

The Changing Nature of Instrumental Music and Musicians in Folk Dance Ensembles

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The paper presents the role of the instrumental music and musicians in folk dance ensembles in Slovenia, and examines different influences on the shaping of its musical image. It focuses on two milestones that have significantly influenced the work of folk dance ensembles: the beginning of organized educational activities in the early 1970s, and the impact of socio-political changes caused by the breakup of Yugoslavia and Slovenia's independence in 1991.

▪ **Keywords:** folk dance ensembles, traditional music, amateur musicians, stage presentations, educational activities, expert guidance, Slovenian independence

Prispevek predstavlja vlogo glasbenikov in instrumentalne glasbe v folklornih skupinah na Slovenskem ter obravnava različne vplive na oblikovanje glasbene podobe teh skupin. Osredinja se na mejnika, ki sta pomembno vplivala na delovanje folklornih skupin: na začetek organizirane izobraževalne dejavnosti na začetku 70. let 20. stoletja in na vpliv družbenopolitičnih sprememb, ki sta jih povzročila razpad Jugoslavije in osamosvojitve Slovenije leta 1991.

▪ **Ključne besede:** folklorne skupine, tradicionalna glasba, ljubiteljski glasbeniki, odrske postavitve, izobraževalna dejavnost, strokovno vodenje, slovenska osamosvojitve

Introduction

Folk dance ensembles¹ have had over a century of tradition in Slovenia, and belong to the broader framework of “folklore activities” (*folklorna dejavnost*) representing traditional-based music, dance, costume, rituals, and customs. In many cases, these elements of tradition are most comprehensively encompassed in the activities of folk dance ensembles, which combine, intertwine and unite them; presenting them at various public events in the form of music-dance performances. The activities of folk dance ensembles rest on amateur foundations, which is especially true for artistic reproduction, i.e. music-dance performances within the framework of participation in a folk dance ensemble.

Today, folk dance ensembles in Slovenia are institutionally organized. As a form of cultural production they operate as sections within cultural societies, or as independent societies, and are non-profit entities whose activities are often made possible through the financing of amateur cultural activities from state and local sources, as well as through symbolic membership fees.

¹ The Slovenian term *folklorna skupina* is translated into English in various ways, often as “folk dance ensemble”, whereby the dominant role of dance in this, generally complex activity, is implied (cf. Šrmpf Vendramin, 2017).

The activities, purpose, and stage production of folk dance ensembles have recently been the topic of various folkloristic and ethnological discussions addressed by authors at such practices in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, with a particular focus on the second part of the 20th century and their function in the socialist societies (Ilieva, 2001; Herzog, 2010; Pavlicová, Uhlíková, 2013; Kapper, 2016; Petkovski, 2016; Stavělová, Buckland, 2018). The authors mainly address the activities of folk dance ensembles in their countries of origin, as well as their activities in diasporic communities (e.g. Zájedová, Rüütel, 2009, 2014; Kunej, Kunej, 2016). Likewise, the history and development of folk dance ensembles in Slovenia has been discussed in various works (e.g. Kunej, 2018, 2020), but attention is yet to be directed at folk dance music and ensemble musicians (the band) in particular.

Folk dance music has, similarly to folk dance, been transferred from its traditional environment to the stage, and transformed from its primal purpose of the social dance and music event into stage presentations of “past folk tradition” performed by folk dance ensembles (cf. Kunej, 2020). In this, folk dance music likewise appears as a reinterpretation of traditional music – rather than the setting of still-living tradition into the context of the stage. Generally, the performance of folk dance music and its musical image are redesigned, adapted and arranged for presentation to the public, where the music shows certain properties we wish to illuminate in this article while comparatively presenting them in relation to dance.

Though the dominant role of folk dance is often put forward in this context, the music plays a vital part in the activities of folk dance ensembles. It is usually performed live by musicians, and so these have carried a significant, often key role in folk dance ensembles. The paper aims to present the role of the instrumental music and musicians in this phenomenon, and to examine different influences on the shaping of its musical image. It addresses the period between the 1970s, when the systematic expert guidance of folk dance ensembles into the study of tradition first began, and the mid-2010s, when essential changes and novelties occurred in the conceptual framework and activities of folk dance ensembles.² In this, it focuses on two milestones prominently affecting the operation of folk dance ensembles in the period: the first was the beginning of organized educational activities, seminars and gatherings (*srečanja folklornih skupin*),³ institution-

² Rebeka Kunej establishes that the novel approach “brings more artistic freedom and choreographer’s creativity, no longer bound to historical sources but rather following the theatrical and dance rules of the stage performance” (Kunej, 2023: 44).

