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"Move Over Madonna"

Gender, Representation, and The "Mystery" of Bulgarian Voices

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When New York Times critic Jon Pareles wrote "Move over Madonna, tastemakers on two continents are embracing a Bulgarian women's choir" (1988, 27), he both reflected and promoted the Bulgarian music craze that swept the United States and Western Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Whereas people used to stare at me incredulously when I said I was studying Bulgarian folk music, in that era Bulgarian CDs were prominently displayed in Tower Records, critics proclaimed Bulgarian folk music "the most beautiful music on the planet,"[1] and rock and classical stars waxed eloquent about the group Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares (The Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices) and collaborated with them in "crossover" productions. Following Steven Feld, who wrote that "transcultural record productions tell specific stories about accountability, authorship and agency, about the workings of capitalism, control and compromise" (1994, 258), I discuss the historical background of Bulgarian choral music, highlighting issues of labor (both socialist and capitalist), representation, and gender in the transcultural dialogue between East and West.[2] Furthermore, I locate my discussion of Bulgarian choirs within the theoretical frameworks of the emerging literature on the conception, marketing, and imagery of "world music."

It is no accident that the term "world music" was gaining ground precisely

at the time when the Bulgarian choirs first toured the West; the choir's fame in the West was intricately entwined with the emerging marketing success of "world music." According to Timothy Taylor, this term gained currency when it replaced the terms "ethnic," "folk," and "international" and began to be used as a sales category, marked by the debut of *Billboard*'s world music chart in 1990 (1997, 3–5; also see Feld 2000, 146–150). As Steven Feld remarks, "the phrase swept through the public sphere first and foremost signaling a global industry, one focused on marketing danceable ethnicity and exotic alterity on the world pleasure and commodity map" (2000, 151). World music is, indeed, a fruitful arena for examining global flows of commodities and symbols in a charged atmosphere revealing multiple representations of "difference" and conflicts over who has rights to sell what to whom. The Bulgarian case is particularly rich because we may examine all of the above within the contrasting contexts of socialism and postsocialism.

Steven Feld characterizes the scholarship on world music of the last decade as focusing either on anxiety or celebration, loss or gain. On one hand, anxious accounts stress the loss of musical diversity that accompanies increased homogeneity (Alan Lomax's cultural "gray-out") and the "complicity of world music in commodifying ethnicity," noting that there is little possibility of resistance to world capitalistic institutions. On the other hand, celebratory accounts uncover active resistance, laud reappropriations of Western forms, and revere the emergence of local, creative, hybrid genres (ibid., 53). My analysis of Bulgarian choirs is an anxious tale, but it is not one that isolates capitalism as the enemy. A significant danger of the anxious narrative is the tendency to essentialize a prior authenticity (socialist or presocialist), which is then contrasted with a degraded and exploitative capitalist commodity. In my analysis, there is no prior authenticity, rather merely a series of historical moves wherein music is part of ideological and commodity exchanges within both socialism and postsocialism.

The Emergence of Bulgarian Choirs

The form of Bulgarian vocal music which attracted the most attention in the West in the 1980s was the a cappella female chorus, a form "invented"[3] in 1951 by the Bulgarian composer Filip Kutev (1903–1982). Kutev's brilliant idea was to take traditional village songs, which are monophonic in most of Bulgaria or have drone-based harmony in the southwest region of the country, and arrange them into four- or five-part Western harmonies and add dynamics and tempo changes while preserving the throat-placed vocal quality.[4] With the goal of creating a national folk chorus, Kutev traveled around Bulgaria in the early 1950s to recruit the best female village singers and instrumentalists for the newly formed state-sponsored music ensembles.[5] Choruses featured female singers because singing in Bulgaria is predominantly a female tradition; ritual and work songs, for example, are almost exclusively sung by women.

Moreover, women are symbolically associated with tradition and nationalism, a point I develop below. Singer Kremena Stancheva recounts, "The Radio had a competition for folk singers. At that time the Radio had a small group of singers and instrumentalists but they decided to create a large ensemble—a female choir and male instrumentalists. . . . I also received an invitation from Filip Kutev to be in his ensemble, but they constantly traveled inside and outside the country, while the Radio choir just made recordings. The working hours were fixed, so I decided to try. Singers from all regions were accepted into our ensemble."

With the formation of the choruses, singers from all parts of the country sang together for the first time, not their own local music but ensemble compositions based on traditional songs and authored by composers. Stancheva remarks, "Our choir was a school for conductors and composers. Those that could compose and those that couldn't all wrote music for the Radio Choir. We had no choice but to sing these songs." Singers were taught how to alter dynamics and tempos, how to harmonize in complex polyphony, and how to blend in a chorus. They were paid a state salary, but they were not paid for singing a village song to a composer, who then used it as the core of his composition, called an *obrabotka* (an arrangement; literally, a reworking; from the verb *rabotja*, to work). I use the male possessive pronoun deliberately because all composers were male except for Kutev's wife, Maria Kuteva. Once an arrangement was written, the composer's name was attached to it and the singer's name disappeared. The composer received an arrangement fee from the government plus a royalty fee every time the composition was performed or played on the radio. These fees were quite substantial during the socialist period and were terribly resented by singers, who felt exploited.[6] According to Stancheva, "In terms of royalties, folk singers were in the most disadvantaged position. We sing the songs; the composer arranges them, changes them; they get the royalties . . . we get nothing." Note that the linguistic coding of how Bulgarian singers conceive of singing a song for composer is with the verb "to give"—"I gave a song to a composer." This illustrates the lack of control a singer exerted over her song once it was "given" to a composer.

The gender coding of the above arrangement was obvious: females/singers worked for and delivered material to males/composers; the latter received the profit from the former's work. But more than just an unequal labor relationship, this was also an unequal artistic relationship. The songs were commodities delivered into the hands of males who often had radically different ideas of musical taste. Stancheva remarks that when her solo songs were recorded by Radio Sofia, the instrumental accompaniments fashioned by composers destroyed the regional style: "The first time we singers would hear the instrumental accompaniments was at the recording sessions. Some of these accompaniments ruined our songs—often they had no connection with the style of our music. We weren't allowed to comment or object to these accompaniments—we were only singers."

The above practices demonstrate that despite the rhetoric of socialist equality, women in the arts held less decision-making power than men. Furthermore, despite claims to employment equality, females held inferior positions in the labor hierarchy—they were paid less and had fewer benefits. As Daskalova remarks, "Despite the communist regime's self-congratulatory assertions about gender equality and equal employment opportunities, these patterns are well documented for the communist period" (2000, 341). In Bulgaria, the situation within the arts paralleled the larger occupational hierarchy: women were clustered in low-paying professions, including the textile, shoe, and leather industries and in teaching, health care, and accounting. The arts were considered one notch up from these professions, but within the arts, singers were indeed many notches down from composers and arrangers. As we will see below, this hierarchy changed little after the introduction of capitalism.

