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BULGARIAN WEDDING MUSIC BETWEEN FOLK AND *CHALGA*: POLITICS, MARKETS, AND CURRENT DIRECTIONS

Abstract: This article investigates the performative relationship among folklore, the market, and the state through an analysis of the politics of Bulgarian wedding music. In the socialist period wedding music was condemned by the state and excluded from the category folk but was adored by thousands of fans as a countercultural manifestation. In the postsocialist period wedding music achieved recognition in the West but declined in popularity in Bulgarian as fusion musics, such as *chalga* (folk/pop), arose and as musicians faced challenges vis-à-vis capitalism. As the state withdrew and became weaker, private companies with profit-making agendas arose. Although it inspired *chalga*, wedding music began to be seen in contrast to it, as folk music. Recently, fatigue with *chalga* and nationalistic ideologies are revitalizing wedding music.

Key Words: Bulgarian wedding music, folk music, *chalga*

This article investigates the performative relationship among folklore, the market, and the state through an analysis of the politics of Bulgarian wedding music.¹ In the socialist period wedding music was condemned by the state and excluded from the category folk but was adored by thousands of fans as a countercultural manifestation. In the postsocialist period wedding music achieved recognition in the West but declined in popularity in Bulgarian as fusion musics, such as *chalga* (folk/pop), arose and as musicians faced challenges vis-à-vis capitalism. As the state withdrew and became weaker, private companies with profit-making agendas arose. Although it inspired *chalga*, wedding music began to be seen in contrast to it, as folk music. Recently, fatigue with *chalga* and nationalistic ideologies are revitalizing wedding music.

Bulgarian Wedding Music 1970s–1989: Instrumentation, Style, and Repertoire

In the 1970s the genre wedding music (*svatbarska muzika*) catapulted to fame in Bulgaria, causing “mass hysteria,” according to one journalist

¹ Fieldwork took place 1979–present in Bulgaria and on several tours in North America with prominent wedding musicians. I would like to thank Ivo Papazov, Yuri Yunakov, Nikola Iliev, Ivan Milev, Petu'r Ralchev, Gerogi Yanev, and Neshko Neshchev for numerous fruitful discussions about the history of wedding music. I am also thankful to Kalin Kirilov and Mark Levy for comments on this paper. Note that quotes without citations are taken from interviews.

(Gadjev 1987). The fact that Roma were prime innovators in the scene fueled the controversy around the genre because Roma are quintessential “others” for Bulgarians (Trumpener 1992; Levy 2002). Labeled “kitsch” and “corrupt” by purists, wedding music was prohibited by the socialist government and was excluded from state-sponsored media and festivals. Its absence from state media ironically promoted its success in unofficial media. Fundamentally a grassroots youth movement, wedding music struggled against state censorship and became a mass underground cultural phenomenon.

Wedding music is defined by a combination of instrumentation, repertoire, context, and style. It encompasses music played not only at weddings, but also at baptisms, house-warmings, and soldier send-off celebrations, in short, at major ritual events in village and urban contexts. Although its history reaches back to urban ensembles of the nineteenth century that were composed mostly of Roma, wedding music as a distinct genre began to crystallize when amplification was introduced to folk music in village settings.² The loudness of electric amplification and its affinity to rock music became a symbol of modernity and the west. Instrumentation typically consists of clarinet, saxophone, accordion, electric guitar, electric bass guitar, and drum set, plus a vocalist.³ In the mid 1980s, synthesizers were added, sometimes replacing guitar, bass, and drums. These instruments have a greater range and versatility than Bulgarian village instruments. According to state categories, only village instruments such as *gaida* (bagpipe), *kaval* (end blown flute), *gu'dulka* (vertically held fiddle), and *tambura* (plucked lute) are *narodni*, “folk” or “authentic;” instruments in wedding bands are *klasicheski* (classical), thus outside the rubric of “folk.” True, they are imports from western Europe, but clarinet and accordion have been used in Bulgarian folk music by both villagers and urbanites since the early part of the twentieth century. In the socialist period and still today, they were/are not taught in folk music schools, and were/are rather taught in schools for classical music.⁴

² See N. Kaufman 1989; D. Kaufman 1990; Vu'lichinova-Chendova 2000; Buchanan 1991: 522–529. Non-Roma also played major roles in the history of wedding music. For example, Atanas Milev, the father of Ivan Milev, was one of the founders of the Pu'rvomaiskata Grupa, an influential wedding band in the 1960s. The writings of Buchanan (1991, 1996 and 2006) and Rice (1994 and 1996) are extremely insightful regarding the style and politics of wedding music during socialism; also see Silverman 1996.

³ In the 1970s there were often two accordions and no bass guitar; the bass was introduced a few years later. The drum set is sometimes modified to include *indiyanki* (roto-toms).

⁴ Ironically, if a student wishes to learn folk music on clarinet, he or she must attend a school for classical music and learn folk music on the side, or else switch to a “folk instrument”.

The repertoire of wedding music can be divided into two main categories, Bulgarian music and Romani music (*kyuchek*, see below). Bulgarian wedding music encompasses all the additive meters of traditional music, but favors *pravo horo* (2/4), *ru'chenitsa* (7/16, 2-2-3), and *lesno* (7/8, 3-2-2, characteristic of the Pirin/Macedonian region). Instrumental Bulgarian wedding music is highly structured in some ways and highly free in others; there are set passages played in unison or thirds which alternate with individual improvisations on the melody instruments. The set passages are composed by wedding musicians, sometimes based on traditional melodies but they often have melodic and rhythmic surprises. In the middle of a piece one may find the theme from Offenbach's "Can Can", a quote from an advertising jingle, a popular rock and roll song, or phrases more reminiscent of jazz and acid rock than folk music. The emphasis is on originality, eclecticism, and cleverness. Versatility is also prized. Clarinetist Ivo Papazov composed "A Musical Stroll Around Bulgaria" to display his regional diversity. He also imitates gaida on his clarinet, plays clarinet and saxophone at the same time, and removes pieces from his clarinet (down to the mouthpiece). The theatrical element is definitely present. Moreover, audience members, who are often musicians themselves, listen carefully for what is new and interesting; they are highly critical, and they relentlessly compare musicians and performances.

Above all, ability to improvise is valued by both performers and audience. Each melody instrument in turn takes off from the unison sections and shows its virtuosity. Dazzling technique is displayed by complicated rhythmic syncopations, daring key changes, arpeggio passages, chromaticisms, and extremely fast tempi. Timothy Rice quotes the phrase *s hus* (with gusto) to illustrate how proponents differentiated wedding music from traditional music which they found *prosto* (simple) (1996:193). There is a great deal of performer/audience interaction in wedding music, and both dancers and listeners alike are energized especially when the musicians improvise. In comparing weddings to concerts, clarinetist Ivo Papazov stated: "In truth, a wedding is equal to a dozen concerts. There a person can create.... A great deal of music is introduced into a wedding, and in a concert you lack this thrill." Saxophonist Yuri Yunakov concurred: "You can't compare a wedding with any other performance... On the concert stage it is more like an examination."

During socialism, wedding music was inextricably tied to large opulent life-cycle events that symbolized status; villagers saved for years to invite hundreds of guests to a three-day wedding. Despite totalitarianism, this period was the apex of community celebration and display. Ignoring government warnings about "bourgeois conspicuous consumerism", villagers insisted on abundant food and drink, opulent gifts, and

good-quality music. Wedding music was central to the rituals (such as *daruvane*, reciprocal gift giving), the banquets, and the dancing that occurred for many hours (Silverman 1992).