³ At the beginning, annual ensemble gatherings consisted of a demonstration (exhibition) program and were essentially non-competitive. The gatherings were held at the local, regional and national levels. After each gathering there was a discussion with an expert evaluator, who gave their assessment of all the performances and provided some guidance, encouragement and commendation to each participating ensemble. Since the 1990s, the three-tier selection system for the gatherings has had a competitive/evaluative nature. The expert evaluator assesses the performance of each ensemble according to certain criteria, grades it with points, and makes the selection for the higher-level event based on the total scores. Promotion to higher event levels represents a key reference in various tenders for co-financing the programs and activities of the ensembles.

ally conducted in the early 1970s; and the second the impact of socio-political changes caused by the breakup of Yugoslavia and the independence of Slovenia in 1991. The article primarily wishes to examine the consequences of the start of comprehensive expert guidance and education on the music of folk dance ensembles, and the factors that made the independence year of 1991 a historical turning point for the music and the ensemble musicians alike.

The author bases the research on personal experience, having actively participated in different folk dance ensembles in the 1980s and 1990s; first as a musician and instrumental band leader, and later as the author of musical arrangements. He has attended a variety of seminars, workshops and education programs for musicians and folk dance ensemble leaders, initially as a participant and subsequently, for a number of years, as a lecturer as well. He witnessed many changes in repertoire and performing practice, including changes to the programs and new guidelines in the work of folk dance ensembles following the breakup of Yugoslavia. For the analysis of the recent years, the author has replaced the autobiographical method with observation of, and participation in, various events featuring folk dance ensembles. In addition, the author leans on collected sources, literature, records, and digital ethnography.

Characteristics of the activity of folk dance ensembles in Slovenia

The beginnings of folk dance ensembles in Slovenia date back to the first half of the 20th century. Early inklings are connected to the celebration of the 60-year anniversary of the rule of Emperor Franz Joseph, on 12 June 1908 in Vienna, which was also attended by selected groups of locals from various parts of Carniola where folk dance ensembles later emerged. In the 1930s, the initiative for the establishing of the first folk dance ensembles were folklore festivals, organized in several places (in Ljubljana, Maribor, Črnomelj, Metlika) by France Marolt within the framework of the Folklore Institute with the purpose of presenting and popularizing folk culture. Various local groups (so-called ethnographical groups) participated, from Bela Krajina, east Štajerska and Prekmurje in particular, presenting their music-dance tradition at these festivals (more in Kunej, 2004, 2009). The establishing of folk dance ensembles gained momentum after the Second World War, driven by cultural and educational societies. Among the first was in 1948 the Folk Dance Ensemble in Ljubljana (now *Akademski folklorna skupina France Marolt*, the France Marolt Students' Folk Dance Ensemble), whose founder France Marolt wished to channel the findings of ethnomusicological research to the public. In the following decade, other folk dance ensembles emerged, either within the various trade union associations or as independent educational societies.

Very early folklore activities in Slovenia were related to the presentation of music and dance of mostly living traditions, and focused on those of Slovenian origins only.

In the 1970s, when increasing numbers of different folk dance ensembles appeared, a division of ensembles was made and persisted for a while, namely into the “original folk dance ensembles” and “reproduction folk dance ensembles”. The former presented their still-living music and dance tradition or experience from the local environment on stage, were usually active in a rural environment, and were smaller in membership. The latter presented a newly-learned dance repertoire from various Slovenian regions drawn mainly from written records, were active primarily in the urban environment and had numerous memberships⁴ (cf. Kranjec, 2001; Kunej, 2020). In the 1990s, such division was no longer sensible since ensemble members no longer shared a common own experience of traditional music and dance, but their shared experience was rather one of dancing – reproduction on the stage and public performance.⁵ This has been recently pointed out by several authors (e.g. Wrazen, 2005; Bejtullahu, 2016; Shay, 2016; Kunej, 2020, 2023) and applies in Slovenia to various types of folk dance ensembles.

In the 1960s and 1970s many folk dance ensembles were established in urban environments, belonging to the field of the so-called *reproduction folk dance ensembles* and soon became widely known and recognized, in Slovenia as well as broader Yugoslavia.⁶ The leaders of these ensembles were frequently also among the first participants who successfully completed educational seminars for folk dance ensemble leaders, which began taking place in the early 1970s.

The activities of folk dance ensembles, consistently an important pillar of educational-cultural-amateur happenings, were always under the supervision of state cultural policy or its relevant institution. The name of this institution changed several times, but its mission remained more or less constant. The starting role of the institution responsible for folk dance ensembles was mostly political-financial, but over time its mandate as a professional training and guidance mechanism also strengthened. From the year 1984 on, it employed a special folklore activities expert, who also conducted monitoring, organisation and coordination of folk dance activities. In addition, the activities of folk dance ensembles were regularly overseen and guided by various expert work bodies

⁴ In particular, many *reproduction folk dance ensembles* during the time of former Yugoslavia held repertoires that were not connected exclusively to the Slovenian tradition, but also showcased traditions of other republics of former Yugoslavia. This was true in all republics of the former Yugoslavia, both in terms of amateur folk dance ensembles active in larger towns and cities, as well as professional national folk dance ensembles. Slovenia was, next to Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the republic without a professional national folk dance ensemble (more in Petkovski, 2016; Kunej, 2018).