In the socialist period, ensemble music became a significant ideological marker of the elevation of "folk" (or "peasant") to the realm of "nation": it was hailed as the "national music" of Bulgaria, as opposed to competing regional and ethnic musics and the popular/folk fusions played at weddings.[7] Composers, ethnomusicologists, and Party ideologues boasted that they were raising the level of folk music to that of Western art music.[8] This was part of a state-sponsored initiative to "modernize" peasant culture in diverse realms. Folklore had to be "cleaned up" and reworked to make it "art." During the socialist period, ensemble music received prime media space; ensemble music was almost ubiquitous on the radio and represented Bulgaria at festivals of music held in various socialist countries. Moreover, two high schools and a pedagogical institute at the college level were formed to train young people for ensembles. In spite of government sponsorship, however, ensemble music never was and still is not widely accepted by the Bulgarian public. Perhaps because of its homogenized sound, its predictability, its removal from the "folk," and its association with socialism, ensemble music was rejected by most Bulgarians.[9] Bulgarians were certainly proud that the West admired Bulgarian choral music, but at home nobody listened to it. At home, a very different kind of music swept the country in a craze during the 1970s and 1980s—"wedding music." Combining the loudness and intensity of rock music with breakneck speed, dazzling improvisations, and eclectic quotes reminiscent of jazz, wedding music embodied a Western modernity which was tantalizingly forbidden under regulated socialism (Silverman 1996). Ironically, then, as Bulgarian audiences rejected the socialist music of choirs, the West embraced it as "mysterious, ancient, and seductive."

Even though males as well as females were part of government ensembles, the socialist government promoted the symbolic association of women with traditional music through visual and aural means. For example, Bulgarian women in peasant costume were ubiquitous images for concerts, records, and tourist posters. Women were perceived as closer to local custom and lore, and indeed during the 1950s some villages lost most of their males in outmigration

to town industry. As Kligman pointed out for Romania, "Women are now the practical tenders of tradition for their families, their villages and the state" (1988, 257). It is ironic that women were displayed symbolically as tradition-bearers precisely at the time that women were being recruited away from villages into wage labor for music ensembles which did not perform traditional music. The latter were part of a larger trend in all East European socialist countries, whereby women were mobilized away from private village agriculture into industry. The symbol, however, transcended the specific circumstances; the power of the equation women = tradition is intertwined with a related association, that of women with nation.[10] As Martha Lampland points out, "The frequency with which the nation was represented as women in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is well known. . . . Visual representation gave form and physical presence to these symbols" (1994, 288). Furthermore, European nationalism required a particular form of gender relationships, most notably the regulation of female sexuality and reproduction in the service of the state: "The trope of the nation-as-women of course depends for its representational efficacy on a particular woman as chaste, dutiful, daughterly and maternal" (Parker, Russo, Sommer, and Yaeger 1992, 6). As we will see below, the image of the chaste or maternal female peasant needed to be altered significantly to refashion Bulgarian women into pop stars.

Western Promoters Invent the "Mystery"

The female Bulgarian singer was reinvented when Western music producers and marketers entered the representation process. In 1987, Nonesuch/Elektra Records released an album of the Bulgarian State Radio and Television Female Vocal Choir (henceforth referred to as the Choir) with the title *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* (*The Mystery of Bulgarian Voices*), and the public went wild, first in Western Europe and then in the United States.[11] Volume one of *Le Mystère* sold over a quarter of a million copies (Kohanov 1991, 73), and volume two won the 1990 Grammy for Best Traditional Folk Performance.[12] Also in 1987, Hannibal issued the LP *Balkana: The Music of Bulgaria*, which featured vocal arrangements by the Trio Bulgarka (composed of former members of the Choir), plus solos and instrumental performances. This record was also a hit in Western Europe and the United States and was followed by the Trio's *The Forest Is Crying* (*Lament for Indje Voivode*). The Choir first toured the United States in 1988 to sold-out audiences. A bevy of other choruses formed and reformed in Bulgaria after 1989 to capitalize on the success of the Choir and Trio Bulgarka. Subsequent tours of the Choir and other related choirs during the 1990s created what *USA Today* called "Bulgaria Hysteria: What has 52 feet, the voice of an angel and counts Linda Ronstadt and Jerry Garcia as fans? The Bulgarian State Radio and Television Female Vocal Choir" (1988).

Why the sudden popularity of Bulgarian music in the West? There is no

doubt that the 1980s craze of world beat and ethnopop had opened listeners to many kinds of folk music (Miller 1988, 72–74). No doubt the dissonant harmonies, additive rhythms,[13] expressive ornamentation, throat-placed vocal style, and superb technical abilities of the singers were all very striking. But whereas African and Caribbean musics have had points of entry into American popular music via jazz and gospel, Bulgarian a cappella singing has little in common with the drum kits and synthesizers of world beat.[14] The marketing strategy of Nonesuch and other companies deliberately exoticized the music as ethereal and ancient, perhaps the opposite pole from ethnic and peasant.[15] By now, this has become a common technique in world music marketing, as witnessed by the marketing of the music of the Gyuto Monks and other Tibetan and Mongolian groups. In their case, although the musical style was largely remote for Western audiences, the appeal was in its "spirituality." Taylor reminds us that the popularity of New Age cultures fits right into the trend of "spiritualization that western listeners impose on this decontextualized and reritualized music" (1997, 25).

In the case of the Bulgarian choirs, marketing tropes capitalized on remoteness, but they were less about the "sacred" and more about the "mystery." In fact, the choir soon began to be referred to as "The Mystery." Composer Ingram Marshall wrote in volume one's liner notes that "it is really the uniqueness of these singing voices, the 'mystery' of their clarity, tempered by seductive loveliness, which ultimately enchants our ears" (1987). Reviewers and journalists expanded the theme of mystery: *Rolling Stone* said the music "offered transporting sensual experiences to audiences" (De Curtis 1988). *Newsday* said it "achieves a spectral sonic beauty . . . is hypnotic. . . . The notes seem to float" (Williams 1988). *The Christian Science Monitor* lauded "shimmering, other-worldly voices" (Duncan 1988), and the Hult Center for the Performing Arts (Eugene, Oregon) wrote:

> Trained in centuries-old, secret vocal tradition, their voices resonate with a dense, ravishing mixture of exotic dissonances and gorgeous romantic timbres. Listeners the world over have been drawn to the mysteriously haunting songs of the all-female 24-voice Bulgarian State Radio and Television Female Vocal Choir. Performing arrangements of ancient East European folk songs and chants, these women sweep through a profusion of eerie, heartbreaking harmonies. Dark sighs. Strong, cutting resonant power. . . . Hear the other-worldly sounds that evoke a heartbreakingly distant past. (1990–1991)

Promoters highlighted three main elements of the music: mystery, women, and antiquity. The East European female voice became a discursive symbol for interwoven fantasies about power, mystery, and mythology. First, various historical ages are invoked by reviewers in an effort to convince us that this music is ancient. I have dated the choral style to the 1950s,[16] but nevertheless, reviewers remark that "they sound . . . like the chorus of some prehistoric

golden age delivered to us in a time machine" (Migaldi 1988). The Orpheus story connects Bulgaria to Greek mythology: "What do the Bulgarians sound like? It may be suggesting too much, but according to Greek myth, Orpheus, the great musician, was born in Thrace which is now part of Bulgaria. And it is said that he was able to charm the gods of the underworld with his divine playing of the lyre. The Mysterious Voices of Bulgaria conjure exactly the kind of thrilling, unearthly beauty and purity of sound that this music suggests" (Weiss 1988).[17]