The second category of repertoire consists of *kyuchek* in 2/4 and 9/8 (2-2-2-3), a genre associated with Roma and Turks accompanied by solo dancing utilizing torso isolations. *Kyuchek* has become a symbolic of Muslim culture in Bulgaria even though only half of Bulgarian Roma are Muslim (Silverman 1989, 1996, and 2007b). Tunes for *kyuchek* are sometimes drawn from older Romani tunes but are more often composed by wedding musicians. They too are inspired by an eclectic array of sources: folk and popular music from Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey (and other countries of the Middle East), film scores from the West, cartoon music, and Indian film music. *Kyuchek* titles in the 1980s included *Sarajevo '84* and *Olimpiada*, in honor of the Olympics, *Alo Taxi* (Hello Taxi), from a pop song, and *Pinko*, based on the musical theme from the Pink Panther. *Kyucheks* are also borrowed wholesale from Macedonian and Serbian performers and vice versa. Among Romani musicians there is a cross fertilization of musical styles, with a premium on innovation. Ivo Papazov confirmed that he and Ferus Mustafov, a noted Macedonian Romani musician, traded tunes over the telephone in the 1980s because travel to Yugoslavia from Bulgaria was prohibited. Although it is impossible here to discuss all the famous wedding musicians, I must note that Ivo Papazov has been the most influential. With his cousin Neshko Neshev, Papazov founded the band *Trakia* that was composed of Roma (Yuri Yunakov joined in the early 1980s) and set numerous trends in wedding music (Buchanan 1996; Silverman forthcoming).

Economics: The Free Market and State Control

The economic framework of wedding music is important to grasp in order to understand attempts in the 1980s at state intervention. Even during the socialist period the hiring of music for an event was located in the realm of the free market. Because of the phenomenal popularity of some stars, the market became grossly inflated; they earned in two days what most Bulgarians earned in a month. Moreover, patrons not only gained in social status but also displayed financial prosperity to neighbors and kin. For these reasons wedding music was a viable economic niche in the 1980s. In addition to wedding work, most musicians during this time had state-sponsored jobs. e.g., in professional folk music ensembles. Having a state (i.e. wage) job entitled a musician to a pension, medical benefits, vacation packages, and occasional bonuses. These amenities were denied to independent wedding musicians, who were also denied the right to join

the musician's union (Buchanan 1991: 538 and 1996: 207; Rice 1994: 247–250). Moreover, in ideological terms, doing wage labor made you into a “worker”, in the eyes of the state, thereby affirming your place as productive member of society. Still, many wedding musicians, such as Nikola Yankov (founder of the *Lenovska Grupa*) and Ivo Papazov resisted wage labor and only played at weddings. They were permitted to do so, but they were very heavily taxed (Rice 1994: 247).

The socialist government thus exerted pressure on wedding musicians to accept wage labor. Both Romani and non-Romani musicians suffered. Bulgarian clarinetist Nikola Iliev, founder of the *Konushenska Grupa*, explained: “It became really bad for musicians. The government started collecting high taxes from us. Because I was from a ‘fascist’⁵ family, they targeted me first; I had to pay back taxes and fines for five years. The first time I paid... an enormous sum, equivalent to fourteen weddings.” Concerned about “conspicuous consumption”, the state began more vigorously to regulate the earnings of wedding musicians. In 1985, a state commission rated each band and assigned to it a category (*kategorija*) which dictated how much it could charge based on level of expertise and mastery of “authentic” Bulgarian music. Each band also had to submit a repertory list that was approved by the commission to assure that only “pure” Bulgarian music was played (Rice 1994: 249–250, Buchanan 1991: 538–539; 1996). Almost immediately after the category system was implemented, some musicians began to circumvent it by requiring more money under the table. During the 1980s wedding music stubbornly clung to the free market domain.

Dissemination of Wedding Music and the Official Rhetoric of Purity

Wedding music was not only excluded from official government-sponsored media but was also either neglected by scholars or condescendingly labeled as “clichéd.” The most common criticism leveled by scholars was that wedding music incorporated foreign elements and did not retain the “purity” of Bulgarian folk music.⁶ Ironically, it was simulta-

⁵ The ‘fascist’ label was used by the socialist government for wealthy families who resisted the collectivization of land.

⁶ Music professor Manol Todorov wrote: “The harmonic language is modest and when it is complicated it is unconvincing.... Often they master clichés that are imitative and chaotic.... Very often pieces of doubtful Bulgarian ancestry are preformed.... These pieces, devoid of artistic value, are quickly disseminated” (1985: 31). Georgiev referred to wedding music as stateless, impetuous and out of control, like “cosmopolitan water” where “Bulgarian music is only a glaze-like covering.” He further laments that no one has told wedding musicians which influences are good and which are bad

neously too western (like jazz and rock) and too eastern (like Romani, Turkish and other Middle Eastern musics).⁷ This rhetoric about musical purity is directly related to the 1980s state policy of mono-ethnism and the concomitant regulation of the display of Muslim ethnicity. Along with the prohibitions against *kyuchek*, there were forced name changes among Muslims and the banning of circumcisions, the Turkish and Romani languages, and the instrument *zurna* (double reed wind instrument) (Buchanan 1996; Silverman 1989 and 1996; Poulton 1994). Wedding music became a primary target of the state; its Romani and Turkish manifestations, i.e., *kyuchek*, were banned entirely, and the jazz, rock, and non-Bulgarian elements in the Bulgarian repertoire were cleansed.

By the mid-1980s wedding musicians faced a coordinated program of prohibitions, harassment, fines, and imprisonment. As the top wedding musicians, members of *Trakia* were especially targeted by officials to hold them up as examples. The message was that lesser musicians would face a fate even worse. Ivo Papazov stated “In sum, they wanted to slap the hand of Romani and Turkish folklore to show that, look, the greatest artists are in jail—the rest of you, be careful. They wanted to warn people not to make weddings like that.” *Trakia* members’ cars license plates were confiscated and they were fined, beaten, and jailed; in prison their heads were shaved and they were forced to do menial work such as breaking rock and digging canals. Papazov vividly remembers that legal charges of “hooliganism” had to be fabricated because no official law existed about *kyuchek*: “There was no evidence—they had nothing to charge me with! I hadn’t broken a law – they charged me with political propaganda, that I didn’t respect their laws, that I was spreading propaganda—as if I were a terrorist!”

Musicians developed creative tactics for avoiding incarceration, for example, at village events, they assigned someone to watch for approaching police officers. An obvious response was to hide when the police approached. If it was too late to hide, a common tactic was morphing a *kyuchek* in progress into a traditional Bulgarian *pravo horo* (also in duple meter). Saxophonist Yuri Yunakov describes that despite lookouts, running was sometimes the only alternative: “As soon as the

(Georgiev 1986: 90). Music professor Nikolai Kaufman wrote: “Recently it has been pointed out that these wedding bands are the illegitimate children of the music profession. The basis of this attitude was that the bands... lacked professional ability in harmony, construction of form, and maintaining pure Bulgarian style” (1987: 78–79).

⁷ Manol Todorov espoused this position in 1985: “No one is playing pure folk material. We must keep Bulgarian music Bulgarian. Foreign elements – Spanish, Indian, Turkish – don’t belong. You wouldn’t throw foreign words in the middle of a sentence. A Spanish motif doesn’t belong in Bulgarian folk music.”

police approached, most of us started running. It was humorous to see Ivo, as heavy as he is, running into the forest behind the stage. The worst thing was to run from the police. That was the highest insult. You were supposed to stay and face the consequences.”

Here Yunakov alludes to the issue of resistance, suggesting that the bravest response would have been to continue playing *kyuchek* and face the harsh consequences. But resistance is never simple: wedding musicians were survivors – bravery was not central to their identity—they did not seek to become heroes because of lofty anti-government principles. They defied the state because of economic rather than moral imperatives. Music was their profession; they made a living by serving their patrons, and their patrons requested *kyuchek*. At the same time, however, moral outrage accompanied economic motives. Musicians did not shy away from critiquing the absurdity of the policy and its racist message.