⁵ Due to changes in the way of life and discontinued ties with traditional music and dance, members of the once *original folk dance ensembles* likewise had to begin re-learning their tradition and cultivate it deliberately, if they wished to portray it on the stage. This brought them closer to the way of work of the *reproduction folk dance ensembles*. Thus, a new specification was proposed for folk dance ensembles, which in the 1990s in Slovenia all exhibited reproduction tendencies – one based on the region from which their staged tradition originates (home town, home region, some or all Slovenian regions, etc.) (Kranjec, 2001).

⁶ E.g. folk dance ensemble at KUD Študent in Maribor was established in 1964, folk dance ensemble Emona in Ljubljana in 1967, folk dance ensemble Koleda in Velenje in 1971, the Celje Folk Dance Ensemble in 1973, folk dance ensemble Stu Ledi in Trieste in 1973, folk dance ensemble Kres in Novo Mesto in 1975.

made up of external members,⁷ which, while monitoring the work of the ensembles, also designed educational activities for them, and advised on the organisation of various ensemble gatherings and public presentations.

Intertwining of music and dance

The important role of dance music in folk dance ensembles originates in folk tradition. In Slovenia, generally speaking, people always used to dance to instrumental music. Thus, there was hardly any traditional folk dance event that did not feature the participation of performing musicians. This is also attested by certain common sayings and fixed expressions among the people. In these, dance music is strongly connected to dance and musicians, and they describe the meaning and role of the musician in society. One traditional folk musician for example colourfully stated that “the musician is always around, like the broom” (Kumer, 1983: 152), since it was impossible to dance without them in times when recorded and broadcast music was not yet available. This is why they were highly sought after and respected, often enjoying a privileged role in the local community (cf. Kumer, 1983; Strajnar, 1986).

In the Slovenian folk culture, instrumental music and dance are often closely intertwined, even inseparable. The usual contemporary term is that the musicians or music are “accompanying” (*spremljati*) the dance. And yet, it would perhaps be better stated that it is dance that accompanies the music, since it is the music and musicians who are a sort of animating spirit and motor of dance, and the ones who determine many aspects of dance and dance events. This is also characterized by the popular saying or set phrase “you will dance to my tune” (*plesal boš, kot bom jaz igral*), which communicates the prime role of music over dance, while metaphorically acquiring still broader meaning in the sense of doing precisely as someone dictates or commands (cf. SSKJ, 2014).

The close connection of traditional music and dance is also reflected in the relation of the musicians towards dancing and dancers. Interaction between them is constantly taking place. Traditional musicians were highly familiar with the dances, they also knew when and how to interpret individual dances so that the outcome is appropriate for the event and accordant with custom and tradition. Often they were skilled dancers themselves, and while playing they observed the dancers closely, adapting the style of play to the character of the dance, the ability and the mood of the dancers (cf. Strajnar, 1986). Thus, the dancers indeed *danced to their tune*. Accordingly, it was important for musicians to

⁷ The work bodies included participation of various experts and scholars in the field of ethnology, (traditional) music, and dance; coworkers of the Institute of Ethnomusicology, the Slovene Ethnographic Museum, the University of Ljubljana and other institutions, as well as some acclaimed and experienced folk dance ensemble leaders (in the 1970s and 1980s e.g. Bruno Ravnikar, Radoslav Hrovatin, Marija Makarovič, Mirko Ramovš, Julijan Strajnar, Iko Otrin, Janez Bogataj, Marjan Kralj, Mile Trampuš, Andrej Košič etc.).

play enthusiastically so as to encourage the attendance to “let music into their feet” (*gre glasba v noge*), and so that everyone present should have “itching heels” (*zasrbijo pete*). This means that music was performed in a way as compelling and zestful as possible, to entice and excite the present for dancing, to elicit a dancing, physical response. The primary function of dance music is therefore its “danceability”, to which the performance, including the aesthetic component of the music was adapted, whereas the “virtuosity” of the performance was of secondary importance though still appreciated.

It is therefore not surprising that in the folk dance ensembles in Slovenia, live music rather than recorded music continues to be the customary way of performing. Musicians in folk dance ensembles, much like the ensembles themselves, can be very different, with different musical preferences, abilities and knowledge, but also inclinations, roles and intentions. The musicians and their music often also reflected the orientation and activities of the folk dance ensembles they were part of, as well as shifting trends in the work practices and tendencies across various time periods.

Folk dance ensemble musicians are most frequently amateur musicians. In the early period, those folk dance ensembles performing largely local tradition and predominantly active in the rural setting sometimes featured the participation of local traditional musicians. They were well versed in the traditional dance music repertoire and the traditional style of playing, which just had to be adapted with the stage choreography of the music-dance performance event. An example of such cooperation was the folk dance ensemble KUD Beltinci, an exception in general terms – namely, its establishment in 1938 was closely connected with music. France Marolt then, during his exploration of traditional music in Beltinci, came to know the Kociper Band, a typical Prekmurje traditional ensemble that also performed a great deal of dance music. He was impressed by their playing, and so familiarized himself with the traditional dances with local Matija Kavaš, proposing the establishment of a folk dance ensemble that began operation that very year based on his instructions. The Kociper Band, which eventually partly transformed and renamed itself into the Kociper-Baranja Band, played within a folk dance ensemble for several decades, eventually also taking care of a younger generation to perpetuate their activity (KUD Beltinci, s.a.).

