

# FOLK SONGS OF MONTENEGRO – FROM THE FIRST FIELD RECORDINGS OF MIODRAG A. VASILJEVIĆ TO PUBLISHED COLLECTIONS

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this work is to introduce the general public to the enthusiasm, dedication and engagement of Miodrag A. Vasiljević (1903-1963), Serbia's most renowned ethnomusicologist and music pedagogue, to melographic work. His melographic journey through the lands of Montenegro has been reconstructed from, among relevant sources, documents from the Miodrag A. Vasiljević Archive. A survey of the numerous collections of recorded folk songs has led to an in-depth look at the ethnomusicological collection Folk Songs of Montenegro in the Published Melographic Records of Miodrag A. Vasiljević, published by the Montenegro Academy of Science and Art and the Montenegro Music Centre in 2019. Vasiljević had, through melographic records, notes on folk singers, and studies, worked creatively by offering not only a written record, but also active communication across a great distance, thanks to the layered nature and levels of meaning in his approach to ethnomusicological material. His familiarisation with the formula of folk songs and with the creative functioning of folk singers is transmitted through written material and studies, and he searched for and found ways to rework a layered musical whole and operationalise it for a practical music-pedagogical application. The work also contains a look at this intriguing link between ethnomusicology and pedagogy which, through the creative work of one man, blazed a trail for both sciences in Serbia. At the same time, this connection is what makes Vasiljević unique as an ethnomusicologist and a music pedagogue, and that dialectic makes his legacy priceless.

*Keywords:* Folk Song, Montenegro, M.A. Vasiljević, Ethnomusicology, Music Pedagogy.

## SNAPSHOTS OF THE LIFE OF A MELOGRAPHER IN THE LANDS OF MONTENEGRO

Miodrag A. Vasiljević (1903-1963), Serbia's most renowned ethnomusicologist and music pedagogue, was born in the village of Zakuta to a family of teachers. He began practising music as a high schooler, in the Music Society in Kruševac. He began his musical studies in Prague, and finished them in Belgrade in the class of Dr. Miloje Manojlović. His first professional position was in Skoplje in 1931, where he taught sheet singing in the Men and Women High Schools and in the Skoplje music school.

At the invitation of composer and his former professor Kosta Manojlović (1890-1949), in 1937 he moved to the Music School as part of the Music Academy in Belgrade, and shortly thereafter to the Music Academy, where he remained until his passing in 1963. In addition to his activities at the Teaching Department (now the Department of Solfeggio and Music Pedagogy), Vasiljević was the founder and first head of the Department of Ethnomusicology and one of the founders of the Union of Yugoslav Folklorists.



Figure 1 – Miodrag A. Vasiljević (1903–1963)

Vasiljević had begun to work in melography at a young age. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, having clearly noticed the unique qualities of the folklore in the region, he began creating ethnomusicological studies that did not rely on the then-modern European analytical style. The first complete collection of ethnomusicological recordings from then-Macedonia, which were collected during official trips there from 1931 to 1937, was lost in the bombing of Belgrade on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1941. Fortunately, Vasiljević was able to reconstruct much of this material following the Second World War.

The first songs from Montenegro and Sandžak were recorded by Vasiljević while on official business in Skoplje<sup>1</sup>, from teacher Rista Marjanović, born in Pljevlja, and his wife Jelena. In the Foreword to the Sandžak collection, he noted that he had been deeply intrigued by the collected material, and he felt compelled to visit Sandžak in 1934 and 1935 (Vasiljević, 1953). Unfortunately, this material, as well as the complete material from Macedonia, was burned down in the April 6 bombing of Belgrade in 1941. Following the end of World War 2, Vasiljević resumed his melographic work. In 1946 he travelled to the Kosmet (Kosovo and Metohija), and then to Sandžak the following year. He made his first post-war

<sup>1</sup> From 1931 to 1937.

melographic expeditions with only notebooks, and no magnetic tape recorder, visiting villages and hamlets on foot, on horseback or by carriage, “just as Kuhać and Kuba did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (Đurić-Klajn 1965, IX).