Resistance to prohibitions against wedding music was also found among its fans, especially young musicians. Ripe breeding grounds for young wedding musicians were the folk music high schools in Shiroka Lu'ka and Kotel and the Plovdiv Music Academy. Although playing wedding music was strictly forbidden at the schools, students would regularly sneak out to play weddings or to listen to the stars. After speaking with students at the Shiroka Lu'ka school in 1985, I wrote in my fieldnotes: “All the students talk about is wedding music. They are infatuated with it, and they test us to see what we know: ‘Who is the accordionist with Ibryam Hapazov [Papazov’s name before he was required to change it] now?’ They live for this music but they are not allowed to listen to it or perform it. Playing weddings is strictly prohibited. The administration recently issued uniforms and confiscated all of their ‘civilian’ clothing so they can’t sneak off and pass unrecognized. Some students have no warm clothing now.”

Nikolai Kolev, a Thracian gu'dulka player, further explained: “We students at Shiroka Lu'ka were forbidden to play wedding music even in our dormitory rooms. We could be dropped from the school if we were found at weddings. In fact, a friend was kicked out of the Plovdiv Academy because he went to Varna to play in a restaurant. In spite of this, my friends and I would slip out at night and somehow get to weddings to hear Ibryam or Nikola Iliev, and then sneak back in, or sleep on a bench somewhere. We were crazy for the new music.... We played and listened to wedding music all the time even though it was prohibited.” Accordionist and tambura player Kalin Kirilov similarly described how students struggled secretly to learn wedding music from cassettes that had been copied many times. Many students told the legendary story of being

warned about the evils of weddings music by their teachers, then sneaking out to a wedding and seeing the teachers there!

Resistance, then, was located in many sites, even the most official. As described above, the teachers at the schools lectured their students about the evils of wedding music but sometimes broke rules to hear it. Papazov recalls that some of his most ardent fans were police officers, and he even played at their private events. He claims that when he was arrested, the judge loved his music and thus he received a soft sentence (Cartwright 2006). In 1985 I attended the baptism of Romani kaval player Matyo Dobrev's son, and one of the guests of honor was a local police officer who danced *kyuchek* with abandon. Similarly, the state legislated Roma out of existence but informally acknowledged them. For example, when I told folklore scholars that I was studying Roma, they responded with the official line, "they don't exist," but there was always an ironic smile.

These examples amplify Herzfeld's point that "cultural intimacy" with the state is highly nuanced (1997). Herzfeld commented on my last example above by pointing out, "for a brief instant we see the official representatives of state ideology as human beings capable of wincing at the absurdity of what they must nevertheless proclaim" (Herzfeld 2000: 226). He further explained that despite the external formality of states, they can be viewed in social terms as "intimate apparatuses". The state embodies "potentially disreputable but familiar cultural matter" which is "the very substance of what holds people together.... Some of that substance even includes resistance to the state itself" (Herzfeld 2000: 224). On both sides, the official and the unofficial, there were cracks in dogma. In socialist Bulgaria police officers arrested musicians but secretly loved *kyuchek*; wedding musicians not only resisted but also accommodated to the state. In the cracks of official ideology, then, wedding music thrived.

Stambolovo and State Ambivalence

In the above discussion, I pointed out that resistance is never simple: as Ortner points out, it is always paired with collaboration, or more precisely, resistance often involves accommodation to the state. Below I discuss cracks within the official sphere, and its relationship to black and grey musical markets (1995 and 1999). Verdery explicates how the socialist state permitted the unofficial sphere to operate so there wouldn't be a revolution (1996). The Bulgarian government, then, simultaneously prohibited wedding music, accommodated to it, sold it, and tried to control it from within. In the mid-1980s, for example, the state recording

company *Balkanton* released several official versions of wedding music that were sanitized of foreign melodies, jazz, and *kyucheks*.⁸ Manol Todorov, who wrote the liner notes, told me that he instructed Papazov not to play anything foreign at the recording session or else it wouldn't be pressed. On these albums wedding music was not only censored of foreign influences, but also arranged by state composers. In the process of *obrabotka* (arrangement), much of the wild, spontaneous, improvisatory style was lost. Furthermore, an ensemble-type orchestra was added as back up.

Wedding musicians developed the ability to sense when they could push the limits of the state and when they had to tow the party line. This may help to explain the apparent puzzle of why musicians would record these censored versions. They reasoned that official versions would increase the circulation of their music and even enhance the value of their live performances because they were so different from the censored versions. In addition, they did not want to incite the government against them by refusing to cooperate. James Scott's work on "everyday protest" (1985 and 1990) suggests that analyzing resistance always requires analyzing power and its effects on the weak. The hegemony of the state does not depend on brainwashing but on how public discourse triggers shifts in consciousness. Both wedding musicians and the state may have perceived "the advantage of avoiding open confrontation" (Sivaramakrishnan 2005:350). In addition, we can't assume that musicians had full agency nor can we assume the state had total hegemony. "On the contrary, at times social structures, roles, statuses...modify agency and its consequences. ...Actors may engage in everyday acts of resistance or desist from them under structural pressures..." (Sivaramakrishnan 2005: 351). Wedding musicians, then, strategically alternated between accommodation and resistance to the state.

In addition, the state itself was not monolithic, and, indeed, "different levels of the state may work at cross-purposes" (Sivaramakrishnan 2005:351). The Bulgarian state was ambivalent about a phenomenon that was fast become a mass movement. State policy was contradictory and, at times, the state cashed in on the popularity of wedding music, again illustrating Herzfeld's point about cultural intimacy and Verdery's point about grey markets. In the 1980s, for example, in an effort to undercut the black market in wedding tapes, the state established studios for duplicating and selling wedding music made outside the auspices of Bal-

⁸ For example, *Popularni Trakiiski Klarinetisti* (BHA 11188) (Popular Thracian Clarinetists) includes Petko Radev, Nikola Iliev, Nikola Yankov, Hari Asenov, Ibryam Hapazov, and Yashko Argirov.

kanton. At a *Stereo Zapis Studio* (literally a tape recording studio, but actually a store for purchasing various cassettes) a customer could choose among dozens of tapes of the most famous bands. The studios were, in effect, arenas where popular taste was paramount and where prohibitions were relaxed. When *kyucheks* were banned from records, they could still be found at studios; in fact, they were the best sellers among Roma. Similarly, when *zurna* music was banned, it could still be found at studios. Although a printed notice posted in one studio read: “This studio is for copying tapes of Bulgarian music and music from other socialist countries,” I regularly saw tapes of rock groups from Italy and folk music from Greece and Serbia. With the studios, the state simultaneously maintained its official folk music policy and also catered to public taste. More important, the studios were a means for the government to gain access to the inflated market of wedding music.

Given the popularity of wedding music, it was perhaps inevitable that the government would regulate it. It became clear to the state that the popularity of wedding music was a grassroots phenomenon. Wedding music arose at a time when the youth was turning away from folk music; they were attracted neither by the aesthetic of arranged folk music offered by the professional ensembles nor by the aesthetic of “authentic” folk music offered by amateur collectives. While the former was too structured and packaged, the latter was irrelevant to modern life. Numerous articles were written in the popular press by folklorists, ethnomusicologists, and cultural planners debating the merits and demerits of arranged folk music.⁹ Many writers spoke of a crisis of stagnation in folklore due to the transition to modernity. Combining technology, creativity, dynamism, daring technique and improvisation with an irreverence for traditional categories, wedding music epitomized modernity for Bulgarian youth. With the amplification of rock music and the participatory quality of folk music, wedding music was simultaneously traditional and modern. In addition, its unofficial status and its countercultural quality promoted its success.