In general, however, folk dance ensembles mostly involve amateur musicians who no longer have direct contact with traditional music. They may be self-taught or without any music education, or might have basic music education attained in the system of musical schooling, where traditional music is not part of the curriculum. In the past decades folk dance ensembles are seeing increasing numbers of musicians with basic music education, even those once comprising mostly local folk musicians. Familiarization with the traditional folk repertoire and style of playing is then required, as these musicians generally are not acquainted with it prior to joining a folk dance ensemble. This tends to lead to certain divergences between the traditional way of playing (and traditional musical aesthetics) and the view of music and playing style acquired during musical schooling.

Academic musicians are rare in the folk dance ensemble. Exceptionally they participate in larger ensembles in urban environments, often only occasionally e.g. for major performances and tours. Their playing is based on the academic approach, often of a highly advanced technical and musical standard, though at times lacking a deeper connection with the dance and dancers as it is not based on so-called danceability but rather on the virtuosity of musical performance.

Yet the way of presenting traditional music on the stage depends not only on the musicians, but very much also on the authors of the musical arrangement and dance choreography. Instrumental music in folk dance ensembles was, due to changes in context and stage presentation, adapting and transforming in similar ways as has been established in the context of traditional dance by Rebeka Kunej (2010, 2023). Music and dance on the stage, being subject to the demands of public performance and stage design constraints, can no longer appear in their original form but may only approximate the genuine traditional template. Two principles offering two poles of the stage presentation spectrum are the concept of passive adoption and the concept of active transfer to the stage. In passive adoption, traditional music and dance are adapted to the stage in a form as close as possible to the original template, and are therefore imitated in all their characteristic elements. Active transfer to the stage, conversely, uses only select traditional elements whereas evidently transforming or newly creating the rest. The passive adoption model wishes to portray authenticity, frequently even idealization and fixation of the image of folk tradition; whereas the active transfer one subjects the original tradition in great part to the creativity of the authors of the performance. Based on the examination of the contemporary presentation of traditional dance on stage, Rebeka Kunej (2023) points out the evident changes to the concept seen particularly in the past decade.⁸ The music-dance stage presentation is also impacted by various foreign influences (e.g. through festivals abroad and encounters with foreign dance traditions), and especially domestic influences from institutional educational activities, organized gatherings and meetings of folk dance ensembles, as well as the activities and influences of leading domestic ensembles.

As an example of different approaches to music and musicians shifting across time we may address the case of the France Marolt Students' Folk Dance Ensemble, a frequent model for other folk dance ensembles. In its early years of operation this ensemble did not have its own music band but nevertheless always danced to live music: music correpitition at rehearsals was conducted on the piano by Tončka Marolt

⁸ “This idea shift is also revealed in the terminology employed within the folklore activity itself: the adaptation of traditional folk dances to the stage, which was once called ‘staging’ and meant a passive transposition of folk dance practices onto the stage, is now replaced by ‘choreography’, by which creators aim to signify that the performance is an original work where choreography is understood as invention, design, composition and structuring of dance into a harmonious artistic whole, for which traditional folk dance is only a loose inspiration” (Kunej, 2023: 45).

(the wife of France Marolt and later long-time band leader in the ensemble), whereas the performances included “hired” musicians in the line-up of piano accordion, violin, clarinet, and double bass. At important performances music might even be played by established music bands of other genres, such as e.g. the Bojan Adamič Orchestra, the Radio Orchestra, or the Military Orchestra (Kunej, 2018). Later on the group had its own band of musicians, some of whom played in various combinations with accordion, clarinet, violin, double bass, etc., others in a tambura band. It also collaborated with musicians from other bands and folk dance ensembles, who occasionally joined for major performances and tours. Other folk dance ensembles around Slovenia have followed the same approach and band line-ups as the France Marolt Students’ Folk Dance Ensemble.

Shaping the music and guiding the musicians

Since the vast majority of folk dance ensembles featured musicians who did not have direct experience with traditional dance music,⁹ the musical image had to be “designed” or shaped, meaning arranged for a particular band. Next to the music arrangement, which ensures the connection between the choreographed dance presentation on stage and the performed music, guiding also the band to some extent, it soon turned out that it was sensible to familiarize the musicians, as well as folk dance ensemble leaders and dance choreographers, with the folk music tradition.