Second, critics slide easily from the ancient era to the middle ages, perhaps because Ingram Marshall, in the liner notes to *Le Mystère* volume one, refers to Bulgarian singing as a "mysterium; in the middle ages, this word was used to denote a guild of craftsmen, a group of people who practiced an art or skill known only to them" (1987). But in Bulgaria, all villagers sing in this manner; there are no secret groups. Few, of course, sing well. The critics, however, fantasize as follows: "Their specialty is an open-throated vocal resonance that is something of a tool of the trade, handed down in guild-like secrecy" (Moon 1988, 4D), and "There is something medieval about the Bulgarians' sound too—as if it emanated from a remote monastery where chosen women were trained in musical secrets from childhood" (Weiss 1988).[18] Finally, not only is time displaced to the past, but place is also displaced to the East. The Eastern influences in the music are noted with "Orientalist" clichés: "There is the oriental component to the Bulgarians' music—full of haunting nasal wails and vocal twists, and mesmerizing dissonances" (Weiss 1988).[19]

In the context of hyperbole and ethereal associations in liner notes, concert notes, and press releases, critics freely embellished the discursive symbols of mystery. Some brave critics criticized the lack of information in print and media (Dyer 1988); others delved into Balkan history to explain this singing style as due to the oppression of the Ottoman empire (Alarik 1988). This line of reasoning, although supported by Bulgarian nationalist anti-Turkish propaganda and espoused by the Choir's conductor and producers, has no scholarly basis. Most critics, however, simply expanded on the given mystery and dealt with the music in terms of sound (melody, harmony, and rhythm), omitting text, context, and performer background. Popular music stars and marketers alike have emphasized that the sound of the music has universal appeal: claims state that it is not tied to one ethnicity and is part of an avant-garde aesthetic. National Public Radio commented that "perhaps this is a musical truth that opens the gates to the timeless realm of all human song."[20] And Danny Kahn, director of promotions for Nonesuch said, "This music is magical. There is a difference between ethnic musics from around the world . . . but some things transcend them. . . . Everyone can listen to this."[21] There is a profound irony here: as Taylor asserts, world music lays claims to "authenticity" by virtue of its "positionality" (that is, being from a faraway place), its "emotionality" (that is, its spirituality or "realness"), and its "primality" (that is, its age) at the same time that a universal appeal is made in terms of sound

(1997, 21–28). The central irony is that world music is both strange and familiar. It also claims to be timeless and new at the same time (ibid., 28).

Perhaps more than any other marketing strategy, the endorsements of rock and popular music stars guaranteed that Bulgarian music would have an audience far wider than ethnic music fans. This phenomenon is noted by Taylor, who calls these Western stars "intermediaries" (ibid., 28). At the first press conference of the choir in November 1988, just prior to their first tour, Graham Nash was the featured speaker.[22] In addition to Nash, Pat Metheny, Paul Simon, Linda Ronstadt, George Harrison, Jackson Browne, Jerry Garcia, and David Byrne have at various times lavished praise on the music, many of whom claim to have been fans well before the 1980s. During the 1988 press conference, Graham Nash chronicled his own interest: "In 1966 Paul Simon called me over and said 'I want you to sit down and listen to this. . . . It was an overwhelming album. . . . For a member of a band somewhat renowned for harmonies, it was truly amazing music. I feel somewhat responsible for having given away over 100 of these albums." Choir concerts through the 1990s continued to draw a huge array of rock and popular music stars, and name-dropping about which famous stars were attending Choir concerts became a favorite sport of journalists.

Women, Work, and Voices

How have gender ideologies molded the female Bulgarian choir phenomenon? My analysis reveals two notions of the female singer, the first as socialist worker and the second as capitalist pop star. These radically different notions, the former a product of planned economies and the latter a product of Western media, clashed boldly during the era of the post-1989 transition. As Gal and Kligman state, "We begin with the observation that the economic and political processes of the 'transition' . . . are not gender neutral, and that one of our primary tasks would be to explore the various ways gender has been a factor in the current transformations" (*Reproducing Gender*, 4). To deconstruct gender appropriations, we must first return to history: in the 1950s, it was entirely reasonable that Filip Kutev recruited only women into the newly formed national choirs, for women were considered the preservers of Bulgarian tradition and women traditionally sang in groups more often than men. However, Kutev faced opposition from many families of excellent female singers because they were appalled at the thought of a young girl leaving a village or small town to live alone in Sofia, the capital city, to work as a professional singer. In the patriarchal family, women were expected to marry in or near their village and to adjust to a husband's career aims. I do not wish to imply that Bulgarian women did not work outside the home. Historians such as Maria Todorova have shown that many Bulgarian women worked outside the home even prior to the twentieth century, and when they worked at home in peasant agriculture they were an essential part of decision-making and re-

source allocation (1993). Furthermore, as noted above, the recruitment of women into various forms of state labor, such as industry and agricultural collectives, was happening precisely at the time of the formation of the ensembles. Despite these demographic trends of the 1950s, many parents rejected Kutev's offer to move their young (often unmarried) daughters far away to initiate independent careers; surely this offer conjured notions of the breakup of family life.

Two additional factors influenced families: first, ensemble singers traveled a great deal (from the 1950s to the 1970s to socialist countries, but in the 1980s and 1990s all over the world), taking them away from their families and domestic duties. The second factor is that traditional village values associated females singing professionally (i.e., for money) with lack of morality and lack of respect. A woman singing at family and village events for no remuneration was praiseworthy, but female singers who worked in "wedding bands" or in restaurants for tips were labeled "loose."[23] One Thracian singer remarked to me that her parents refused the offer "because it was simply out of their realm of the acceptable; it was shameful." According to singers I have interviewed, just as many families said no as said yes to the idea of their daughters joining the ensembles in the 1950s. As singer Kremena Stancheva narrated, "In general, my parents didn't want singing to be my profession, they didn't consider it prestigious enough." Clandestinely Stancheva became involved in singing; at one point she was asked to travel with the Choir to Germany: "But I didn't have a passport then; I needed my parents' permission to leave the country. So I needed to tell my parents about my secret involvement. It was the first time my father visited me in Sofia. He agreed and then decided that I could sing."

As Bulgaria developed as a socialist nation, the notion of the female professional ensemble singer became more positive, more acceptable, and more ideological. By the 1980s, female gender roles were less restrictive, even in many villages, and women had more options for mobility. Schools opened to train ensemble members, and competition for acceptance into the ensembles was fierce. The singers were viewed as ambassadors of Bulgarian culture to the outside world. Many envied the ability of ensemble performers to travel, even to the West, while ordinary Bulgarians had virtually no opportunities leave the country.[24] As Gal and Kligman note, working outside the home added to the self-esteem and self-worth of professional women (*The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, 53). It is ironic that as the ensemble singers gained in prestige, the music they sang declined in popularity at home. After a short bout of curiosity in the 1950s for hearing and seeing the new ensembles, concertgoers decreased in number. By the 1970s, albums of various ensembles remained unsold for months on record store shelves as more modern fusions of jazz, rock, and folk captured the attention of young people.

An ensemble singer was supposed to be above all a socialist worker, a woman dedicated to the ensemble, the nation, and the communist path, not a woman interested in her own career. Her dedication was both ideological and

practical. In structural terms, ensemble singers worked for the state and had no say in what they performed, when they performed, and where they performed. Artistic decisions were made by composers and conductors, and concert and tour decisions were made by managers and administrators, most of whom were male.[25] The lack of control over their performances was partly ameliorated by the ability of soloists to record solo songs with Radio Sofia. This way, the singers picked their own songs to record and were paid separately for them, but they still had no influence over the kind of orchestral accompaniment the recording would feature. As Stancheva narrates: "It was good that we soloists had the right to record as many solo songs as we wanted. Of course, everything had to pass a commission. We would go out and search for village songs." In addition, singers had no access to subsequent profits that the state radio and recording companies earned from their solo songs.