The first official government effort to organize wedding music was lead by Manol Todorov, who in 1985 told his conservatory class: “These wedding bands have existed for thirty years in Bulgaria and it’s about time the government paid attention to them. They enjoy enormous popularity and the scholars and the government should see why... We know we can’t preserve folklore unchanged – it always develops and

⁹ For example, see the 1988 collection of articles in the journal *Hudozhestvena Samodeinost* (Amateur Arts) and *Bu’lgarska Muzika* including Kraev 1988 and Zaharieva 1988.

changes. We don't harvest by hand anymore; *sedenki* [work bees] are old fashioned; I won't go by cart to Varna. Listening to a kaval player for hours isn't popular anymore—these wedding bands are.... The *nadpyavana* [contests for folk music] have their task to preserve pure authentic folklore, but this festival has another purpose: to organize and see what these wedding bands do. Until now they have been drifting around on their own. It's time we embraced them." Thus in 1985, in the village of Stambolovo, *Pu'rvata Natsionalna Sreshta na Instrumentalnite Grupi za Bu'lgarska Narodna Muzika* (The First National Gathering of Instrumental Groups for Bulgarian Folk Music) was held. The audience was huge and overwhelmingly young, and the excitement was palpable. Note that the official festival label (*festival*, *nadpyavane* [singing contest] or *subor* [fair]) was denied to Stambolovo; the event was instead called a *sreshta* (gathering) to make sure it wasn't mistaken for a folk festival.¹⁰ Thus wedding music was labeled "neo-folklore" (Gadjev 1987) but not folklore, or it was stylistically "founded in folk music" (T. Todorov 1986: 7) but not folk music itself.

Stambolovo was created by the state to police the borders of wedding music—not only to cleanse it of *kyuchek*, but also to make sure that the Bulgarian repertoire was "pure." The term *tsigania* was used in a disparaging way to mean unruly, wild, aggressive, Romani elements in Bulgarian music.¹¹ Peicheva perceptively sees the question of *tsigania* as a problem for Bulgarians, not Roma: "One can discern a complex about lost music and lost national aesthetic identity... From this comes a nostalgia...for a "golden age" of the music of wedding orchestras when all were identical...". This nostalgia for "timeless pure Bulgarian folk music" comes precisely at a time when there is also nostalgia for "a 'healthy hand' of cultural engineering, of control from above..." (Peicheva 1999: 163). Stambolovo precisely embodied this control from above. For example, directly after the competition, Manol Todorov held a meeting with band leaders where he lectured them about how they had corrupted Bulgarian music. Papazov was conspicuously absent; having recently been jailed, he was not allowed to perform. The state would make wedding music conform to the revered category folk music; it would save wedding music from its internal pollution, which was metaphorically, ideologically, and physically located among Roma and Turks.

¹⁰ See Buchanan 2006: 170–173 for a discussion of these terms.

¹¹ Music journalist Todor Bakalov's opinion is clear: "I've been wondering why...good instrumentalists use arpeggios, chromaticisms, triads.... This is a kind of pollution of folk music.... Our folk music is so beautiful that it doesn't need effects...." (1992: 90).

The first Stambolovo festival was so successful that another was held in 1986, followed by a gala concert in Sofia. People went crazy to obtain tickets to the latter, and black market prices sky-rocketed. The third Stambolovo festival was held in 1988 and attracted 100,000 fans. In a tremendous concession to popular taste, the government recorded the event live and immediately sold tapes; later the double album *Stambolovo '88* (BHA12367/8) was released. These live recordings show the ambivalent attitude of the state: simultaneously it acquiesced to the demand for unarranged wedding music (while cashing in on inflated record prices) and it dictated to musicians that foreign elements were prohibited (Buchanan 1991: 549–550).¹²

After over ten years of ignoring wedding music, scholars, who were supposed to follow the government line (but could no longer discern a monolithic one) began writing about it.¹³ Along with government sponsor-

¹² By 1988 the government was trying not only to purify wedding music of foreign elements but also to regionalize it. Timothy Rice, who was privy to the 1988 jury's discussions writes, "By nationalizing the festival as a display of regional difference, the organizers symbolically reversed the homogenizing effect of wedding music" (1994: 252). In the regional competitions that preceded the festival, traditional instruments were favored over higher quality Thracian bands without them (Rice 1994: 254). Yet the festival audience still responded best to wild solo improvisations on clarinet, saxophone and accordion. The standard performance format for each band consisted of several regional songs followed by regional instrumentals, followed by improvisations which moved into the heart of wedding music. Yet, according to Rice, in 1988, several Romani/Turkish bands dispensed with the regional requirements and played wild, aggressive improvisations from the beginning (1994: 253). Similarly, Buchanan reports that audience members dared to dance *kyuchek*, that is, until the police intervened (1996: 224; 2007: 240). Rice relates how the jury, composed of state-sanctioned music administrators, performers, and composers associated the aggressiveness of some of the music with the potential ethnic threat from Roma and Turks: "The jury, when it acted to ban aggressive groups or failed to give them prizes, made a connection between the ethnic tensions in the region and the frenetic playing style of these Turkish Gypsy musicians" (Rice 1994: 254). It is clear that from the state's point of view, wedding music was about ethnicity as well as music.

¹³ A panoramic view of the huge Stambolovo crowd appeared as the cover photograph of the scholarly magazine *Bu'lgarska Muzika* accompanied by an article summarizing glowing interviews with young fans. Krum Georgiev wrote in *Bu'lgarski Folklor*, the official arm of the Institute of Folklore under the Academy of Sciences, that these bands, unfortunately, have not been recognized as providing "folk music sought after by the masses. Musicologists and composers... pretended they didn't exist.... It is true that they lack the necessary theoretical training...but almost all possess technical virtuosity, play from their hearts and souls and captivate their listeners.... This creates a paradox: the regular listener admires them...while the specialist criticizes them, stressing their negative qualities" (1986: 90). In 1988, Lyubomir Kavalzhiev bravely noted another paradox; titling his article *Te Sa Profesorite* (They are Professors), he defended wedding stars as competent and knowledgeable performers and teachers, while, ironically, the judges (who aren't musicians) decided the prizes. He

ship of wedding music came acceptance, even praise of it as a youth phenomenon. As wedding music became “official” and regulated, it began to be lauded for saving the youth from hating folklore, and even seen as a tool of patriotism. This is quite ironic considering the earlier charges about corruption and foreign melodies. Instead scholars wrote, “...in considering the future of traditional Bulgarian folk music, we have to take account of these groups. They have created a style which successfully combats foreign invasion....” (T. Todorov 1986: 7).¹⁴ Thus the Stambolovo festivals were hailed as a forum for the growth and development of wedding music.

Wedding Music in the 1990s

Wedding music in the 1990s garnered effusive praise internationally while at home in Bulgaria it faced economic woes. The international path of wedding music was paved by the British rock impresario Joe Boyd who visited Bulgaria in 1987. Boyd was so smitten with wedding style that he scheduled *Trakia* to tour and record in the west, but the tour fell through when the government denied the visas. It was clear that the state did not want wedding music (and the Roma who played it) representing Bulgaria abroad. Boyd persisted in his advocacy of *Trakia* despite government opposition; he recorded the album *Orpheus Ascending* in Bulgaria (Hannibal HNCD 1346) and released it in 1989 to international acclaim. Boyd omitted Romani music from the album because he was reluctant to alienate the state representatives who had helped him with the recording. Boyd’s album notes are vague about ethnicity: “Bulgaria is sensitive to questions of racial or national origin, so accurate information is hard to come by, but Ivo and his group seems to be at least partly gypsy and much of their music is related as much to gypsy styles as to Bulgarian traditions” (1989).

In 1988 Boyd and I discussed whether including *kyuchek* on a second album would hurt *Trakia*’s chances of receiving visas. I stressed how important *kyuchek* was in their repertoire. Boyd then decided to include Romani, Greek, Romanian, Macedonian, and Turkish repertoire

stated that some judges criticize Papazov for his “foreign influences” [Turkish stylistic features] but it would be impossible to create “folk jazz without different influences, rhythms and varieties of timbre” (1988: 5).