In the arrangement of the musical part of the staged music-dance performance we can observe various approaches, depending on the practices of the ensemble as well as the musicians participating. A frequent approach is that the music arrangement is prepared by the musicians themselves (see Figure 1, item nr. 6). In this, in accordance with the choreography of the dance performance, the musicians together assign the order of the melodies they receive from the choreography author, the number of repetitions of individual melodies, their potential modulations etc., and agree on the role of the individual instruments in the performance. The musicians most often build upon the choreography concept, which presents the dance choreographer’s perspective of the music-dance event, arranging music accordingly. The music concept is generally not fixed with sheet music but is shaped during live rehearsals into a form that is eventually memorised, then partly improvised during performances. This approach is characteristic particularly for those folk dance ensembles that operate in the local setting and present local tradition, but also for other ensembles where musicians are actively included in the work of the ensembles and the creation of program.

⁹ Regardless of the historical period of their activity, this holds true for all *reproduction folk dance ensembles*, as well as all those once-designated *original folk dance ensembles* that did not feature the participation of local musicians well versed in the traditional dance music repertoire and the traditional style of playing.

Many times, the music arrangement is prepared by a musically educated individual who is usually familiar with the characteristics of folk music tradition, in addition to music fundamentals. Since 1990s, these were in particular the researchers of traditional music (in the beginnings of folk dance ensemble activity for example France Marolt and Tončka Marolt, later on Julijan Strajnar, Bruno Ravnikar and others) whose field research granted them insight into folk music tradition and the work of folk dance ensembles; and in the recent period also those more engaged and ambitious among the ensemble musicians (see Figure 1, items nr. 1, 3, 4, 5 and 8). Such musicians are often well familiar with dance tradition, which proves to be highly useful and reflects in the popularity of their music arrangements and the success of the ensuing music-dance performance. Frequently, in the creation of the arrangement, they cooperate with the dance choreographer, jointly shaping the music and dance to its final form. The arrangements are most often written down as sheet music, learned by the musicians at their rehearsals with the dancers and then normally played by memory. Arrangers often receive fees for such arrangements. This approach to the arrangement is typical especially for ensembles that perform traditions from several different parts of Slovenia, operate in an urban environment and have a large number of musicians in their band, at least some of whom have a basic musical education. Often the arrangers have a joint rehearsal with the musicians (and dancers) to finalise the sound image and the intertwining of music and dance, and to guide the musicians towards the envisioned playing style.

On exception, authors of dance choreography can also create the music arrangement themselves (cf. Figure 1, program item nr. 2). Among such artists, one standout is certainly Bruno Ravnikar,¹⁰ who authored the musical arrangements for all his numerous staged music-dance performances. In this it is interesting that he builds the music-dance performance from the music arrangement concept first, to which he then matches the dance choreography. This approach is quite distinct from the one employed by most choreographers who normally ground their work in dance to which music is then adapted, with arrangements prepared by a third party (the musical arrangement author). According to Ravnikar, his holistic music-based approach and the authorship of music and dance by the same individual were key in catalyzing the great popularity and success of his music-dance performances (cf. Ravnikar, 2020).

In the recent years, increasing numbers of music-dance arrangements are specifically described as arrangements of arrangements. These emerge both in the choreography of dance performances as well as arrangement of music. Here, the dance choreographers and music arrangers no longer build directly on documentary materials (e.g. field sources

¹⁰ Dr. Bruno Ravnikar was the leader of several folk dance ensembles, and the author of many music-dance stage productions. He participated in the organization of folklore activities in Slovenia and was in 1969 among the founders of the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts (CIOFF). He was an expert in recording folk dances with Kinetography Laban, and the initiator and contributor of several magazines dedicated to folkloric activity.

and archive records of dances and music), but on already existing original arrangements or stage music-dance performances.¹¹ Such arrangements normally list both authors, e.g. the author of the secondary adaptation as well as the first (original) arrangement's author, or these are named as co-authors (see Figure 1, item nr. 5).

The music in folk dance ensembles, and likewise the musicians, were importantly affected by the start of organized institutional educational activities commencing in the 1970s. Then, the Association of Cultural Education Organizations of Slovenia began its regular training courses for artistic leaders of folk dance ensembles. The inspiration was the well-received and already established Summer School of Folklore in Badija on Korčula in Croatia, which had been running annually since 1963 and also featured lectures by Slovenian experts, for example Mirko Ramovš and Bruno Ravnikar. This summer school, regularly attended by Slovenian folk dance ensemble leaders, ran education courses and workshops on the traditional music and dance culture of all the republics of Yugoslavia.