Vasiljević would set off on his trips thoroughly prepared. This entailed examining available historical and geographical information, complemented by “verbal descriptions from people familiar with the conditions in the area he was currently in” (Jerkov 2006, 67), however in spite of that it was difficult to predict if singers would be willing to cooperate. The most credible account of his life in the field and the skill with which he was able to approach singers is provided by his companion in life, Ana Vasiljević.<sup>2</sup> In her memoirs of her husband, preserved in the Miodrag A. Vasiljević Archive<sup>3</sup>, she writes: “Everything the people have invented and created, he loved. He was interested in peasant huts and hamlets, the creation of milk products, the swarming of bees, old ladies sitting at the loom, lumberjacks in the woods... He had his own unique way of winning them over to his work... Himself a good singer, he was always the first to sing a song from those parts and so encourage singers to tell him their texts or to sing... He did not find it difficult to hike, with a rucksack on his back and a bag full of music sheets, over the tallest of mountains”.<sup>4</sup> At one point, Ana and Miodrag found themselves travelling between villages by two-wheel carriage. While stopped to rest, Ana records that “The peasant had us disembark, watered his horse, put a bucket of feed around his neck, and we went to the inn to rest and get a drink. The carriage driver shared a cup of ‘Ružica’ with the innkeeper and turned his cart around and left, leaving us with strangers in a strange land. But Milo’s ability to establish a rapport with the peasants was impeccable. He called over the hostess who was at the bar, and a pretty peasant girl (a cousin of the host’s), made everyone’s drink orders, and said: ‘well today is my wife’s birthday, so I’ll pay’. He began to sing, and rapport was established”.<sup>5</sup>

Ana Vasiljević notes that in the summer of 1949 he “continued his field work and simultaneously prepared material for *Jednoglasi solfedo*...<sup>6</sup> He writes constantly. Anywhere and everywhere. He writes on the train, in the village houses where he spends the night when he’s in the field, in the room at the inn, on the ship, in the hills and valleys whenever he sits down to rest from a long walk, and wherever else he finds a quiet moment to work”.

And so, two days after arriving in Montenegro, after a five day journey through Rijeka, Split and Dubrovnik, Vasiljević writes in a later dated August 19 1949 that “I have already rested from the journey and started, at the crack of dawn, working on the textbook *Solfeggio*. I was so naive to think that I could work on it on

<sup>2</sup> Ana Vasiljević (1905-1986, née Sirovatka) frequently accompanied Miodraga in the field and helped him with his note-taking. In the collection *Folk Melodies from Sandžak* it is noted that she was the one who enabled “contact with the female Muslim world and helped collect texts” (Vasiljević 1953, IX).

<sup>3</sup> The Miodrag A. Vasiljević Archive which preserves original documents, manuscripts, melographical records, correspondence with colleagues and partners, notes from teaching, etc. is in the family’s possession.

<sup>4</sup> Miodrag A. Vasiljević Archive F2, 10g, 10h, 10i.

<sup>5</sup> Miodrag A. Vasiljević Archive F2, 10s.

<sup>6</sup> *One-Voice Solfeggio*.

the boat. The boat however turned out to be so crowded that I spent more time on my feet... than seated. There was no way I could write these past two days”.

Мили моји,

Ево ме у Никшићу већ други дан. Забележити сам мало песама, али са материјалом која биде има нисам задовољан, јер, углавном, шта сећа на кафану и на Босанску себаличку. Светлих сељачких песама има код грађана врло мало. Срећом, у Никшићу ради се у време фестивала музике. Ту је сакупљено око 350 омиљаких и гитараке земље. Са овом ту ми овршавамо једно изредавање и музички аспект да ми се јако чебама. Ако биде ме усрбем, мораћу ићи да се.