¹⁴ In the liner notes for the Stambolovo ‘88 album (BHA 12367/8, Manol Todorov wrote: “These instrumental groups... prove that folklore is not a sentimental museum piece but a weapon against the aggression of denationalizing musical influences.... These are ensembles... with patriotic activities, [that are] widely popular among thousands of mostly young people who don’t want to listen to foreign music but rather to their native musical language, Bulgarian folk music.”

on the album, *Balkanology* (1991, Hannibal/Ryko HNCD 1363), under somewhat disguised names, and he asked me to write the liner notes. While my notes emphasize the Romani/Turkish ethnic dimension of Trakia's music, Boyd refused to label any tracks *kyuchek* and did not want me to write about politics. In fact, the marketing for Boyd's tours did not emphasize the Romani connection. This occurred before the popularity of "Gypsy Music" was initiated in western Europe by the documentary film *Latcho Drom*; however, it was precisely at the time when "world music" became a viable marketing category, and in fact Joe Boyd was one of the key people in Britain who coined the term (Silverman 2007a and forthcoming). *Trakia* members were ultimately successful in receiving their visas in autumn 1989 – they heard about the fall of Bulgarian communism from abroad, where they were awash in media adoration. Ironically, wedding musicians received the recognition they craved from the west, not from their own government. In the 1990s *Trakia* toured frequently in Europe and also traveled to the United States and Australia. The musicians made their mark on the international folk and jazz scenes which increased their stature in Bulgaria but made them less available for local weddings and concerts.

The transition to capitalism in postsocialist Bulgaria affected wedding musicians in contradictory ways: there were new freedoms but the economy suffered greatly. Socialist restrictions related to purity were totally removed, allowing the free performance of *kyuchek* along with jazz, rock, and foreign musics. The Bulgarian public, meanwhile, enthusiastically embraced Serbian, Macedonian, and Greek musics. Unfortunately, the euphoria of transition was short-lived and the reality of unfettered capitalism soon soured the populace. Economic crisis gripped Bulgaria in the early and mid-1990s, negatively affecting work, health-care, education, and sociability. State enterprises closed and private companies struggled to operate, but they were poorly managed and heavily taxed. There were shortages of goods and thousands of people tried to emigrate. Corruption flourished in everyday transactions and also in the legal process of restitution of land and property. A tiny class of "new rich" emerged, flaunting their cars and jewelry, while the middle class sunk closer to poverty and rates of unemployment rose. Discrimination against Roma increased, violent crimes began to be committed against them, and their rates of unemployment reached 90% (in comparison to the national average of 30%) (www.eerc.org).

At first, wedding musicians embraced capitalism boldly, as most of them had experience in the free-market realm and had not relied on the state for security. Many bands released cassettes on newly formed private labels (none run by musicians) such as Payner, Lazarov, and Unison

Stars (Peicheva and Dimov 1994). Stereo Zapis Studios closed and Balkanton curtailed most of its production. Everyone looked for private sponsorship, either local or foreign. The Stambolovo festivals were held in 1990, 1992, 1994 and 1996 (financed mostly by private sponsors) but attendance dwindled because people had less disposable cash. In 1994 there were 40,000 audience members but by 1996 there were only 4000. The sponsors had a hard time raising the prize funds, and after 1996 the festival was abandoned. Despite democracy, the rule to play only Bulgarian music at Stambolovo remained in effect in the 1990s, illustrating the lasting power of socialist categories. Nevertheless, Papazov ignored regulations and premiered his *kyuchek* composition *Celeste*¹⁵ at the 1996 festival.

In April 1994 the record label Payner sponsored a “megaconcert” in Sofia with thirty soloists and nine bands, but it was very poorly attended. In September 1994 Payner sponsored the first *Trakia Folk*, a juried festival of wedding music with huge prizes. Payner produced cassettes and videotapes of the festival and attendance was good. But much of the populace was too worried about their declining incomes to be active wedding music fans.¹⁶ In addition, the new musical genre *chalga* (pop/folk) and new Romani bands drew listeners away from wedding music. In fact, in 1999 Payner changed the direction of *Trakia Folk* toward *chalga*.

The decline of wedding music in the 1990s must be seen in the context of the phenomenal rise of *chalga*, which in the 1990s was the predominant genre in Bulgarian media (Buchanan 2007; Kurkela 2007; Rice 2002; Kraev 1999; Dimov 1995 and 2001; Statelova 2005; Silverman 2007b and forthcoming). *Chalga* represented a fusion of pan-Balkan styles with pop music, Romani music, and wedding music. From

¹⁵ Ivo composed *Celeste* earlier and named it after a popular television series. It was later recorded on the album *Panair/Fairground* (2003), see below.

¹⁶ *Trakia Folk* was held in 1994, 1995 (Haskovo), 1999 (Stara Zagora), 2000 (Stara Zagora), and 2003 (Plovdiv). The history and winners of the festivals can be found at www.payner.bg. Two magazines, *Folk Panair* (Folk Gathering) and *Folk Kalendar* were published in the mid to late 1990s with the aim of reporting on and promoting folk music, wedding music, and Romani music. Contributors were well-respected academics and journalists. The publications featured interviews, song texts and music notation, riddles, descriptions of holiday customs, and announcements and reviews of concerts, festivals, and recordings. Advertising and subscriptions supported the publications, but they too ran out of money and folded. New radio programs became popular in the 1990s, including Radio Signal Plyus and Radio Veselina (founded by Veselina Kanaleva). Both offered a healthy mixture of Bulgarian village music, wedding music, Romani music, Greek music, Serbian music, Turkish music, Macedonian music, and *chalga*. In the 1990s, a few television shows attempted to present wedding music, but they too failed. Perhaps the format of the shows forced wedding music into too narrow a framework; the short time frame made the music too formulaic.

wedding music *chalga* drew instrumentation, from Romani music it drew the ubiquitous *kyuchek* rhythms plus eastern melodic and visual motifs, and from pop it drew a slick presentation style plus rhyming texts about money, sex, and corruption. Within a decade the Payner company built a *chalga* media empire encompassing radio and television stations, fan magazines, tours, clubs, hotels, and CDs and DVDs (www.payner.bg; www.planeta.tv). As the visual element of *chalga* grew (with video, DVDs and television stations), promoters transformed it into a soft-porn industry featuring scantily-clad female sex symbols. Both intellectuals and wedding and folk musicians derided *chalga* for its crassness, superficiality, and escapist qualities. Some critics blamed Roma for *chalga* ruining Bulgarian music even though Roma had virtually no control over the marketing of the *chalga* industry. In contrast, wedding music was hailed as closer to folklore and to village life.

In the 1990s weddings were a far cry from the three-day events of the 1980s. The economic crisis dictated that Bulgarians could no longer afford lavish weddings. A typical wedding lasted one afternoon or one evening, often with a DJ rather than live music. Weddings were bargained for by the hour rather than the day. In 1994, Ivo Papazov remarked: “Now the businessmen rule Bulgaria, back then the communists ruled... Now there is no work for musicians in Bulgaria...” (Dimitrova, Panayotova, and Dimov 1994:23). When a journalist asked him, “has the great boom of wedding music passed?” he answered, “Of course, such are the times. In the old days when I would play twenty to thirty sheep would be slaughtered, 1000–1500 people invited under three to four huge tents.... Another 1000 came to listen. But today times are such that a person can’t relax. To make a wedding you need at least 50,000–60,000 leva, plus money for music. Look at the times—gasoline is 15–20 leva [per liter]. Sofia residents come and beg me [to play for weddings] but I can’t take the soul of a person—tomorrow he won’t have anything to eat. (Dimitrova, Panayotova, and Dimov 1994: 26).

In comparison to the 1980s, wedding musicians during the 1990s played for shorter gigs and suffered from more unengaged days. Because weddings were only one evening long, musicians had to play more weddings per week to make a decent income. This was stressful and involved more driving and hence spending more money on gasoline which was very expensive. Even famous musicians could no longer earn enough to support their families. Many secured other jobs, e.g., Georgi Yanev of *Orfei* struggled to create his own music studio and Petu’r Ralchev opened an automobile parts store. At this time, a new genre of personal experience narrative arose, the crime story. *Orfei* members, for example, were driving home from a large wedding when a car swerved close to

them to make them stop. Men emerged with guns and stockings over their heads and took all their money. Also in the 1990s Ivo Papazov and his family were robbed at gunpoint inside their own home in spite of his numerous guard dogs and watchmen. Wedding singer Svetla Angelova was tied up by mafia bosses and forced to sing in the back room of a club. Indeed, the mafia emerged as a force in Bulgaria in the 1990s and had its finger on music, especially *chalga*.