An ensemble singer was paid a monthly state salary, regardless of whether her songs became hits or not. This salary was secure and relatively high for the socialist period, but it was nowhere near the salary of a successful performer in the West. In 1988, the average state salary for an ensemble singer was roughly $210 a month (soloists received an extra $25 a month), plus a $15 per diem (to cover food) when visiting Western countries. Because Choir members wanted to augment their salaries by pocketing their per diem allowances, they regularly carried salamis and canned vegetables from Bulgaria in their suitcases. They viewed themselves as "crafty tricksters" or "brave victims" of the socialist state (Gal and Kligman, *The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, 53). Even if they had used their per diem allowances, the money would have never covered meal prices in major Western cites. During the same time period, the 30-person choir was charging $10,000–$25,000 for one performance in the United States. It is clear that the huge profits earned by both American producers and the Bulgarian government have rested on the exploitation of the performers. Also remember that the singers themselves received no royalties for their songs, as these went instead to composers/arrangers. Many of the chorus singers did not even own one copy of the ensemble and solo records on which they performed.

The marginalization of the performers and their alienation from the production of "The Mystery" became clear to me during the November 1, 1988, press conference introducing the Choir to the United States. The marketing director of Nonesuch introduced the Choir; then the Choir sang a few songs and fell silent, for no one was assigned to translate the proceedings for them. Not one of the singers was asked to speak; rather, Graham Nash was the spokesman for the Choir. Seeing him at the podium, the Choir members asked me, "Who is he?" "He is Graham Nash," I replied. "Who is that?" they queried. "He is a member of a popular American singing group, and he is a fan of yours," I answered. At that point they all wanted his autograph for their teenage children!

Besides not knowing what was happening around them, not knowing the

Choir's fees, and not being compensated fairly, the singers were socialized into a work culture of deference to the conductor and the directors and, by implication, of submission to the state. The most overt manifestation of this was the undercover agent who traveled with the Choir, making sure that nobody entertained the idea of defecting to the West. Katherine Verdery calls this dependence on the state "socialist paternalism. . . . Subjects were presumed to be grateful recipients—like small children in a family—of benefits their rulers decided for them" (1994, 228). Gal and Kligman similarly note how the state "infantilized" its citizens by dictating what they should say, believe, and do (*The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, 54). If singers, like other socialist workers, failed to show loyalty to the state (for example, by refusing to participate in patriotic parades), their jobs were in jeopardy. Privately, however, singers complained about financial arrangements and musical decisions.

This dual consciousness, or divided subjectivity, was a common feature of totalitarianism. Scholars have pointed out how the we/they divide revealed "a discursive opposition between the victimized 'us' and a new and powerful 'them' who ruled" (ibid., 55). For choir singers, "we" became associated with village folklore, and "they" became associated with the state that manipulated folklore. Some singers actively disliked many of the compositions they performed. Stancheva remarks: "I've sung these arrangements for forty years, but they are different from folk songs; they are not natural, not authentic. More recent arrangements tend toward classical music. When Kutev founded his ensemble, he did not allow warm-up exercises with the piano, he did not allow singers to read notes. In our songs, there are sometimes microtones, there are untempered intervals." Stancheva points to a loss of regional style in the arrangements; many singers preferred their own traditional village material, Moreover, all singers were outraged at the royalty fees which the composers collected every time they performed their compositions.[26]

The transformation of these socialist singer/workers into ethereal, exotic, "ancient" voices was artfully orchestrated by promoters, who submerged the women themselves and emphasized the female sound aspect of the music, devoid of text and context. Gender surfaced in female voices, not in real people. When asked directly by reporters during the 1988 press conference how the singers themselves experience the music and how Bulgarian audiences respond, one singer remarked, "This is normal music, it is not something special or exotic." To be sure, not one reporter used that comment! Another singer said she thought that the reason Bulgarian music was appealing was that "it is interesting, original, the mixed rhythms, the style of singing." Again, this was too mundane for reporters to quote. Women's voices, then, are a discursive trope embracing the mysterious, the old, the powerful, and the secretive; omitted are real women with real jobs, many of whom have very interesting life histories. Record and CD covers do not feature pictures of the Choir, for their stocky, conservative appearance would fly in the face of the "mystery." As Buchanan writes, "The absence of photographs and accurate

information about the women's ages, training, musical competence, and repertoires in promotional materials in effect became part of the seductive 'mystery' of the musical sound, conjuring fantasies in the minds of reviewers as to how these women might appear" (1996, 197). Indeed, many audience members were surprised to find that singers were elderly and often stocky in appearance.

Buchanan further suggests that Western ideas about the authenticity and purity of pastoralism play a role the marketing of Bulgarian choral music (ibid., 197; 1997). While I agree that choir singers are often depicted by marketers as authentic villagers singing naturally (whereas actually many are school-trained and others left their villages in the 1950s), I also observe the suppression by marketers of associations with village life. The most important evidence of this is the omission of song texts from many liner notes and concert programs. More than anything else, the texts of these songs link them to village life, especially agriculture and shepherding. Depicting the life cycle, the emotions of traditional life, and the seasons in relation to the land, song texts are revealing interpretations of peasant life. Yet few reviewers devote any attention to them, and for marketers they are better left untranslated. The Choir's costumes, too, reveal the ambivalent nature of their folk roots. In most concerts of the Choir, singers wear peasant costumes during the first half and perform without a conductor. During the second half, they wear tailored black gowns and perform with a conductor. I view this transformation of costume and style as a statement that the Choir has transcended its pastoral roots and found a home in the world of the elite, high art chorus. Composers such as Kutev actively espoused this philosophy. Nonesuch promotions director Danny Kahn explained to me that Choir press kits deliberately avoided connections to folklore: "This music should be compared with Itzhak Perlman, not the Rustavi Georgian Choir." Referencing the search for universal appeal, Kahn commented that the fame of folk, ethnic, and popular artists is short lived in the record business. "We don't want to cultivate the pop music connection. Anything that is ethnic or pop is temporary. The Choir is artistically beyond that. The public wants modern things. They are interested in beautiful music, not the fact that it is Bulgarian."[27] The Choir's relationship to the pop realm, however, is a bit more ambivalent than Kahn suggests. Buchanan perceptively highlights the remaking of the choir "into cosmopolitan commodities by endowing them with attributes of sexual enticement linked more commonly to the performance of pop music" (1996, 196). Perhaps the pastoral must be suppressed because at critical times it appears asexual (daughterly or maternal) and thus interferes with the latent sexuality of the marketing imagery.[28]

The tension between the female image of the peasant and the image of the pop star was illustrated to me in 1989 when I accompanied the Trio Bulgarka to a fashion photographer's studio. The trio was to be the subject of a music article in the fashion magazine *Elle*, and Deborah Feingold was to do the photography (Dery 1989). A makeup and hair artist awaited the trio. Fein-

gold, used to photographing avant-garde fashion and glitzy pop stars, was stymied about how to portray these robust middle-aged grandmothers glamorously. There was simply no existing visual niche in the West for the peasant pop star. Feingold finally warmed up to the Trio's folk costumes and infectious smiles, but the resulting photograph does seem somewhat anomalous in *Elle*. Moreover, the Trio Bulgarka's 1988 performance on NBC's midnight music show *Sunday Night* was designed to usher the Trio into the world of popular music.[29]

The female Bulgarian voice, then, traffics between East and West and among folk, popular, and elite levels of art. Bulgarian female village singers were first transformed into socialist ensemble singers, veritable emblems of folklore becoming high art; then they were transformed into Western pop stars. In Western marketing, the discursive trope of the female voice was not embodied; rather, female bodies were dematerialized and the resulting disembodied female voices carried meanings suggestive of power, age, and sexuality. With the removal of human bodies came the removal of context, history, life stories of performers, and economic arrangements. To understand the music, however, the economic changes of the transition period must be considered, along with their political and cultural implications.