Figure 2 – Excerpt of the letter from Nikšić, 25.08.1949

The next day Vasiljević would travel from Podgorica to Cetinje to meet with the minister for education, and continues on to Nikšić. He would write from this town on the 25<sup>th</sup> of August, stating that he was not overly satisfied with the melographic material collected thus far, but that he was planning to hold a lecture at the Teaching School, which had been host to over 350 teachers from across Yugoslavia during the summer break, and that he was hoping to entertain some singers among them.

After Nikšić, Vasiljević travelled to Pljevlje where, during his ten days spent there, he did not write a single letter. The reason for this is that he could contact his family by phone, and had an abundance of work to do, both in melography and putting together notes. In his next letter from Bijelo Polje, dated September 17 (Figure 3), he writes that he was “very much spoilt by Pljevlje and those telephone calls”, and he continues excitedly that he has found “a folkloric bounty”. In his first three days in Bijelo Polje he collected 126 songs, which brought the total number up to 400.

Бijело Поље ме са материјалом пона-  
нарило. Биде је фолклорни мајрац. За штр  
дана забележио сам 126 песама. Убрзо са  
до броја 400. Нисам да ће ови у Радио Ти-  
штраду ме на фестивалу бити врло задовољ-  
ни.

Figure 3 – Excerpt of the letter from Bijelo Polje, 17.09.1949

In his next letter from Berane, he informs the family of “his situation” regarding melography, and notes that it is going excellently, seeing as he had written down 172 melodies in Bijelo Polje, “quite unlike any place thus far”.

At that time, in the summer of 1949, in the month he’d spent in Montenegro, Vasiljević had collected 434 folk songs, and stated, not hiding his excitement, that this had exceeded his expectations, considering his unfamiliarity with the area.

Знам да вас интересује моја ситуација.  
 Она је одлична. У Б.Полу записао сам 172 мелодије,  
 као и у јошким месету до сада чотиришт. Иначе  
 јучино нисам већерас 434 мелодије. То је вели-  
 кадрај за овај шерец, ја и за Санџак, који ми шере-  
 рец није одговарао.

Figure 4 – Ivograd (Berane), 20.09.1949

How preoccupied Vasiljević was with his work, and what he was thinking about, is illustrated by the continuation of this letter, where he states that he had not yet decided where he would go from there, whether to Gusinje or Konavlje, and that this decision would also govern the start of his work on writing entries for the Music Encyclopaedia, which he had been commissioned to do by the Zagreb Academy of Sciences and Arts (Figure 5). As a reminder, he was simultaneously working on *One-Voice Solfeggio*.

Овако не знам у Шимитрац. По Шимитра-  
 ца у Шучице или у Конавље. Нисам се још од-  
 лучио. Ако идем у Конавље записаћу још 74  
 Заједничку Академију Југос. и Срп. која ме чак-  
 брине да евога знам сарадника.

Figure 5 – Ivograd, 20.09.1949

In Ana Vasiljević’s memoirs it is noted that he wrote a letter from Žabljak which read “Tonight I finished *One-Voice Solfeggio*. I wrote part of it on the ship from Budva to Bar and I will soon be returning with a decent amount of Montenegrin songs and the completed *Solfeggio*. I hope to hand the manuscripts over to Prosveta for print”.

*One-Voice Solfeggio* was published the next year by Prosveta, and the Montenegro collection was updated with new material and remained in the editing phase until 1959. During this time Vasiljević visited the province of Kruševac including Kopaonik, and the collections *Folk Melodies from Sandžak* (1953) and

*Folk Melodies from the Leskovac Region* (1960) were published. According to his wife's memoirs, he eagerly awaited the publication of the songs from Montenegro. Unfortunately, "... the manuscript had remained with Prosveta for around a year. It was then transferred to a Montenegrin publishing company, then finally to the SAN Institute of Musicology which made the decision to publish in June of 1963, by which time he already had a severe heart condition, and his untimely death tore him away from his great wishes and ambitions, never to see the publishing of *Montenegro*".