Another important concern of wedding musicians during postsocialism became copyright and exploitation by record companies. In the 1990s musicians were worried about the widespread practice of pirating. Theoretically, a company like Payner would pay a band a substantial fee for a master recording plus a small royalty fee (*avtorsko pravo*) for every album sold. Musicians, however, complained that companies deliberately underreported the number of albums sold.¹⁷ In addition, in the 1990s every city boasted a huge open-air market for pirated copies of albums, and Bulgaria was cited as one of the worst offending countries in relation to pirating (Kurkela 1997; Buchanan 2007: 245). In the last five years the situation has improved somewhat as the state has formulated and enacted copyright laws; however, many problems still remain.

Bulgarian Wedding Music in the Twenty First Century

Many musicians lament the current difficult economic situation of wedding music, and some are nostalgic for the socialist period. According to Papazov, "I had more work back then. People were happier and had a lot of money. I don't think anything good has come of the new democratic Bulgaria. Now it is a place of corruption and everyone is fighting to get into the ruling party" (Cartwright 2006: 38). Nostalgia for socialism, however, should not only be seen as the longing for order and security, but also as a critique of capitalism. It turns out that the free market is not so free after all. Whatever sells gets the most media playtime. And today it is *chalga* that sells; indeed, Ivo Papazov observed that the *chalga*-dominated "Payner company owns and runs Bulgaria today."

Furthermore, wedding musicians now identify themselves as champions of Bulgarian folk music. In some senses, they are correct, if we

¹⁷ At the 1994 *Trakia Folk* festival mentioned above, the Payner company required participating bands to be taped for a cassette release. The band *Orfei* refused to sign on because they wanted to produce their own cassette but, according to Petu'r Ralchev "weaker groups are glad for the exposure." Producing an independent cassette required *Orfei* to overcome huge obstacles in financing, marketing, and distribution. As mentioned above, *Orfei*'s leader, Bulgarian violinist Georgi Yanev struggled to set up his own high quality recording studio and was eventually successful.

conceive of folk music outside the narrow authentic socialist box, and if we see wedding musicians as configuring themselves opposed to *chalga*, Papazov sees wedding style as solidly Bulgarian (of course, he means the Bulgarian part of wedding music), but enriched with other elements. When he was asked what is Bulgarian about his style, he answered, “The foundation of wedding music is Bulgarian.” He remarked that today, when few people are interested in Bulgarian music, wedding musicians play it: “Ironically, I have preserved Bulgarian music.” He elaborated: “We played pure Bulgarian folklore in spite of the fact that it wasn’t really pure, but it was Bulgarian, and it was beautifully embellished!” As early as 1994 Papazov complained that at Bulgarian weddings patrons requested mostly *kyucheks*: “Recently I’ve played for several Bulgarian weddings, on purpose...they pay well. I opened with a Bulgarian *horo* and from then on it was all *kyucheks*” (Dimitrova, Panyotova, and Dimov 1994: 26). He and Yunakov have both proclaimed on television that Bulgarians should be ashamed that Roma are preserving their heritage: “Now we Roma are touring around playing Bulgarian music, while, in Bulgaria, Bulgarians are playing Romani music.” Here Papazov and Yunakov are alluding to the popularity of *chalga* among Bulgarians.

Wedding musicians blame *chalga* for the decline in popularity of wedding music; they criticize *chalga* for being more pop than folk, and they feel that it is technically inferior to wedding music. Papazov exclaimed proudly: “Our music is neither *chalga* nor pop!” But aside from stylistic differences between wedding music and *chalga* (Silverman forthcoming), their respective positions vis-à-vis the state and capitalism need to be examined. In the socialist period the competitors of wedding music were the ensembles that were the purveyors of “authentic folk music”; the latter were supported by the state but, to a great extent, rejected by the people. Wedding music received some of its cache by being countercultural, that is, oppositional to the state. More specifically it represented capitalism and democracy in the midst of socialism. Now the biggest competitor of wedding music is *chalga*, which is supported by unbridled capitalism. The state has withered and wedding music has lost its anti-state oppositional positioning.

Wedding musicians, however, are not totally pessimistic. Although Papazov claimed “It is sad to me that no one pays attention to wedding music,” he also pointed out that wedding music still has many fans in Bulgaria: “In 2004 in Plovdiv we celebrated the [thirtieth] anniversary of Nikola Iliev and the *Konushenska Grupa*. There was an audience of 6000 people.... Wedding bands continue to exist and to have their fans. ...Twenty-eight bands appeared.... The audience booed the lip-synched performers [typical of *chalga*] but the viewers stood up when we played

live. That made Professor Radev [clarinetist with La Scala, Italy, who is a champion of folk music] repeat with teary eyes: We won't perish, we won't perish. If, from time to time, we, the elite of wedding music don't gather to play some kind of concert, the young generation will forget us. And for the rich music companies, it is unpleasant for us to appear in public because the people will realize they are being cheated with these lip-synchings" (Filipova 2004: 17). Similarly, in 2005 a commemoration of Bulgarian wedding singer Dinka Ruseva's thirty-year career was attended by hundreds of wedding musicians.

Wedding musicians have had to make many compromises in the postsocialist period. One type of compromise involves forgiving past detractors. Papazov recalls how professor Nikolai Kaufman was an early critic, but "now I'm going to play for his gala eightieth birthday." In 1994 he elaborated: "I make compromises.... The other night... we were at Manol Todorov's [former critic] sixtieth birthday celebration. Isn't that a gesture? For when one makes gestures, one makes money. After all, I have two children" (Dimitrova, Panayotova, and Dimov 1994: 26).

Surveying the landscape of wedding music in 2007, immediately one notices that many of the hundreds of groups that existed in the 1980 have simply disbanded. Yet there is a solid group of high-quality bands that have survived, including the *Vievska Grupa*, *Tru'stenik*, *Kanarite*, *Orfei*, *Konushenska Grupa*, and *Brestovica*.¹⁸ Featuring the Rhodope *kaba gaida* (low pitched bagpipe characteristic of the Rhodope region) and bolstered by Payner, the *Vievska Grupa* has a strong following in a region where people are very attached to their music. Yet the *Vievska Grupa* has also incorporated *chalga* and Macedonian and Serbian music into its performances to cater to current tastes. The success of the *Konushenska Grupa* derives from its legendary clarinetist Nikola Iliev, one of the early founders of Bulgarian wedding style. Excelling in the Bulgarian repertoire and not emphasizing Romani and jazz elements, he has a regular following among the generation that remembers his fame in the 1980s. Like the *Konushenska Grupa*, *Orfei* also has a steady output of albums and fairly constant wedding work. *Orfei's* strength lies its high

¹⁸ I will deal with *Trakia* separately below because its trajectory is quite different, involving international tours. Some wedding performers have become active in the growing Romani music scene and in the *chalga* scene. Others have been featured as guests in international Romani productions; Clarinetist Yashko Argirov (of *Brestovica*) and accordionist Slavcho Lambov, for example, appeared in the Hungarian production *Gypsy Spirit* which toured in Europe and North America. Clarinetist Filip Simeonov (of *Tru'stenik*) appears regularly with the Romanian Romani group *Taraf de Haidouks* and has recorded with them on the album *Band of Gypsies* (Nonesuch 79641-2).

quality musicianship and its mastery of both the Romani and Bulgarian repertoire. In 1994 *Orfei*'s singer Pepa Yaneva claimed that she would never sing *chalga*, but a year later she recorded *chlaga* songs; obviously, the market required it. Although for fifteen years *Orfei* resisted signing a recording contract with a major company, in 2006 it signed with Payner.

