

Traditional Songs and Dances from the Soko Banja Area.

Field recordings from Yugoslavia. Notes edited by Robert H. Leibman. Selo Records, LP-1. Balkan Heritage series, Vol. 1. Available from Robert Leibman, Department of Folklore and Folklife, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Reviewed by Richard March

This album of annotated field recordings is very valuable to the folklorist interested in Balkan music and dance. Very little music actually recorded in the field in Yugoslavia has appeared on long-playing albums. Most albums of Yugoslav folk music feature either professional musicians or amateurs recorded while appearing in a folk festival. Thus Leibman's field tapes from eastern Serbia help to fill a major gap.

The album features nine dance numbers played on the gajde, a type of bagpipe, and some examples of newer and older folk song traditions. The record is accompanied by a 92-page booklet which includes headnotes and descriptions of the songs and dances by Leibman, labanotations of the dances by Elsie Dunin (based on a film shot during the field collecting), texts and translations of the songs by Leibman and R. Crum, and discussion and transcription of the music by Mark Levy. The notes are much more extensive than is usual for ethnomusicology albums. They include not only analysis of the specific materials presented, but also a theoretical discussion by Leibman of general problems in dance research.

The album, the accompanying book, and the filmed dances are the fruits of a major scholarly team effort. Much valuable analysis of internal features of the recorded sound and filmed dancing is provided; however, the work as a whole suffers from a tendency to ignore questions of performance context, the performers themselves, and the wider social context of the collected materials. In addition to this formalistic tendency, there is a surprising disregard for accuracy in the materials presented. For example, the music heard on the record is not precisely as it occurred when recorded. Leibman made a number of editorial changes in the gajde instrumentals by eliminating sections which he felt were poorly played, and electronically splicing together the sections he liked. He also extended the length of each piece by duplicating and splicing together the sections he favored. Where the songs were concerned, Leibman cut out the pauses between verses and eliminated the conversation of the singers which went on between verses. Such editorial practices which were common in the past in the publishing of folk narrative texts have been harshly criticized by serious folklorists. There is no reason that standards for the presentation of folk music should be any different. The "poorly played segments," pauses, and conversations are part of the creative dynamic of the traditional forms, are just plain authentic data, and should have been preserved in at least some of the examples presented on the record.

Leibman's reasons for editing the data are particularly hard to understand in light of his great concern for "authenticity" in his discussion entitled "Some Problems in Dance Research," which is included in the booklet and is currently being republished in the folk dance newsletter Mixed Pickles (in three installments beginning Summer, 1976).

Leibman designates certain events which involve dancing as "traditional dancing events" and others as "less traditional" in order to be able to define a given folk dance in terms of its performance at the "traditional" event. His major distinction seems to be that the "traditional" events are not performed on stages, and the "less traditional" ones are. He then describes types of organized dance groups in Yugoslavia and rates them according to "authenticity," by which he means the degree to which their staged dancing resembles a mental image of non-staged dancing which presumably occurred at some time in the past.

It is true that some of the people involved in folk dancing in Yugoslavia are concerned

with this sort of "authenticity," but it must be remembered that this "authenticity" is an emic distinction which is employed by revivalists who feel it is their duty to create an image based upon a romantic notion of their nation's past. This view is important to understand but it must never be confused with the researcher's etic view. Obviously all dancing which actually occurs in whatever context is inherently authentic. The researcher's first goal is to accurately describe the event as it occurs; the accurate description constitutes authentic data.

However, Leibman seems to have accepted the emic "authenticity" as his main criterion in his etic definition of folk dance: "a folk dance is defined by its performances at traditional dancing events." In that case, it seems logical that the researcher would observe and describe non-staged dancing as it naturally occurs. However, Leibman discusses instead the various types of stage dance groups and speculates as to the similarity of their dancing to "traditional dancing events."

It seems ludicrous that a researcher would observe an event which is itself a vital form of cultural expression, and rather than discuss its dynamics and meaning would waste effort speculating about its possible similarity to another kind of event--especially when the other kind of event, if that is what interests one, could be observed and described.

However, like the revivalist, Leibman seems to have an assumption that dance events of the past are the definitive ones. But since dance is an evanescent form, dancing events of the past can only be observed in old pictorial materials--drawings, photos, and films. Dance which takes place in the present is contemporary dance, whether or not the performers feel it to be a representation of the past. It is still a contemporary use of past symbolism. For his filming Leibman indicates that he instructed the older dancers to perform "older dances which are no longer regularly performed" as they would have at "traditional dancing events" in the past. The result was not a film of a past "traditional dancing event," but rather of a dance specially staged for filming. Because he gave such explicit instructions, it is difficult to know just how extensive the researcher's influence was on the dancing. The collected material would have been much more valuable if Leibman had taken the more reasonable strategy of filming natural behavior--dancing events as they occur today--and allowed the emic concept of "authenticity" to skew his data as it was collected.

Aside from formalism and a lack of accuracy, the other major shortcoming of the work is its inadequate contextual data and documentation about the informants. Only the names, and in some cases the ages and home towns, of the informants are listed, but there is much more we'd like to know about them. For example, what does Ilija Pavlovic (whose picture is on the album cover) do when he is not playing the bagpipe? What is his occupation, his life history, his social position in the village, his personality? What are the prevalent social attitudes about his music? What segments of village society appreciate or fail to appreciate his music? Such questions can only be answered by solid, in-depth fieldwork. I realize that this may sound overly demanding for album notes, but the record, the 92-page booklet, and the film represent a major scholarly effort, and as such we expect more from it.

If we hope to understand music and dance as expressive forms created by real people, rather than merely treat it as a curiosity to catalogue, we must learn something about the process through which the music and dance concepts of a culture are realized in performance, the meaning of the music and dance to the performer and audience member, and the general social position of the art. We learn very little when a fieldworker makes a foray into a given area, captures some material on tape and film, and returns to the academy to painstakingly analyze its internal features without paying attention to the persons who created the music or to the community in which they live.