#### THE COLLECTED MELODIES OF MONTENEGRO – THE LAST PUBLISHED VASILJEVIĆ MANUSCRIPTS

The ethnomusicological collection *Folk Songs of Montenegro in the Published Melographic Records of Miodrag A. Vasiljević*, published by the Montenegro Academy of Sciences and Arts and the Music Centre of Montenegro (2019) represents a comprehensive collection of Vasiljević's melographic records from the area of Montenegro and songs sung by Montenegrin people living outside of Montenegro. In the previous portion of this essay it has been noted that these records had thus far been published in two books – *Folk Melodies from Sandžak* from 1953 and *Folk Melodies of Montenegro*, published two years after Vasiljević's death, in 1965. In addition to the 568 pieces from *Folk Melodies of Montenegro*, this collection also includes 229 pieces from *Folk Melodies from Sandžak*, written down in Plevlje and Bijelo Polje and the surrounding villages, for a total of 797 folk songs from the area of Montenegro and songs recorded as sung by Montenegrin people living outside of their homeland.

The collection comprises 708 pages and contains an exceptionally systematic and comprehensive foreword by co-author Sanja Radinović (7-18), following which songs are organised according to a geographical criterion, from north to south. Songs from the mountains and valleys are organised according to the settlements where they were recorded – Pljevlja, Bijelo Polje, Berane, Rožaje, Gusinje, Andrijevića, Kolašin, Sinjajevina and Durmitor (37-320). Songs from the central region – Nikšić, Danilovgrad, Podgorica and Cetinje (321-388). Songs from the coastal region – Boka Kotorska, Paštrovići, Bar and Ulcinj (389-534). The regional songs are followed by Partisan and patriotic songs and songs regarding the rebuilding of the homeland following the Second World War (535-554), and finally songs from two ethnic Montenegrin settlements outside of the territory of Montenegro – Petrovo Selo near Kladovo in Serbia, and Peroj near Pula in Croatia (555-576). The recorded songs are followed by a dictionary of Turkish loanwords and other less well known folk expressions, arranged by Mirjana Mima Rilak (577-599). Following this, pages from 601 onward contain seven indices: order of songs in the collection, alphabetical index, index of pieces organised according to original publication, index according to poetic metre, index by initials, index by genre and index of singers.

With his many music sheets of folk songs from the area of Montenegro, published in the first Montenegro collection in 1965, Miodrag A. Vasiljević lays

down strict criteria for every previous and subsequent interpretation of the region's musical tradition. By shedding light on key moments from Vasiljević's experiences in the field at the beginning of this essay, we can see that his melographic work began in 1948 when he visited Podgorica and Nikšić and environs, and Krivošije and Boka Kotorska, then continued in 1951 when he again visited Boka and Kolašin, and in 1952 the Montenegrin settlement of Peroj in Istria. In 1954 he visited Andrijevića, Murino, Plav and Gusinje, and in 1959 he visited Petrovo Selo near Kladovo in Serbia.

Vasiljević broke down the myth that the folk musical heritage of the Montenegrin people boiled down to small melodies accompanied by gusle, proving that Montenegro has been home to a great lyrical and musical wealth for centuries. He also believed that in Montenegrin songs the lyrics held pride of place over the melody, and that the verse underwent decompositions and inversions that could not be found anywhere else at that time, which led him to, alongside the *Folk Melodies of Montenegro*, prepare a study on the metre of Montenegrin verse which, sadly, was not published due to Vasiljević's sudden passing, and which is still awaiting interpretation. Traces of this study can be found in Vasiljević's notes even before the book *Folk Melodies of Montenegro* and in the collections *Yugoslav Music Folklore II – Folk Melodies Sung in Macedonia*, *Folk Melodies from Sandžak* and *Folk Melodies from the Leskovac Region*, where he uses specific symbols to mark the form of melodies with highlights of lyrical metre and the initial and cadence tones of specific motif phrases.

Example of Vasiljević's nomenclature,  
*Folk Songs of Montenegro in the Published Melographic records*

#### 46 RASTI BOLJE, MOJ ZELENI BORE

Pljevlja

Ra - sti bo - lje, moj ze - - le - ni bo - re,  
ra - sti bo - lje, moj ze - le - ni bo - re.