Under the direction of Atanas Stoev, the band *Kanarite* has emerged as the most prolific wedding band, producing an album every year on the Payner label. Their arrangements (by Stoev) are sweet-sounding and pleasant and their instrumental improvisations are short and do not veer toward jazz. Their sound is thus tamer and less aggressive than other wedding bands and this has resonated with a wide fan base. Furthermore, their target audience is composed of Bulgarians rather than Roma and Turks. Although they established their reputation in the 1980s with well-known Romani clarinetists Nesho Neshev and Delcho Mitev, now they underplay Romani associations and emphasize their Bulgarian affiliations.¹⁹

The trajectory of *Kanarite*'s repertoire and style during postsocialism shows that in the 1990s they included *kyucheks* and *chalga* songs on their albums but ten years later they had moved away from these genres toward an exclusive association with the Bulgarian repertoire of wedding music. The *Kanarite* '98 album, for example, contains several 2/4 and 9/8 *kyuchek* songs. One song, *Biznesmen* (Businessman) has a typical *chalga* text (and Romani-style kaval solo): "I want to become a businessman, to drop a million every day, to buy a villa and two cars.... Bars, taverns, modern girlfriends." By 2000, however, the band made fewer recordings of 2/4 and 9/8 *kyucheks* and veered away from texts about materialism and sex, and instead embraced texts about love, family, friends, and village life. Note that these song themes were always part of their repertoire but they became more pronounced. Not ignoring *chalga*, they cleverly converted it to something more Bulgarian by inviting *chalga* singers to record wedding songs with them as guests. Stoev could accomplish this because many *chalga* singers are also wedding singers and perform both repertoires; they were pleased with the exposure that a *Kanarite* album would engender.

Kanarite's twentieth anniversary video *Nie Bulgarite* (We Bulgarians, 2000) exemplifies its Slavic orientation. For example, begins with the announcement: "on this album, the beauty of Bulgaria has been col-

¹⁹ As early as the 1980s *Kanarite* were known as a "well-behaved band." According to Rice, Stoev insisted that members arrive on time, wear identical white jackets, and refrain from smoking and drinking on the job. In 1988, their Romani clarinetist Nesho Neshev complained to Rice about how reserved the music was (Rice 1994: 246).

lected.” Staged in the Plovdiv amphitheater which dates from Roman times, the video provides a visual spectacle linking the band to antiquity. Interspersed in the concert, the *Smolyan Dance Ensemble*, dressed in folk costume, performs choreographies and comic skits of village life. The dancers begin the show with the propitious ritual of offering bread and wine. These symbols link the band to the realm of village and folklore. The regular band is augmented by guest classical clarinetist Petko Radev who is beloved by many Bulgarians because while working at La Scala in Italy he also championed Bulgarian folk music. The regular instrumental lineup of *Kanarite* includes kaval and gaida as well as the standard wedding instruments; these village instruments strengthen the connection to folklore. In addition, the instrumental solos are very short and rather tame, in contrast to the longer, wilder solos of other bands. The guest singers on the video include eight *chalga* stars, but not one of them sings a *chalga* song—they all sing Thracian wedding songs. In addition, the crass sexuality of *chalga* has been tamed – even the outfits are subdued (gowns are cut low but the abundance of skin in *chalga* is absent). In short, on this album *Kanarite* has assimilated *chalga* into a more wholesome folk aesthetic.

Kanarite has continued to develop its Bulgarian profile into this decade. Its standard formula includes Bulgarian instrumentals with shorter improvisations, more Macedonian/Pirin songs in 7/8, more city songs, and tamer *kyucheks*. Their 2001 album *Ne Godini, A Dirya* (Not Just Years, but a Path), has one 9/8 *kyuchek* and one 2/4 *kyuchek* (a duet with Stoev and *chalga* star Ivana); it also features the *Eva Quartet* in polyphonic a capella arrangements reminiscent of the socialist era. The 2003 album *Na Praznik i v Delnik* (On Holiday and Weekday) has no 2/4 *kyucheks* and only one 9/8 song that has no instrumental improvisation. The video’s visuals feature a costumed folk ensemble composed of Bulgarian teenagers in a village setting, and the singers wear large Eastern Orthodox crosses on their necks.

The 2003-4 album, *S Ritu`ma Na Vremeto* (With the Rhythm of the Times), epitomizes the band’s evocation of national pride through themes of church, family, and patriotism. The religious theme surfaces in the title of the first piece (*Pravoslaveno Horo*, Eastern Orthodox Dance) where the band is filmed playing in a monastery in front of Byzantine icons. The song *Bu`lgarski Cheda* (Bulgarian Children) develops the themes of patriotism and family in a 7/8 Pirin meter (this meter itself evokes nostalgia) by poignantly narrating the sacrifices of Bulgarian soldiers and the suffering of the populace. Filmed in a church, with band members wearing black clothing and lighting candles in memory of Bulgarian soldiers killed in Iraq, the somber atmosphere is interspersed with

footage of military training. This song links past sacrifices to contemporary Bulgarian politics.²⁰

Chalga singers are again guests on this video, and again they sing Bulgarian wedding songs. Gloria's *Ah Lyubov, Lyubov*, (Oh Love, Love) narrates a story about the pain of love that ends with separation and the birth of a child. The accompanying visuals for Gloria's song are close-ups of historical Bulgarian paintings depicting peasant mothers holding and nursing children; in Ivana's song we see her relaxing around the piano and the table with Stoev. The usual exotic and sexual *chalga* iconography is thus assimilated into a tame framework of the Bulgarian family and the home.

These recent *Kanarite* albums thus position the band as opposed to the values of *chalga* (money, alcohol, and sex) but they manage to recuperate the association of *chalga* with success, modernity, and technology. In recent performances Atanas and Nadya Stoeva are featured together more prominently (singing and even touching), as a symbol of stable marriage. In their 2005 video, *Traditsia, Stil, Nastroenie* (Tradition, Style, and Spirit) the opening song *Nie Sme Kanarite* (We are the Canaries) introduces them as successful and happy, content with their families and friends, and implores the audience to "forget your woes." The band has come to stand for the Eastern Orthodox religion, family values, optimism, and the nation (i.e., the Bulgarian majority). They have distanced themselves from Romani and Turkish musical motifs and cultural symbols. I do not think this is accidental. Especially at a time when anti-Muslim sentiments are being openly expressed by the Attack party, *Kanarite* has tapped into a nationalistic musical vein.²¹

By contrast, the musical trajectory of *Trakia* is starkly different from *Kanarite*. *Trakia* is the least recorded band; after *Balkanology*, the band

²⁰ Bulgaria has been known as a staunch ally of the United States in reference to the Iraq war.

²¹ In 2005, Attack won over 8% representation in Parliament and in 2006 it won 26% of the presidential vote. Attack is an extreme nationalist party that openly proselytizes against Roma. Its leaders have characterized Roma as criminals and as a threat to Bulgarians because of their high birth rate; one of their slogans is "No to Gypsification, no to Turkification" (Kanev 2005; Cohen 2005; www.bghelsinki.org). Attack portrays Roma as undeserving of social programs in spite of the fact that in March 2007 Bulgaria's overall unemployment rate was 9.5%, while among Roma it was 70%; 18% of Roma are illiterate, 65% have not finished school, and under 1% have completed a higher education (www.news.bg, March 12, 2007). Immediately after Bulgaria was admitted into the European Union in January 2007, Ataka found allies in the European parliament. It joined forces with Western European xenophobic and anti-immigrant parties such as the National Front in France to establish the European Union platform "Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty" which defends "Christian values" and the "national identities of the countries" (www.erio.org).

did not make another recording until 2003. Papazov claimed that he was hoping that Boyd would record another project, but because of illness and business problems he never did (Cartwright 2006: 37). In the 1990s *Trakia* played few Bulgarian weddings and was featured at Stambolovo but found most of its work abroad. Some *Trakia* members have developed their own paths, for example, Papazov has collaborated with Hungarian Romani cimbalomist Kalman Balogh on a pan-Romani project; accordionist Neshko Neshev released the album *Shareno Horo* (Colorful Dance, Gega CD 305) with his own band in 2006; and Yuri Yunakov emigrated to New York in 1994 and formed his own wedding band, which released three disks on Traditional Crossroads. In contrast, in Bulgaria, for the most part, *Trakia* was ignored by the media.

