contacts as a “cosmopolitan permeating” at “a connected (geographical) area”, permeating which was not jeopardized either by the historical shift of empires which ruled certain areas for long periods of time, regardless of the fact that the peoples settled in such areas were not united either in terms of race or nationality (Zaks / Sachs 1980: 64, 65, 303). Such findings were also corroborated in the course of more recent field research in ethnomusicology (Chabrier 1995: B). It is also the fact that the term “eastern musical practice” is used in literature in terms of melodic organization of tunes (Пењо 2010: 163), which may be taken into account when it comes to eastern, Orthodox singing, and specific vocal and instrumental music practices in the Balkans.

The members of the congregation “St John of Damascus” perceive the ‘eastern’ tone of Byzantine chanting as its natural property related to its continued existence and development in eastern geographic and cultural regions of ancient Greece, Persia, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires with which, at least theoretically, the Balkans and thus the ethnicities populating it, have been in a long and close relationship of interwoven cultures and traditions.

Conclusion: Metaphors

The fact that in the 1990s the kaval was brought to light in Belgrade as a result of investigative efforts of individuals dedicated to religious art, speaks a lot about its important role in this context, in development of not only individual identities, but also the one of the group. This specific role of the kaval was facilitated by its specific sound, the manner in which the tone is produced, and coincidence of the structural elements of Byzantine chanting and Macedonian kaval *ezgijas*. Following the conceptualization of Timothy Rice, statements of

²⁸ In the introduction to his study, Jean-Claude Chabrier states that his research of Oriental music practices relates to the area “from the Danube to the Ganges” (Chabrier 1995: B).

the protagonists of kaval playing in Belgrade and the circle of sympathizers and people in love with this music, imply that they perceive playing the kaval in a manner corresponding to the following metaphor: “music is a symbolic system or text capable of reference not only to existing music but also to a world beyond the music” (Rice 2003: 166). Importantly, this finding is complementary to the result of studying the approaches of other performers of traditional music in Serbia, who also launched their activities during the last decade of the twentieth century (Zakić and Rakočević 2012: 321).

The latest interpretations of the role of kaval in confirming Serbian national identity seem to be simplified, since they neglect the important fact: from the beginning, for the bearers of rekindling of interest for kaval, national identification, even though of primary importance, was too narrow to enclose all the aspects in which they recognized their personal identity and the identity of the social group in which they socialized and created. Without knowing about the sources that show the presence of kaval in Serbian tradition, they accepted Macedonian kaval, thus confirming their belonging to a wider cultural milieu, than solely national (and nationalistic) frames could possibly allow. In other words, in the conditions of the crisis of identity in the given context, Byzantine chanting and the kaval were rekindled as parts of a reference framework broader than the already existing one (compare Todorova 2006: 128).²⁹

The playing possibilities of the kaval helped recognize ‘eastern’ properties of the Byzantine church chanting in an entirely different manner. It is important to state that all the enumerated elements of musical text in Western European musicology were characterized as ‘exotic’, which, thus, are “coming from (or referring to, or evoking) a place other than here” (Locke 2009: 1, also 12, 51–4; see also Baines 1991: 181, 233, 234), which makes them ‘alien’ from the standpoint of a ‘western’ listener. Unlike such perception and experience, according to which any trace of the ‘oriental’ is characterized as ‘alien’ and in line with the general perception of the East as the ‘other’ in Western civilization, Belgrade champions of Byzantine chanting and kaval playing accepted these properties as ‘their own’, as a reflection of their own affiliation to the culture of the Mediterranean basin and wider. This confirms the international character of a musical style, the existence of which was pointed out by some of the greatest authorities in the area of ethnomusicology (Zaks 1980: 303), and which is also mentioned by Maria Todorova, who considers the Balkans a “sub-region of the broader Mediterranean area” (Todorova 2006: 343). It seems that the kaval in Belgrade in the 1990s was experienced and became the favourite as a specific Balkan ‘window’ to music logic, music idiom, aesthetics, and ethos of the well-known and close *East*, now perceived in a new manner.