Rasti bolje, moj zeleni bore,  
da se penjem tebi pod vrhove,  
da pregledam po Bosni gradove.  
Sve bih grade za dva grada dala,  
za Trebinje i za Nevesinje.

Ja kakvi su nevesinjski momci,  
sve bih momke za dva momka dala,  
za Milana i za Milovana!  
Milovana ja bih milovala,  
a Milana drugarici dala.

Pjesma iz Polimlja  
Pjevao Risto Marjanović, 1932. godine  
Tekst zabilježio Vasilije Marjanović  
(S 48a)

Legend: A. Melodic-poetic part; (10) – decasyllable (verse); 2-1 – initial and final tone of melodic-poetic part; v – variation of the melodic-poetic part

The attentive and systematic eye of this publication's editor did not miss this, and so, in addition to the primary, geographical criterion for the classification of songs, a secondary criterion for classification was verse metre, with the exception of songs from Paštrovići which have been organised according to the process of the custom (Radinovićs 2019, 15).

The collection *Folk Songs of Montenegro in the Published Melographic records* "is not a 'simple sum' of two previously published works, but an organic whole which speaks in a new and more communicative way" (Radinović 2019, 10). Each of Miodrag A. Vasiljević's texts speaks volumes thanks to the complexity and layers of meaning in their approach to ethnomusicological material, but the value of the effort invested to make this publication live, to enable this communication to see the light of day, is indisputable.

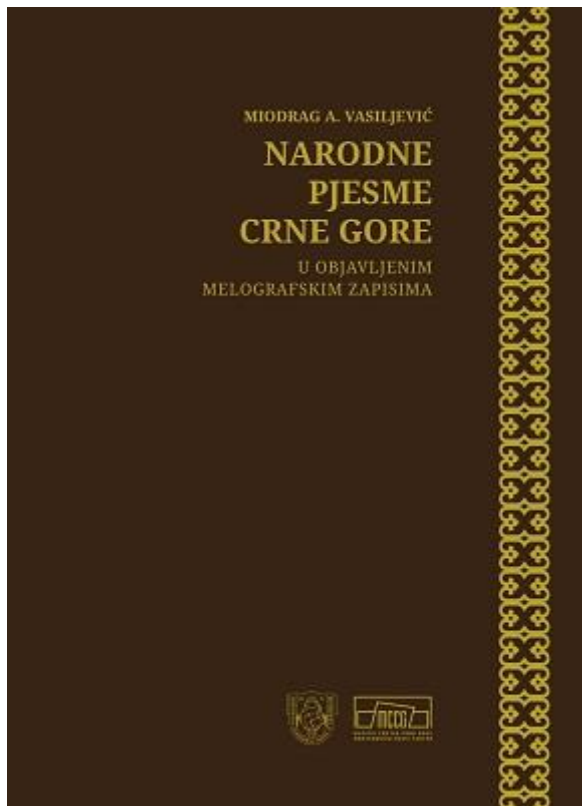


Figure 6 – Miodrag A. Vasiljević  
*Folk Songs of Montenegro in the Published Melographic Records* (2019)

The indices in the book were prepared with great care, knowledge and dedication to all aspects of the analysis: Order of Songs in Collection, Alphabetical Index, Index by Order in Original Publication, Index by Poetic Metre, Index by Initials, Index by Genre and Index of Singers. If we recall how much Miodrag A. Vasiljević loved and appreciated his singers, then we can take this as one of



many examples of this being recognised by the editors, and so the Index of Singers is not just a means of finding information (though this cannot be said of the other indices either), but also an image of the people of that time and region, the bearers of poetic legacy. In this and many other ways, the editors have enabled precisely the aforementioned communication between Vasiljević and the reader, even across this distance. Vasiljević took part in the creation of the melographic records, notes on singers, and studies, not only by providing a written record, but also by singing along with the singers, admiring them as men of the people and preserving their memory with love and care. Simultaneously, he invests boundless energy and knowledge to preserve the melodies and pass them on, and searches for and finds ways to 'process' the complex musical whole and utilise it for a practical music-pedagogical purpose.