All this changed in 2003 with the release of *Fairground/Panair* (Kuker Music KM/R 07) distributed in Germany. The album is a tour-de-force of *Trakia*'s newer style which is more arranged, more polished, more textured, more technically ambitious, and more influenced by jazz. Because *Fairground* was made for western audiences, it features concertized versions of wedding compositions that are not danceable. Added to *Trakia*'s regular line-up are jazz musicians Ateshhan Yuseinov on guitar, Stoyan Yankulov on tupan and percussion, pianist Vasil Parmakov and two bass players. The repertoire includes standard Bulgarian instrumentals, plus slow songs and dance songs beautifully performed by Maria Karafezieva, but the solo improvisations by Papazov and Neshko Neshev are longer, wilder, and much more inflected with a jazz sensibility than earlier recordings. This album is clearly intended to present *Trakia* to western jazz audiences.

Despite this foray into jazz, the album's visuals solidly evoke Bulgarian folklore. The men (except Papazov) wear red vests, Maria wears a Stara Zagora costume, and six dancers wear full village costume. Note that for performances the musicians do not usually wear folk costume although Maria has recently worn her costume more often. I believe that this imagery reflects the repositioning of wedding music as folk music in opposition to *chalga*. It also reflects Papazov's genuine attachment to Bulgaria as a nation. Although the visuals eschew anything Romani or Muslim, the repertoire includes a Turkish slow melody and three *kyucheks*, one of which is titled *Gypsy Heart*. The album received international triumphant reviews, and in 2005 Papazov won the British Broadcasting Company Radio 3 audience award for World Music (www.bbc.co.uk/bulgarina/news/story/2005/03/printable/050306_pap-zovbbc.shtml). *Trakia* performed in a gala award concert, and in an emotional ceremony Joe Boyd delivered the statue to his old friend.

As a result of the award, *Trakia* has received dozens of invitations to perform around the world, and the musicians are now in the limelight once again. Articles have appeared about Papazov with titles such as “The King Returns” (Cartwright 2006). American audiences warmly received members of *Trakia* during their 2003 and 2005 reunion tours with Yuri Yunakov, and Traditional Crossroads produced the album, *Together Again: Legends of Bulgarian Wedding Music* (CD4430, 2005). What is perhaps most striking about the last three years is the official attention Papazov is finally receiving in Bulgaria. Special concerts have been organized for *Trakia* in Sofia; Papazov was made an honorary citizen of Stara Zagora in Fall 2005; and he now appears in the “Alley of the Stars” in Sofia. In 2004 *Trakia* played for NATO leaders and in 2005 they played for a meeting of the presidents of Balkan nations. Papazov could not help notice the irony of receiving all these government accolades after years of being harassed followed by years of being ignored. He emphatically stated: “Only in 2005 did I start playing for large audiences again in Bulgaria. At one of these concerts, I told them bitterly, ‘Now? Now you give me these honors? Now – when I’m getting old? Why not in my younger years when I was at the top of my fame?’” Similarly, Yuri Yunakov, in answering a question from a Chicago reporter about the recent attention, said: “How do we feel about the press attention? Where was the press in the 1980s and 1990s? Not one Bulgarian paper wrote about us even though we were household names. Where was the press then?”

Recently, there are indications that wedding music is making a significant comeback and is attracting larger audiences in Bulgaria. As mentioned above, in 2006 *Orfei* signed a recording contract with Payner and has benefited from increased media exposure. In March 2007 Payner launched a new 24-hour television channel *Planeta Folk*. According to Payner’s promotion, the channel features: “Traditional and modern folklore, films about notable events in Bulgaria and historical and cultural achievements.” It is aimed towards: “Bulgarian viewers at home and in Europe... who love Bulgaria and want to learn more about their natal culture and traditions” (<http://planetafolk.tv>). To coincide with the Eastern Orthodox holiday St. George’s Day, on May 6, 2007, the channel sponsored an inaugural concert in London featuring *Kanarite* and Ivana (the combination I analyzed above); and a week later it sponsored a gala concert in Sofia with *Kanarite*, *Vievska Grupa*, and *Orfei*, as well as with folk dance ensembles.

The creation of *Planeta Folk* by Payner, a company that had previously promoted *chalga* almost exclusively, is a clear sign that wedding music audience’s are growing. The Bulgarian public is starting to be-

come fatigued by the superficial glitz and the artificial formulas of *chalga*. Simultaneously, wedding music is becoming an ideological symbol of nationalism and patriotism in a period where the definition of Bulgarian identity seems precarious. *Chalga* is criticized as too Romani, too eastern, but simultaneously too western, too much like Euro-pop. Ironically, wedding music received the very same criticism in the socialist period, but now it is hailed as quintessential folk music. Nationalist parties such as Attack rail against *chalga* as corrupting the historical core values of Bulgaria; they encourage patriotic Bulgarians to support folk music, and for Payner, folk music means wedding music. Thus the popularity of wedding music today, just as in socialist times, is informed by a highly politicized environment where the meaning of Bulgarian identity is again being debated.

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БУГАРСКА СВАДБАРСКА МУЗИКА ИЗМЕЋУ ФОЛКА И
ЧАЛГЕ: ПОЛИТИКА, ТРЖИШТЕ И ДАНАШЊЕ УСМЕРЕЊЕ
(Резиме)

Овај чланак испитује перформативан однос између фолклора, тржишта и државе, и то кроз анализу политике бугарске музике за свадбу. У периоду социјализма, ова музика је од стране власти осуђена и искључена из категорије фолклора, али је имала на хиљаде обожаваалаца као контракултурна манифестација. У то време *свадбарски музичари* су се истовремено опирали државној контроли и саображавали се са њом, док је државна политика варирала између одбацивања, контроле и прилагођавања.

У постсоцијалистичком периоду *свадбарска музика* је достигла значајно признање на Западу, али је њена популарност у Бугарској ослабила пошто се појавила музичка фузија као што је *чалга* (фолк-поп) и пошто су се музичари суочили са изазовима капитализма. Како је држава узмицала и слабила, јављала су се приватна предузећа са програмима за стицање профита. Иако је она инспирисала *чалгу*, на свадбарску музику је почело да се гледа као на њену супротност – то јест, као на народну музику. У последње време, националистичке идеологије засићене *чалгом* почеле су са ревитализацијом свадбарске музике.

Постоје показатељи о значајном повратку свадбарске музике која привлачи све ширу публику у Бугарској. Године 2007. покренут је двадесетчетворочасовни телевизијски канал *Планета фолк*. Током промоције, канал се легитимисао као програм који представља „традиционални и модерни фолклор, филмове о значајним догађајима у Бугарској као и историјска и културна достигнућа.“ Програм је усмерен ка „бугарским гледаоцима код куће и у Европи... који воле Бугарску који и желе више да науче о својој родној култури и традицији“. Стварање *Планете фолк* од стране компаније Раунег, која је претходно промовисала скоро искључиво *чалгу*, јасан је знак да бројност публике свадбарске музике расте. Бугарска публика почиње да бива засићена површним сјајем и вештачким формулама *чалге*. Истовремено, свадбарска музика постаје идеолошки симбол национализма и патриотизма у периоду када дефиниција бугарског идентитета још увек чини неизвесном. *Чалга* је критикована као сувише ромска, сувише источњачка, али истовремено и као сувише западњачка, сувише слична евро-попу. Иронија је у томе да је музика за свадбу трпела исту критику у време социјализма, а да је сада слављена као најчистија народна музика. Националистичке странке, као што је Атак, оптужују *чалгу* да изопачава историјско језгро вредности Бугарске; оне охрабрују бугарске патриоте да подрже народну музику, а за компанију Раунег, то је свадбарска музика. Тако је популарност ове музике данас, баш као и у времену социјализма, зависна од високо исполитизоване околине у којој се поново расправља о значењу бугарског идентитета.

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