Collaborations, Deregulation, and Capitalism

Almost as soon as Bulgarian music hit the record charts in England and the United States, there was talk of collaboration. In 1989, English pop singer Kate Bush featured the Trio Bulgarka on her album *The Sensual World*.[30] Soon after came an offer from classical composer Terry Riley to compose a piece for the Choir together with the Kronos Quartet, and in 1989 Judith Jamison used a Choir song for her choreography *Forgotten Time* for the Alvin Ailey Dance Company.[31] The effect of these collaborations was to not only to bring Bulgarian music to the attention of wider audiences but also to decontextualize it further and present it as pure sound in the service of a greater art.[32] For example, when Kate Bush sings "Deeper Understanding" in English simultaneously with the Trio Bulgarka singing in Bulgarian in the background, the Trio's text is obscured, serving as a mere backdrop for Bush's fame.[33] Whereas in village singing the text is the most important musical element to listeners, in Bulgarian choral arrangements, the text is secondary to the sound, reflecting Western polyphonic aesthetics. In many collaborations of choirs with Western artists, a further step is taken: the text itself is obliterated or rendered unintelligible, even to native speakers.

A common theme which surfaces in Bulgarian choral collaborations is meditation (Taylor 1997, 24–26). A good example is the 1996 CD *Fly, Fly, My Sadness*, a collaboration between the Tuvan throat singers[34] Huun-Huur-Tu and the choir Bulgarian Voices-Angelite (the Angels). Although space does not permit the analysis of Huun-Huur-Tu's popularity in the West or the popularity

of Tibetan monk throat singers mentioned earlier, suffice it to say that throat singing is perceived by Americans to be exotic, mysterious, mystical, and sacred.[35] Perhaps it was these qualities which caused Ukrainian composer Mihail Alperin to pair Hunn-Huur-Tu with the Bulgarian Voices-Angelite in a collaboration produced by the Germany company Jaro, which also sponsored the album *From Bulgaria with Love* (see below). In the liner notes, Alperin claims there is a "common denominator of meditative structure" in Tuvan songs and in Bulgarian songs, specifically those from the Rhodope mountain region. Not coincidentally, Orpheus is supposed to have originated from this region. Alperin writes that his compositions are about distance, lack of motion, and time standing still, familiar tropes invoked for Bulgarian choral music.

The first and fourth selections of the CD feature Tuvan songs sung simultaneously with Rhodope melodies, the latter performed first as a solo, then in choral arrangement. The Tuvan and Bulgarian melodies intersect in a mass of overtones. This sound idea is repeated in all selections with a bit of rhythmic diversity, but the overtones are the central mystical, meditative symbol. The first selection is titled "Fly, Fly, My Sadness," perhaps a reference to the Tuvan text, but the Bulgarian text (which is almost, but not quite, obliterated) is about the plight of a girl who is about to enter an arranged marriage. This narrative is ignored in the liner notes, which state that it is "a song with the same mood and flying atmosphere as that Tuvan song." The Bulgarian narrative about the mundane lives of village women is sacrificed to the "mysteriously searching" Tuvan voices.

The CD liner notes underline another connection between Bulgarians and Tuvans: the Bulgars, before migrating to the Balkan peninsula and adopting a Slavic language and culture, were, like the descendants of the Tuvans, a Central Asian nomadic people speaking a Turkic-Altaic language. This grossly oversimplified history posits the two groups as possible distant cousins. In reality, there is nothing concrete shared by the two groups, musically or historically, but the notes suggest an Eastern connection. By pairing a Bulgarian choir with a Siberian group, Bulgarian music becomes more Eastern, hence more mystical and meditative (qualities associated with the East in Western views). In this collaboration, it is the Bulgarian women who are secondary to the Tuvan men. The Bulgarian mystery (as West) defers to the Tuvan mystery (as East).

Not only are texts obliterated in collaborations, but sounds are sampled and pasted into music collages, illustrating the trend toward decontextualization and commodification of the Bulgarian female voice. A good example is the 1992 CD *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares: From Bulgaria with Love*. This CD was produced in 1992 by Jaro, a German company which has developed a scandalous reputation for unauthorized use of the name Le Mystère, misleading liner notes, misleading photographs, and mistaken performer information.[36] *From Bulgaria with Love* features a post-1990 incarnation of the Choir with Dora Hristova as conductor, but the CD mistakenly features a rival choir

in photographs and mistakenly names Ivan Topalov, the director of the rival choir, as the director. Liner notes and a visual backdrop of gears and machinery boast the innovative crossover aspect: "a clandestine agreement between classical fans and punk, between sixties lovers and techno-freaks or to put it simply: between generations. . . . A musical high jump and crossover from folk music to modern music, from the Orient to the Occident, from pop song to techno, hard rock to disco, from cryptic music to the computer. This record leaves the usual separation between classical and pop far behind."

Musically, the CD features Choir songs edited into a technopop synthesized mix performed by a number of European, especially Italian, bands. In many of the CD's selections, the women's voices are sampled via loops; thus the melodic element is repeated as a musical theme in the rock genre rather than as a narrative.[37] These vocal pieces are also manipulated in terms of volume and speed. Not only is text obliterated but any semblance to Bulgarian melodies has been lost. Veit Erlmann reminds us of the ironic relationship between valorizing "difference" and selling "sameness" in world music: "An aesthetic theory of music in the global age would thus not be concerned with the truthful representation of difference per se. Instead, such a theory would examine the ways in which world music constructs the experience of global communication and authenticity through symbolic means whose very difference depends so vitally on their sameness as transnational commodities" (1996, 481). Erlmann recommends abandoning the search for posited authenticities, focusing instead on the histories of interactions of music with various technologies (ibid., 481). In Bulgaria, the fascination with loud rock-like amplified sounds has at least a 30-year history: After the 1960s, when electricity was introduced into villages, wedding bands started using amplification (in addition to Western instrumentation such as guitars and drum sets) and very loud volume; this became a mark of Westernization, of modernity, and soon developed into the "wedding music" craze (Silverman 1996).