The first institutional activities in Slovenia were in 1970 the so-called Introductory Seminars for folk dance ensemble leaders (*Začetni seminarji za vodje folklornih skupin*), followed in the mid-1970s by the Advanced Seminars for folk dance ensemble leaders (*Nadaljevalni seminarji za vodje folklornih skupin*). Both seminars were quite extensive and systematic in scope, and were usually held annually. Soon, various thematic training courses, seminars and workshops on specific topics related to dance, costume, vocal and instrumental music and other topics were also organised, aimed at both the leaders and the more ambitious members of folk dance ensembles. At the end of the 1980s, the so-called Folklore Camps (*Folklorni tabori*) began to be held annually, at first mainly for leaders and members of children's folk dance ensembles, and later for those of adult folk dance ensembles as well. To this day, various training programs continue to remain a vital element in the guidance of folk dance ensemble activities.¹²

Though in the recent decades, a number of rather specific and themed seminars and workshops on instrumental traditional music were conducted, intended primarily for musicians in folk dance ensembles or even specific ensemble instruments, we shall in the following focus on the Introductory Seminar for folk dance ensemble leaders,¹³ which represents an important foundation of educational work in the field.

The content of the seminar call, essentially the same for many years, defines who the course is for and what it covers:

¹¹ This also occurs in other countries (cf. Nahachewsky, 2001: 233).

¹² The Public Fund for Cultural Activities (JSKD) presentation of folklore activity states the great importance still attributed to education: "So that the work of these folk dance ensembles can further improve in quality, and the performances grow even more compelling, the JSKD organizes workshops and seminars for the acquisition of necessary competencies and familiarization with appropriate stage interpretations" (JSKD, s.a.).

¹³ The seminar was initially intended for leaders of all folk dance ensembles, eventually forking into separate fields of the children's ensemble leaders, and the adult ensemble leaders.

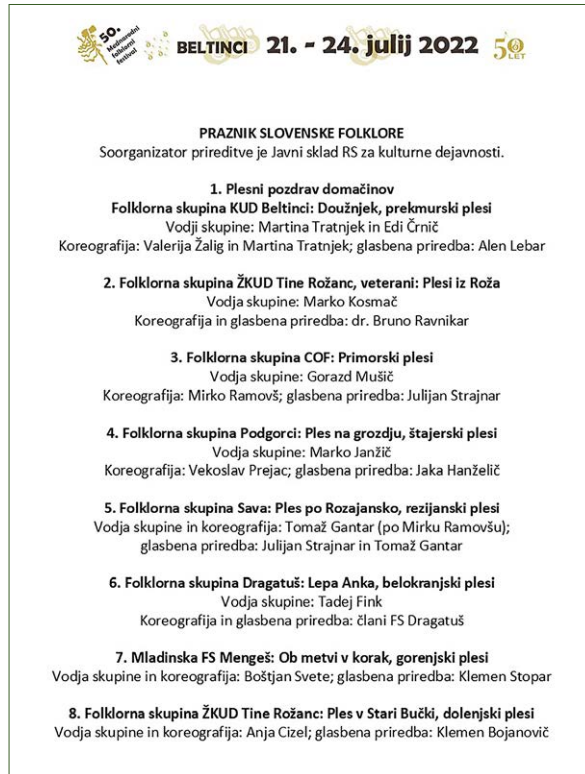


Figure 1: Part of the program schedule stating the repertoire of performing folk dance ensembles and the authors of music-dance performances at the event in Beltinci in 2022. Source: private archive.

The Introductory Seminar for leaders of adult folk dance ensembles is aimed at folk dance ensemble leaders in cultural and artistic societies, and their prospective staff who could take up expert or leadership roles in folk dance ensembles in the future. The seminar enables the acquisition of a wide range of knowledge, nowadays indispensable for the successful guidance and leadership of an adult folk dance ensemble. It provides at least a basic introduction to most of the elements ensembles include in their programs (music, dance and costume heritage, heritage of dance-related customs and traditions, etc.), as well as to the ways in which these elements can be brought to the stage and into the present day. (JSKD, 2014)

The end of the call points out how the participants will conclude their education:

Upon completion of the seminar, the participants will have the option to conduct an examination proving the knowledge of fundamental content necessary for the successful leadership of an adult folk dance ensemble. In

addition to the imparted knowledge, a successfully completed exam grants them the title of the expert leader of an adult folk dance ensemble, and a certificate enabling the attendance of advanced seminars. (JSKD, 2014)

The complete seminar encompassed 75 hours, it was organized during weekends once per month, generally 6 consecutive times.

A relatively stable seminar concept has been set from the very beginning, predisposing a practical and theoretical test of dance knowledge, as well as basic knowledge about traditional music and costume. The course and the final examination were apparently not easy, since the early reports on the number of seminarians, about 60 to 70 per year (cf. IFS, 1975, 1977), show that the vast majority of them did not successfully complete the training: e.g. one report states that 6 participants obtained the title of expert folk dance ensemble leader in 1970, and in the following years about 15 each year (IFS, 1976). Among the successful seminar participants were several individuals who later became leaders of acclaimed Slovenian folk dance ensembles. Exceptionally, these seminars were also attended by ambitious ensemble musicians wishing to gain more knowledge about traditional music and its integration with other forms of traditional folk culture, especially dance and involvement in customs and traditions. Some of these musicians successfully completed their training and passed the final exam, subsequently establishing themselves as eminent musicians and arrangers of music in folk dance ensembles.