The book *Folk Songs of Montenegro in the Published Melographic records of Miodrag A. Vasiljević* (Figure 6) is of exceptional value for the promotion of the folk tradition and culture of Montenegro, and all those who have participated in its creation have risen to meet the challenges placed before them by the monumental importance of this publication.

Credit for the recognition of the importance of Miodrag A. Vasiljević's multifaceted profile and the preservation of his legacy dedicated to Montenegro is owed to composer and valued CANU member Žarko Mirković, and Dr. Ivana Drobni, while Dr. Sanja Radinović organised the material of this publication into a modern ethnomusicological statement. If one adds to this the exceptional technical qualities of the publication, the Dictionary of Turkish Expressions, and indices which add a new qualitative dimension to the study, it must be noted that this publication is of immense value in both form and content.

## CONCLUSION

The connection to the authentic folk musical tradition of our people has marked Vasiljević since his early childhood, and he would remain faithful to this influence in everything he did in his life. Upon finishing education in 1931, when he was, in line with his own wishes, sent to his first workplace in Skoplje, he began doing what he would dedicate his life to collecting the songs and music of the common people, starting from the most remote regions. Every moment of free time, every summer break, he used to travel in the field. Led by his childhood love towards "the man of the people", Vasiljević would, through countless field expeditions, search for and find that which, through song, music and humanity, represented expressions of universal values.

He dug down into the common, universal formulae for musical expressions among the peoples of our region, then followed the expression of those formulae according to the specificities of individual ethno-geographical areas. The things he learned there were applied to his pedagogical work. Having reached the foundational tonal formula, then its metric-rhythmic expressions and finally its formal expressions, Vasiljević naturally and spontaneously wove archetypal formulae of musical function into pedagogy. The basic music-pedagogical

foundations laid down by Miodrag A. Vasiljević, which, with some modifications and updates are still current today, originate from an understanding of folk musical creativity and the creative mechanism of the folk singer which rests on the meaning of the initials in the memorisation of melodies, the creative impulse derived from the deep connection between spoken and musical rhythm, the basic musical formula the folk tonality rests upon with all of its variants, and the metric-rhythmic, and therefore formal, organisation of folk melodies, which Vasiljević understood and experienced in all of his exploration and discovery, and which he supported with an understanding of folk instruments and the way they are played.

On this link between ethnomusicology and music pedagogy rests the unique and inimitable quality of Vasiljević as a music pedagogue, one reinforces the other, and that dialectic creates the immeasurable value of Vasiljević's legacy, regardless of which part of the material is being covered. He connected the past, present and future, "weaving together" the musical material of the region through universal shared values, articulating the specificities of each region through their own bespoke collections, and publishing in parallel with each a study connected to a specific aspect or component of the folk musical expression. The aforementioned studies represent material that is likewise immensely valuable and still awaits an adequate ethnomusicological appraisal, hence its cautious mention. This is another reason why the release of this publication is immensely valuable, as the repeated, more complete, more precise and more suitable republishing of Montenegrin folk songs will also serve as a reminder that Vasiljević's study on lyrical metre that was meant to accompany the release of the collection *Folk Songs of Montenegro* in 1963 still awaits interpretation.

Miodrag A. Vasiljević established, through his ethnomusicological collections and their accompanying studies of rhythm, tonality, classification of folk songs and terminology, the relationship of musicality, both as a universal phenomenon and a characteristic national musicality, with the varieties of music found in specific ethnographic areas, and operationalised these learnings into methodological approaches to the teaching of music literacy. Therefore, every effort put into preserving Vasiljević's ethnomusicological legacy also represents a struggle for a national good, and a struggle for the preservation and propagation of the most notable examples of the musical heritage for future generations.

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