Appropriations from and collaborations with rock music, then, are not new to Bulgarian music. Although more true for instrumental music, this was the case even of vocal music. In the 1970s, Emil Dimitrov, a Bulgarian rock star, incorporated the Sestri Kushlevi, a sextet of Bulgarian singers, into his album to great acclaim. In 1988, Janka Rupkina, a member of Trio Bulgarka and a former member of the Choir, sang with a Bulgarian rock band in arrangements by composer Dimitur Penev that combined traditional songs and a disco backup. This endeavor, however, failed to attract an audience in Bulgaria because the sound was too familiar and too formulaic. On the other hand, Gypsy rap music, another recent vocal "crossover" in which Romani lyrics are set to rap music, has achieved widespread popularity (ibid.).

From Bulgaria with Love continued to sell well in Western Europe and the United States, and its lead song, "Pipppero," was at the top of Italian radio charts in 1992 (Rule 1993). The sexual themes of "Pipppero" are displayed prominently in text and imagery. The melodic choral cuts are taken from the

Choir's arrangement of "Dilmano, Dilbero" ("Beautiful Dilmana"), a folk song with an accompanying dance which simultaneously mimes the planting of peppers and human sexual intercourse.[38] "Dilmano, Dilbero" had been used earlier in a collaboration between Emil Dimitrov and the Sestri Kushlevi that features heavy sighing and panting. The phallic imagery of the 1992 Jaro song is unmistakable—the description of planting peppers, the shape of Bulgarian peppers, and pictures of a banana and a pointed gun[39] on the CD sleeves. In "Pipppero," the Bulgarian text is not obliterated but is rather redirected and expanded into an Italian-language explication of European sexuality. The song is a dialogue between a band leader and the Choir about Bulgarian/Italian relations, both political and sexual (Buchanan 1996, 202–204). The dialogue expands the theme of sexuality, punctuated with the chorus singing "pumps, pumps, pumps." Buchanan points out that "the 'mystery' of Bulgarian voices is conflated with the erotic dance of the pepper, which again promotes the singing of these Bulgarian vocalists as sensually potent" (1996, 204). Yet the fit between peasant singers and sexual pop stars is not easy. It seems as if sexuality has become a convenient common denominator between East and West, and music is one of many forms of its dissemination.

Both within and beyond the sphere of music, female sexuality in Bulgaria has been appropriated and packaged to sell. The post-1989 explosion of pornography all over Eastern Europe has led to a proliferation of images of scantily clad women in all forms of media. Compact disk and cassette covers and music videos which contain post-1990 folk/popular music fusions (commonly known as *chalga*) regularly feature provocative female singers and sometimes nudity. Besides being a product of newfound "freedom," this phenomenon has economic, political, and discursive dimensions. As Daskalova notes, "[T]he 'feminine' woman is perhaps the most common and widespread image of women in Bulgarian society at large" (2000, 348). Bulgarian women's magazines focus on celebrities, self-care, home furnishings, fashion, love, and beauty advice. The perfect woman emerges as beautiful, sexy, and obedient to her husband (ibid., 348–349). Sexuality during the socialist period may have been suppressed, but it was barely under the surface, ready to reemerge as a capitalist commodity.

The commodification of sexuality is tied to the burgeoning prostitution industry. In Bulgaria since the transition, prostitution has gained in respectability and glamour and is touted by many young women as one of the few jobs to offer independence, good pay, and flexible hours.[40] Moreover, some upscale secretarial jobs require sexual services.[41] Scholars note the huge increase in the number of prostitutes, the growth of places where prostitution is practiced, the influx of educated women (especially those with knowledge of foreign languages), and "the existence of legal channels for recruiting prostitutes, especially through the advertisement of jobs (or training courses) for dancers, models, and 'Miss So and So' competitions" (ibid., 346). Furthermore, prostitution often starts with violence and/or rape, is propelled by poverty, and is

boosted by the instability of postsocialism. As women lose their jobs and as state benefits are curtailed, pornography and prostitution become viable alternative jobs. Perhaps it is far-fetched to write about prostitution and choir singing in the same essay. But patterns of gender exploitation have deep historical roots in Bulgaria and crop up in diverse settings.

Simultaneous with the rise in sexual imagery of the 1990s is the increased visibility of the idea of domesticity embodied in the image of the devoted wife and mother. Women's magazines appeal to the devoted and sexy wife and mother. Whereas the mobilization to ban abortion is not as great in Bulgaria as it is in Croatia, Hungary, and Poland,[42] nationalist parties in Bulgaria actively advocate a return to the home and to motherhood (ibid.). This goes hand in hand with nationalist rhetoric about increasing the birthrate (of the Slavs only, not the minorities) to ensure the future of the country (Gal and Kligman, *The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, 2000b; Lampland 1994; Verdery 1994). Choir women are thus caught in a discursive bind about their image. Because they have been constructed since the 1950s by the Bulgarian state as rooted peasants (even though since the 1970s new recruits are largely young women from cities), there seems to be no easy way to modernize their image at home. In the West, on the other hand, fantasies can reign, and they can become ancient mysteries. Just as choir music has been supplanted in Bulgaria by folk/pop *chalga*, choir singers have been supplanted by sexy half-dressed *chalga* singers. Whereas choir singers lose out because their music is considered obsolete at home, their jobs are being curtailed, and they are not sexy enough, the sex stars of *chalga* are criticized because they are too loose and their music is not "really Bulgarian." Ironically, some choir members moonlight as *chalga* singers in a bid to make a living wage; other choir members are the fiercest critics of *chalga*, blaming the rise of this genre for the decline in popularity of folk music. Thus, women's bodies, including their voices, are a site of contestation about the nature and future of the family, the arts, and the nation.

The marketing of contrasting images of women (sex object, mother and wife, worker) with choir music is embedded in an economic matrix where capitalism asserts its hold over socialist holdovers. None of the musical collaborations mentioned above, for example, would have been possible in the Bulgaria of the 1970s, when no performers, not even the most famous musicians, were allowed to pursue independent economic ventures. The perestroika of the late 1980s, however, allowed for private contracts; for example, the Choir's tours and contracts with Nonesuch and Trio Bulgarka's contracts and tours with Hannibal.[43] In 1987–1988, despite the fact that Bulgarian performers were legally allowed to pursue an independent contract, one of the Trio's members faced many problems, both bureaucratic and personal, because she tried to perform simultaneously as a member of the Choir and the Trio. The deregulation of the 1990s led to a tangled mess of choir regroupings and layoffs (Buchanan 1966, 1997). The transition left everyone "free" to profit from the "Mystère" phenomenon, no matter how unscrupulously. The

Choir split into two groups, and legal battles ensued between producers over the rights to the use of the label "Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares." Five or more spin-off choirs have used this label, and various CDs, such as those of Jaro discussed above, list incorrect performers and feature incorrect photographs.

The legal battles over names and ownership rights should be viewed in the context of the fact that since 1989 the Bulgarian government has cut back tremendously on its funding of the ensembles. Concerts, tours, and festivals have been limited, and few ensemble performers can support themselves solely on their small state salaries, which often arrive late. As Stancheva narrates: "The Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices Choir is not employed anymore. Bulgarian Television decided they didn't need folklore anymore so they fired us. But we continue to rehearse with absolutely no salary. We rely on tours abroad. Nonetheless, we work hard, we learn new songs and we have many new young singers." Not only does the government have more pressing economic priorities but it also observes that choral music is unpopular in Bulgaria. This unpopularity, as noted above, in part derives from its association with the socialist past and with central planning. Today, a host of small private music companies operate in Bulgaria, but none seem interested in investing in the choirs because of the decline in the popularity of music at home, the inability of these companies to penetrate the Western market, and the increasing obligations to pay composers' royalties. Instead, various choirs are in competition with each other in their pursuit of Western financial backers; their only option is to arrange tours to the West via foreign sponsors. In 2000, the choir Angelite toured several American cities to small audiences. It is clear that the era of choir popularity has waned, even in the West. The singers also realize that neither "actually existing" socialism nor "actually existing" capitalism has benefited them in the long run. Stancheva reiterates: "We get nothing except fame. Even now it is like this. The last CD of the Mystery from October 1998 on Nonesuch label—when I received one of these CDs as a gift, I was surprised to see one of my songs on it. I hadn't authorized it; the producers didn't consult me, they hadn't asked me for permission. Well, all I have is one CD with my song on it, But we aren't refusing to sing yet. As long as we can, we'll sing."