²⁹ A more detailed elaboration of this thesis is not possible within the limits of this paper; its aspects will be discussed in the papers to follow (Jovanović 2012).

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APPENDIX

Excerpts from the interviews with players / bilders of the kaval in Belgrade

About the surroundings in which kaval was rekindled. Citations:

Vladimir Kidišević: “The guys perceived the absurdity of the setting they were living in, and resisted it”.

Marko Dabić, priest: “For us, it was a complete novelty and a great joy. We were gathered around the ‘Byzantine’ choir led by Vlada Jovanović, yet soon our gathering became a discovery of great fortune of our church and folk arts, of our forgotten heritage. Besides chanting, the fresco painting was renewed, on the fresh mortar, so, it is the real fresco.”

F. Lazar: “In our case, the interest in the kaval, in traditional expression in music and life in general, came with our discovery of Orthodoxy, Byzantine church singing, icons, and everything that was kept and recognized as tradition. This is how we came to certain summarizing and finding of general places in different areas”.

Vladimir Simić: “The circle was comprised of friends, among whom several were great artists, painters, sculptors, icon-painters, book-binders, musicians, theologians, philosophers, historians, and others. I believe that this atmosphere, created by the church setting and wonderful people, was a fruitful ground for the artistic and dedicated approach to music we had”.

On the contexts in which kaval was played and appreciated and about the role of the kaval in the community:

Vladimir Kidišević says about the period: “Fresco painting, the Church, Byzantine chanting, the ‘Moba’, and the kaval were at the time for us one unit comprising life”.

F. Marko Dabić: “We used to stay together long after the liturgy, singing and playing music, which was nice. When the kaval was being played, everyone was silent. This silence (...) was more (...) meaningful than many conversations”.

F. Lazar: “As any other instrument in its own way, the kaval is congregational and collective, as it gathers those who carry the recognizing ‘code’, which circle is rather large. I personally witnessed animals also exhibiting the presence of this ‘code’; they came close to the player and listened to him. It was quite an Orpheus-reminiscent story.”

On the notion and content of notions *the East and eastern* in this context:

M. Nikolić: „Here, it is also about the field that deserves to be especially scientifically investigated. Since the whole music tradition of the East uses its scales, modes, it is certain that there are many similarities. (...) In the Balkans there are differences between Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian, or Albanian playing traditions. In my personal opinion, we would not be able to hear these differences without existence of many similarities. In any case, similarities and differences exist, but they appear more pronounced according to the geographical regions and areas, than to nationalities.“

F. Lazar: “Once I was in a monastery, and I started playing the kaval. There was a man from Palestine and he reacted at once (...) saying that that was something of his, and that every Arab felt the same. I would not know what they could be playing, but it must be something similar, something very old and deep“.

On *ison*, melody, scales, ethos:

F. Lazar: “Playing the kaval follows very strict rules – same as icon painting, or Orthodox ornament. (...) The iconic quality is permeating, so that even the kaval was said to be ‘iconic’ (...). However, there was some differentiation between what was personal, or *hypostatic*, and what was *illustrative*, descriptive, similarly to the difference between a western religious painting which *describes* an event and an icon which *contains* the event in itself. Thus, playing of the kaval may both be *illustrative* and ‘*iconic*’”.

M. Nikolić: „For the first time, I heard kaval from my friend, a painter and fresco-painter from Belgrade, Predrag Stojković-Stole (now hieromonk Lazarus). When I heard him playing shepherd tune (known as *ezgija*), that was a unique experience. I said to myself: this is a perfect melody, melody as a whole, melody with no beginning and no ending, melody that I do not understand at all

and that I am not able to sing in terms of solfège, at the end and before everything, melody as an indivisible and uninterpretable whole. (...) The first tone on the kaval sounds like some *great-tone* from which all the tones of all instruments ever became. Archaic in its way of building, archaic in way of producing the tone, it offers archaic sound. (...) Thus the unique tone colour has been achieved, all the time waving between steady and unsteady, between heavenly and earthly.“

F. Marko Dabić: “Similarities between kaval play and Byzantine chant are great. There is a melody and an accompanying tone in both: it is a basis and at the same time it points out the melody. It is the accompaniment, at the same time simple and splendid. (...) The melody of Byzantine singing and the kaval is harmonious, serious, but also cheerful, simple but not vulgar; refrained, but not poor; void of sensuality; tranquil, but also strong.”