The great significance of the seminar to this day remains that the participants (leaders or more active members of the ensembles, who are often also choreographers of the dance performances) acquire a relatively broad basic knowledge related to the activities of folk dance ensembles, including knowledge of the basics of vocal and instrumental traditional music. The seminar has thus enabled the participants, who are usually mainly dance-oriented, to also learn about the meaning and role of music in dance, to understand it better and to cooperate with musicians and authors of musical arrangements. However, it was apparent already from the first surveys conducted among the seminar participants that they were not specifically interested in music per se, as very few seminar participants expressed desire to extend the music-related content of the course, e.g. 2 out of 23 in the questionnaire from the year 1977¹⁴ (IFS, 1977). This is probably why the majority of the seminars' program is devoted to dance education (cf. JSKD, 2014), while other topics are treated only in a basic and relatively cursory way, e.g. traditional vocal and instrumental music were together often given about 4 hours out of the 75 hours of training.

¹⁴ A similar state is also revealed by the questionnaire from 1974, asking, among other, about content proposals, wishes and orientations for the preparation of a planned advanced seminar for folk dance ensemble leaders. In terms of musical content, opinions diverge among ensemble leaders since "some specifically demand and expect advanced musical knowledge that might facilitate independent creation of music arrangements, while others decidedly oppose the comprehensive treatment of music" (Ravnikar, 1974a: 2).

Changes following Slovenia's independence

After the breakup of Yugoslavia and the independence of Slovenia in 1991, radical changes occurred in the repertoires of many folk dance ensembles, since they discontinued the program of the nations and ethnicities of Yugoslavia, shifting exclusively towards the presentation of the Slovenian tradition.¹⁵ According to estimate, some folk dance ensembles thus lost about two thirds to one half of their existing program overnight (Kunej, 2020).

The Yugoslav program type was normally performed by the so-called *reproduction folk dance ensembles* in larger cities, where there were also the most immigrants from other Yugoslavian republics. In the smaller folk dance ensembles, active particularly in the rural environment, these changes did not occur as most of them had already been presenting mainly Slovenian traditions with their program.¹⁶ Notably, the focus on presenting the program of the different nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia in folk dance ensembles must be understood from a pragmatic point of view in addition to the political context. A folk dance ensemble with a varied program was more attractive to the audience and more popular and successful at festivals at home and abroad. For the ensembles, a content focus on the music and dance traditions of the entirety of Yugoslavia was an informal condition for participation in folklore festivals abroad, where they primarily represented the common Yugoslav state. The ambition to represent the country at international festivals was especially shared by the larger and more established ensembles, which also had a larger membership, were better organised, and had better financial (and political) support.

In terms of content, for musicians and those who directed instrumental music activity in folk dance ensembles, the changes of 1991 were perhaps not as acute and critical as they might initially appear. In the larger folk dance ensembles whose program featured traditions from various republics of Yugoslavia, of course, the changes also led to a rather different emphasis in the repertoire of the music and musicians, focused on the presentation of Slovenian musical tradition exclusively. On the other hand, the training and guidance of musicians, folk dance ensemble leaders and those who prepared musical arrangements, even in the larger ensembles, did not change significantly after 1991, as it was from the outset oriented towards the Slovenian tradition.

¹⁵ At the same time, folk dance ensembles began to be established within the cultural societies of minority ethnic communities, organized by nationals of former Yugoslavian republics living in Slovenia. Due to socio-political changes and the shifting relationships on the identity axis us-others, they experienced a need to strengthen their ethnic identity and boundaries between minority and majority culture (more in Kunej, Kunej, 2019). Given the specifics of this type of folk dance ensembles, we shall not be presenting their issues here.

¹⁶ There were several reasons for this, most evidently leaning on the local tradition and smaller membership numbers which were also ethnically more homogenous, next to presenting the music and dance tradition primarily in the home environment rather than festivals abroad.

The institutional educational activities being conducted since 1970 were throughout aimed specifically at familiarity with the Slovenian traditions. This might be surprising, since they ran in the time of the former common state Yugoslavia, and in addition were attended in particular by members of the larger and more visible folk dance ensembles from the urban environment, whose repertoire also included the folk traditions of other Yugoslavian republics. Nevertheless, both the yearly seminars (the introductory and advanced seminar) for (artistic) leaders of folk dance ensembles, as well as various thematic trainings, seminars and workshops were in their content focused exclusively on the treatment of the Slovenian traditions. This planned orientation was delineated from the early beginnings.¹⁷