The singers' current predicaments should be viewed within the larger economic situation; choir members recruited during the 1950s and 1960s are now retiring on pensions which are virtually worthless today. In Bulgaria, it is widely noted that the transition led to general "mass impoverishment," especially among the elderly. Currently state jobs are disappearing or provide substandard wages, and "women are less likely to find jobs in the private sphere, which tend to pay better" (Daskalova 2000, 338, 340). Discrimination against women shows up in average wage levels and in the fact that women have fewer chances to work in the areas in which they were trained (ibid., 340). Scholars note that throughout Eastern Europe, it is young men who are moving into the rapidly expanding private sector. "It is men more than women

who are increasingly associated with the idealized and even romanticized private . . . capitalist sector of the economy" (Gal and Kligman, *The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, 59). Choral singers are generally absent in the sphere of capitalist entrepreneurship of their own music. Bulgarian choir promoters and agents are men. Usually they are businessmen; only rarely are they musicians. Some singers are very reluctant to embark on capitalist projects concerning music. Trained under socialism to receive funding for the arts from the state, they are resentful of the curtailing of that support. Some wait patiently for a new impresario and a new tour, but others have forged new musical careers. Kremena Stancheva, for example, teaches singing at a private university in Sofia, started a singing program for young children, and hopes to train Americans in Bulgarian folk music. Several singers have emigrated to the United States, where they work in nonmusical low-skill professions which they combine with teaching Bulgarian songs to Americans. One singer married a famous composer, and his connections led to several albums of her solo songs and her husband's arrangements with her as featured soloist. One singer formed a duet with her daughter and promotes the pair to foreign entrepreneurs. Several younger choir members have pursued careers in the more profitable "wedding music" or folk/pop *chalga* circuit.[44] In short, singers, even though they perceive themselves as victims, are not passive; they are actively engaged in ameliorating their situations. As noted by many scholars of the region, women craft together a patchwork of jobs to make ends meet. "Women's diverse strategies of combining irregular and informal employment with regular jobs in the state sector are the response to the constraints produced by postsocialist state policies" (Gal and Kligman, *The Politics of Gender After Socialism*, 81).

In 1988, Steven Feld raised the issue of clashing claims to the ownership of music in world music crossovers (1988, 31–34). Although pop stars "use" ethnic musics in their collaborations, they usually retain copyrights for themselves, in spite of the fact that some donate part of their profits to the ethnic musicians. The endorsements and even collaborations of rock stars do not alter the asymmetry of power relations in the capitalist market, where a few stars and a few companies have the power of financial backing and artistic freedom. As Feld writes, it is important not to "risk confusing the flow of musical contents and musical expansion with the flow of power relations. Even if local musicians take control in remote locales, how progressive can the world of popular music be when the practices of transnational culture industry steadfastly reproduce the forms and forces of domination that keep outsiders outside, as 'influences' and laborers in the production of pop?" (1994, 263).

Buchanan raises the question of ownership by pointing out that Bulgarian choruses and labels have been reshuffled so many times that it is not entirely clear to whom "The Mystery" belongs. In socialist Bulgaria, ownership of ensemble music was held collectively by the state, but after 1989 ownership

was transferred to private foreign enterprises (Buchanan 1996, 200, 204–205). Yet the socialist and postsocialist periods evince structural similarities as well as differences in the management of vocal ensemble music. True, deregulation has erased the hegemony of the state as employer and paternalistic supplier of social benefits; true, vocal groups are free to market themselves to Western sponsors; true, singers are surviving by combining part-time jobs. But the structure of exploitation of the performers seems to have held constant despite the change in economic regimes. During socialism, the singers were treated as wage laborers in the service of the state, regardless of the fact that it was their music and their talent which was the basis of the choral sound. The composers, the choral managers, and the state enterprises benefited financially, not the singers. Now it seems that another global system, capitalism, has become an equally, if not more powerful agent of exploitation (Kurkela 1993, 81).

Feld writes that the capitalist music business is built on three pillars: record companies make the most money (approximately 93 percent of worldwide music sales is controlled by six companies); already-famous performers are given liberal contracts with artistic freedom; and, finally, musicians are "laborers who sell their services for a direct fee, and take the risk . . . that royalty percentages, spinoff jobs, tours, and recording contracts might follow from the exposure" (1988, 36; 1991, 262). The fact that Bulgarian singers still lack control of their own performances, then, is not an aberration but a normal part of the capitalist music business. Disembodied females in the form of voices are the raw materials which the former socialist East can export to the West. Prostitutes (female bodies without voices) and choral singers (female voices without bodies) are mirror images—both are gendered commodities for sale.

The free market, then, has impacted the Bulgarian choral phenomenon in multiple ways. In the economic realm, we have traced the appropriation of musical resources as sounds and singers as laborers. In the symbolic realm, we have traced the emergence of the Bulgarian female voice as a commodified vehicle for Western fantasies about sexuality and bygone eras, while at home in Bulgaria the postsocialist female is being redefined and the postsocialist singer is being fired. This gendered flow of people, images, and discourse is part of the transnational traffic that constitutes East/West interfaces.

NOTES

1. This quote is attributed to the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and appears as a sticker on the album *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares*, volume 1, Elektra/Nonesuch, 1987.

2. The research on which this article is based spans 1972 to 1999. Fieldwork on the Choir's marketing began in November 1988, when I served as a translator for the first press conference of the Bulgarian Radio Television Choir and accompanied singers around New York City. In April 1991, I served as their concert liaison, lecture/demonstration organizer, and translator in Eugene, Oregon. I also worked with the Trio Bulgarka as translator and concert liaison in 1988 in New York City and in May 1989 in Eugene. I had previously talked with many of the singers during numerous trips to

Bulgaria since the 1970s. Most recently, I interviewed Kremena Stancheva, a singer in the Bulgarian Radio Television Choir in 1999. Translations from Bulgarian are my own.

3. I use the word "invented" in the spirit of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), connoting the elevation of a selected part of culture to the level of national tradition, a process often involving some fundamental reworking.

4. Kutev's model was the Piatnitskii Choir of Russia (see Smith 1996); this was part of a wider pattern in which Bulgaria modeled its cultural policy after that of the USSR, its closest ally.

5. In 1951, Kutev founded the State Ensemble for Folk Songs and Dances (sometimes known as the Kutev Ensemble or the State Ensemble), composed of a female chorus, a folk orchestra, and a dance group; in 1952, Georgi Bojadzhiev founded the Ensemble for Folk Songs of Bulgarian Radio and Television (sometimes known as the Radio/Television ensemble), composed of a chorus and a folk orchestra. Herein I employ the term Choir to refer to the chorus in this ensemble. In the 1960s, many regional ensembles were formed.