Vasilije Sekulić: “When I hear the kaval playing, I feel the depth of Byzantine singing and prayer. (...) Since we have learnt both in the same period, the vocabulary that we used for clearing up any ambiguity in the course of learning Byzantine chanting was entirely transmitted to kaval. For example, Vlada [Simić] used to say: ‘No, see, it is the Sixth mode scale’. The one could have been practiced with the other.”

F. Lazar: “They [Macedonians] call kaval ‘the angels’ instrument’”. (...) Kaval is often found as accompaniment to men's and women's songs that tell about deeper states and relations of human soul.”

On the impact of the kaval on the personality of the player and his listeners; on individual experience of producing tone and its quality:

M. Nikolić: I needed three days to produce the first tone. For me, at the time an ex-clarinet player, it was an entirely new experience. (...) Over the course of time, through practical experience, through practicing, I have also been discovering technical assumptions of playing. That is, in fact, a beautiful example (in my life) that the theory comes out from practice, and not vice-versa.

Vladimir Simić: “My first encounter with the kaval was a powerful experience, so strong and inspiring that it was a turning point in my overall perception of music”.

F. Lazar: “As far as the tone is concerned, (...) they say that one should blow into the kaval as if ‘when breathing’, not any stronger”. (...) Having in mind that this is the instrument which awakes some ‘archetypal’ instincts in the consciousness of most people from the Balkans, I took to the kaval listening to what was happening ‘somewhere inside’, every time I listen to or play this instrument”.

Vasilije Sekulić: “The player may be recognized after the tone, which is how personal playing is. (...) We say that the eyes are the mirror of the soul; the sound of the kaval also reflects the spiritual state of the player”.

Vladimir Kidišević: “The kaval purifies, sobers, and keeps company”.

Marko Dabić, priest: “Kaval is strong, calm, peaceful when it is played solo, and it is in high spirits in the orchestra. Yet, it seems to me that it does not achieve such a beauty anywhere, as it does in our tradition. (...) The influence of the kaval to the player and his listeners is: healing, calming, and quite similar to Byzantine singing – collecting and relaxing at the same time. It requires the whole personality, not in the sense of slavery, but of fulfilment”.

On influence on other players, on contemporary approaches to kaval and on its desirable role in the future:

F. Marko Dabić: “It was an inspiration for the others as well, so our choir became a kind of a nursery-garden of kaval play for the whole Serbia. In Serbia, kaval was entirely forgotten by the time. (...) Kaval is a simple instrument, indeed. The problem is that nowadays the simplicity has been experienced / perceived as a defect, not as a virtue. (...) In fact, the truth is exactly the opposite. (...) Have a look at our frescoes. (...) Simple colours, simple composition, simple drawings, and indescribable beauty and richness. The same is with kaval. The melody is simple, but it brings a great joy to one whose ear has not been spoiled by a mess of sounds called contemporary music. (...) Kaval should have had one of the main roles in our music, but it could not work without a renewal of our identity as Orthodox people from Byzantine cultural circle. I think there is no need to talk about how far we are from it.”

Hieromonk Lazarus: “Nowadays, there are players who play in a complicated manner, with virtuosity, but I think that they have abandoned the main principle of the kaval tone, i.e., kaval ethos.”

M. Nikolić: „As originally shepherd, kaval certainly produces such image in the ear of listeners, despite the fact that they might or might not have not known anything about it. In that sense, it certainly has a calming effect, it calls one to become engrossed in this music, not only to superficial aesthetical enjoyment. The one who has the ear to hear, hears in the kaval all that olden and lost in music, necessary to make the music what it is. At this point, as I feel, it is the influence of musical East: that the music is not only an aesthetic category, i.e., to be a musician is not only a matter of a profession, but the whole being. Somewhere there is also a difference between musical East and West.“

Short musical biographies of the protagonists of kaval playing in Serbia in the 1990s:

Predrag Stojković (Vršac, 1958), nowadays hieromonk Lazarus, academic painter, icon painter and fresco painter, was in his youth an amateur musician, playing the guitar. He is a great admirer of the music of Jimi Hendrix. He has been a member of the brethren “Saint John of Damascus” and the male choir since its establishment; as of summer 1994, he had a crucial role in the initiative and the process of restoration of playing the kaval and its building in

Serbia. He learned to play by himself, listening to and imitating the audio recordings of excellent Macedonian players, as well as from practical consultations with Risto Solunčev (Skopje, Macedonia). He is one of the founders of the “Iskon” ensemble. His attitude to the very act of playing, to the kaval as an instrument, his exceptional talent and endurance in grasping the art of kaval building (as well as pipes, double pipes, and instruments such as tamboura) had an impact on younger players originating from choir members.

Vladimir Kidišević (Bavanište, 1955), painter-conservator and icon-painter, is the second most important protagonist of restoration of the kaval playing and building (as well as double pipes) in Serbia and a role model for young players in Serbia. He grasped playing skills based on the recordings of the best Macedonian performers. In the church and monastic circles of Serbia and Montenegro, he is a well-known and respected player. He considers kaval-building a separate area of creation: the kaval he manufactures are unique objects of artistic value. His activities as a fresco painter and player served as inspiration for a documentary film on restoration and painting of monastery Podmaine (*Podmaine*, directed by Amira Novaković, BK Telekom 2003).

Marko Dabić (Belgrade, 1971), theologian and priest, with an exceptional talent for singing and playing of traditional melodies, learned to play and build *duduks* (long duct flutes) and double pipes from Stojković and Kidišević. He cooperated with the singing group *Moba*.

Vladimir Simić (Belgrade, 1972), mechanical engineer and talented musician in traditional and *World Music* genres. He is a builder of traditional instruments: kaval, double pipes, tambouras, and lutes. He is the leader of “Belo platno” group.

Vasilije Sekulić (Podgorica, 1973), dentist, grasped playing skills together with learning Byzantine singing. He was a member of ensembles “Belo Platno” and “Iskon” in the first years of their existence.

Milos Nikolić (Čačak, 1972), the kaval teacher in Mokranjac music school and a doctoral student of clarinet at the Belgrade Faculty of Music, has been active in both theoretical and practical aspects of Byzantine, Serbian, and Balkan music for almost two decades, also exploring Eastern music traditions. The range of instruments he plays includes the kaval, pipe, duduk and the bag-pipes from the South-Morava region. He also cooperates with renowned musicians and artists of various profiles in *World Music* ensembles of different directions; he has performed in Serbia, Europe, and Canada. Being a musician with broad interests, adequate use of folk instruments in popular music is a special area of interest for him.

Goran Arsić (Vranje, 1967), theologian and priest, has been closely connected with traditional music of Vranje and Vlasina region since his childhood. He completed his university studies of theology in Athens. He was one of the founders of Citizen Association “Ved” and the vocal-instrumental ensemble bearing the

same name. He plays various percussion instruments from the area of eastern Mediterranean. He cooperates with renowned instrumentalists in Serbia, Macedonia, and Greece. He was a co-author of the book on connections between Sanskrit and Serbian languages; he is a translator and editor of books and audio publications relating to Sufi teachings on music and musical tradition of Vranje and nearby region. He provided the audio recordings of Macedonian and Balkan singing and playing for use to his friends from choir "Saint John of Damascus".

Jelena Jovanović (Belgrade, 1964), ethnomusicologist and singer, has been learning Macedonian folk songs from Blagoje Ristovski, bagpiper, and dances from Petre Atanasovski while researching performing aspects of musical traditions of Macedonian Slavs. In performing the Macedonian repertoire, she cooperates with performers from Macedonia, Great Britain, and Serbia. Within the congregation "Saint John of Damascus" she was the head of the female choir (1993–1994). She is an active performer of traditional Macedonian and Serbian songs, solo and in a group, *a cappella* and with minimal instrumental accompaniment, and one of the founders of the ensemble "Iskon", as well as one of the founders and leading members of the group "Moba".