6. This fee structure and exploitation was identical for instrumental ensembles, which were composed of males; see Buchanan 1995.

7. For an analysis of wedding music, see Silverman 1996.

8. For example, Bulgarian ethnomusicologist Todor Todorov said, "The polyphonic development of folk music by composers is a normal stage in its existence. This stage had to come as a natural solution to the problem of the new function of the song . . . to satisfy . . . the wider musical interests of contemporary man" (1976, 179).

9. See Buchanan 1995.

10. In the Bulgarian language, Bulgaria is a feminine noun.

11. The album, recorded by Marcel Cellier, was, in fact, first released in 1975; it received a Grande Prix in Paris but sat in obscurity until it was reissued by the British label 4AD in 1986, when it became a hit. Finally, Nonesuch/Elektra picked it up in 1987.

12. Volume 1 mistakenly attributes all songs to the Choir and mistakenly cites Kutev as its director; Kutev was never the Choir's director, but the album does feature a few selections by the Kutev ensemble. Volume 2 has more correct citations and includes a number of choirs. This confusion is discussed in detail in Kohanov 1991 and Buchanan 1997.

13. Bulgarian music is based on combinations of short and long beats in the ratio of 2:3, such as the *ruchenitsa:* 2-2-3.

14. See Rice 1989, 4–5. See below for a discussion of collaborations between Bulgarian choruses and rock groups.

15. Two articles by Donna Buchanan (1996 and 1977) perceptively analyze the marketing of the "Mystery." My article extends the analysis of marketing, public perception, and gender representation and relates it to the postsocialist economic and political transition.

16. Note that I am dating the choral arrangements to the 1950s, not the village songs on which they are based. Some of the latter may well be over a hundred years old, while others can be dated as recent creations of twentieth-century villagers. To complicate the matter, new texts are often written to older melodies and new melodies are often composed to older texts. In sum, scholars simply cannot date many songs, and they know very little about the ancient music of the Balkans. In fact, we really know very

little about vocal music of previous centuries except for liturgical music, which is a distinctly separate genre.

17. Also see Christgau 1988, who writes "this Asian/European chorus from the place the Greeks called Thrace and said Orpheus came from, is the world music/new music/new age/underground phenomenon of the past two years" (55).

18. See Lozaw 1988, who writes, "The concert was a startling mix of remarkable vocal control, medieval traditions, delicate grace, and creative flourishes that could almost be considered avant garde" (17). Also see Buchanan 1997, 149–153 for analysis of a Bulgarian quartet performing a reworked Palestrina mass.

19. See also Dery 1989, who wrote about the Trio Bulgarka: "Silhouetted against stained-glass windows, they break into a buzzing, nasal melody, punctuated by sudden yips and glisses, floating over Asian-sounding chordal drones. . . . Their tangled lines, ornamented with microtonal flourishes, are as intricate as Arabic calligraphy" (156).

20. Tom Manoff, reviewer for National Public Radio, quoted by Peter Clancy, marketing director for Nonesuch records at a press conference in New York, November 1, 1988.

21. Personal communication, October 31, 1988.

22. Graham Nash is a vocalist with the pop vocal group Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. He had taken a night flight to New York to officiate; he flew back to Los Angeles that afternoon. Later in 1988, he hosted a Los Angeles press conference for the choir which featured Linda Ronstadt.

23. Many of these professional singers were Roma (Gypsies). For centuries Roma have had an important place as professional musicians in the Balkans (Silverman 1999 and in press); simultaneously there has been strong discrimination and prejudice against them (Silverman 1995). Similarly, Tim Rice points out that professional male Rom musicians in Thrace were looked down upon because they played for money; their ability to play, however, was admired (1994). Also see Buchanan 1995, 386.

24. Prior to 1988, the Kutev ensemble traveled more widely than the Choir, the latter being a studio ensemble. Choir members, however, were sometimes sent as soloists or in small groups to Western countries.

25. See Buchanan 1995 for similar observations about male instrumentalists.

26. Similar observations have been reported by Donna Buchanan for instrumentalists in ensembles (1995).

27. Danny Kahn, personal communication, March 4, 1990.

28. Buchanan also suggests that the sexual may be contained within the pastoral, for in Bulgarian mythology, female nature spirits have the power to enchant men musically (1997, 134–135). Western audiences, however, would not be aware of these associations.

29. Similarly, during 1988, the Choir performed for television audiences on *The Today Show*, *The Tonight Show*, *MTV News*, VH-1's *New Visions*, and *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings* (Kohanov 1991, 71–72).

30. Trio Bulgarka is also featured on Kate Bush's 1993 CD *The Red Shoes*.

31. Buchanan discusses a collaboration in 1994 between the Bulgarka Jr., 3+1 Trio, a few male instrumentalists, and an organist in a performance of a rewritten Palestrina mass (1997, 149–153).

32. See Feld 1988, 1991, and 2000 for similar observations regarding some collaborations in other parts of the world. See below for the economic implications.

33. I do not mean to imply that Kate Bush disrespects the Trio. On the contrary,

Bush said: "I was very worried because chances were it might not work, particularly because they are so good. It might just sound like we bunged them in a Western track. I really didn't want them to be dragged down to my level. I was worried that they wouldn't want to get involved in Western music because it has a bad name" (Brown 1988, 10). My point is that the structure of collaboration is basically asymmetrical, with the West in control.

34. Throat singing is characterized by the production of two simultaneous pitches by one person; a melody is produced by emphasizing various pitches in the harmonic series above a fundamental drone note. Some Bulgarian singing employs drones, but no overtones are produced and only one pitch is produced at one time by one person.

35. For Tibetan monks, throat singing is sacred, but for Tuvans (residents of southern Siberia) it is secular.

36. Jaro's title was probably taken from the Ian Fleming spy novel *From Russia With Love*, which also became a James Bond movie. See Buchanan 1996 and 1997 for a detailed history of Jaro releases.

37. For example, in selection 5, "Jana," the word *zamraknala* (it was getting dark) is reduced to *zamrakna* and sampled via computerized loops.

38. In Bulgarian folklore, human fertility is often associated with agricultural fertility.

39. The gun also refers to selection 6, "Guns and Paprica [*sic*]," a rock version of the Bulgarian song "Pushka Pukna Gjule Moj" ("A Gun Went Off, My Love"). The gun may refer to the Italian/Bulgarian connection in the attempt to kill the pope (also see Buchanan 1996, 207).

40. Dimitrina Petrova, prominent Bulgarian feminist and human rights activist, personal communication.

41. See Perlez 1996 for comparative situation in other East European countries.

42. One reason for the anti-abortion stance in Hungary, Croatia, and Poland is that these nations are primarily Catholic; Bulgaria, on the other hand, is primarily an Eastern Orthodox nation.

43. In 1988, however, Bulgarian wedding musicians Ivo Papazov and Yuri Yunakov were denied a visa when contracted to tour for Hannibal Records. This refusal was probably linked to the fact that they are Turkish Roma (Gypsies), and the "authenticity" of their music was questioned by the government (see Silverman 1996, 1999).

44. This path is easier for women who are married to male instrumentalists, since there is still a stigma attached to women performing at weddings or in clubs without a male relative.

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