Focus on Slovenian tradition in the instrumental music of folk dance ensembles is also reflected in the gradual introduction of certain traditional Slovenian folk instruments into musical ensembles and stage performances, which had not been used in folk dance ensembles earlier. Generally, the instrumental music in the larger ensembles was based on the so-called Alpine band, a rather typical and uniform line-up in which the piano accordion was the foundation to which, based on the possibilities and availability of the musicians, a melodic instrument (clarinet and/or violin) and a bass instrument (mainly the double bass) were added. Furthermore, such ensembles often had a tambura band, which mainly performed music for various dances from Bela Krajina. Both these sets were also suitable for performing music in the stage presentations of the traditions of other Yugoslavian republics. In smaller folk dance ensembles there was often only one musician, playing the accordion, most often of the piano type. With institutionally organised educational activities however, participants also began learning about other traditional Slovenian instruments, eventually introducing them into stage performances, e.g. (shepherd's) flute, the clay pot bass, pan pipes, transverse wooden flute (*žvegla*), Jew's harp, various occasional instruments and, above all, the diatonic button accordion.¹⁸ Precisely the introduction of the diatonic button accordion offers a telling example of the shifting use of traditional folk instruments in folk dance ensembles, and of the changes that have taken place since Slovenia's independence.

¹⁷ This is also evident from the aforementioned questionnaire conducted in 1974 among those seminar participants who successfully passed their exam. Among 26 interviewees, two expressed the desire to learn about the folk tradition of other Yugoslavian republics at the advanced seminar. The general reply to the proposal was clear and resolute: "Our stance is well known – to focus heavily on Slovenian folklore" (Ravnikar, 1974a: 2). From the rest of the records, it appears that this alone was considered a sizeable and difficult task, while potential expansion to the content of entire Yugoslavia would make it even harder. The organizers advised those wishing to gain expertise on the folk traditions of the other Yugoslavian republics to seek it at the "Summer School of Folklore" in Croatia (Ravnikar, 1974a: 2).

¹⁸ Thus e.g. in the Association of the Folk Dance Ensembles of Slovenia (ZFSS), in 1980 established under the auspices of the Association of Cultural Organizations of Slovenia (ZKOS), the content guidelines of activity among other set forth "the shaping of foundations and content of educational programs for traditional folk instruments" (*Informativno glasilo ZFSS* 1981: 6), in which the education was a "constant and permanent activity" including the planned "school of old traditional instruments" (*Informativno glasilo ZFSS*, 1981: 8).

The diatonic button accordion began appearing in folk dance ensembles relatively late. This is surprising from today's perspective, since the diatonic button accordion is now a widely known and popular instrument; one of the most played and heard musical instruments in Slovenia. In addition to its tremendous popularity, this accordion and its sound are often used as a symbol of Slovenian-ness¹⁹ (cf. Kovačič, 2015).

Although it was only introduced in Slovenia in the second half of the nineteenth century, the diatonic button accordion soon became a central traditional instrument and fundamentally changed the way traditional music was made. Traditional musicians played it in ensembles with other instruments, but often also solo – since its ability to play melody and harmonic accompaniment simultaneously with a bass foundation might replace several traditional instruments at once. In traditional music, it was primarily intended to be played for dancing.

The early use of the diatonic button accordion in Slovenian folk dance ensembles corresponds with the emergence of organized institutional educational activities in the 1970s. Much credit for this goes to Bruno Ravnikar who, as a physicist and acoustician by education, was highly interested in traditional instruments. He researched them closely and had personally reconstructed and used some (simple) instruments in his music-dance stage presentations. Ravnikar played the diatonic button accordion as a child, beginning his long career as a folk ensemble musician on this very instrument. (cf. Trampuš, 1979). That the diatonic button accordion was implemented in Slovenian folk dance ensembles relatively late, with quite some difficulty and uncertainty, and was connected with the efforts of Bruno Ravnikar, is also supported by the introduction to his article 'Diatonic Button Accordion' from the year 1974:

At all the seminars for the leaders of folk dance ensembles we strongly recommended musical accompaniment on the diatonic button accordion. Perhaps we have even been successful in these endeavours, since quite a few participants have returned to us saying: "We have found a diatonic button accordion, but sadly no one to play it!" Truly, it is not easy to find a button accordion musician these days, especially in the cities. The music schools consider the instrument taboo, and any curious beginners have nowhere to turn for guidance. This of course goes to all those folk dance ensembles whose leadership wishes to seek tradition, and looks to include in its performances the diatonic button accordion, or the "button box" (*knofarca*) as we colloquially call it. The following article is intended for them. (Ravnikar, 1974b: 15)

¹⁹ As is for example also evidenced by the remark in a newspaper article titled "The accordion is the voice of the Slovenian nation" which characterized the diatonic button accordion as "almost a national symbol" (Vaš, 2020).

On several pages, his article then presents the characteristics of the diatonic button accordion and fundamentals of playing the instrument, finishing with three sheet music examples of folk dance tunes with added markings for the finger positions and combinations of the appropriate buttons and direction of the bellows. The highly practical and insightful article is likely a consequence of a considerable need for an “old folk instruments teacher” in folk dance ensembles, as is stated in the questionnaire analysis where concrete cases of “lacking a musician able to play the diatonic button accordion” appear (Ravnikar, 1974a: 3).

In the 1980s, the diatonic button accordion was becoming an increasingly popular instrument in folk dance ensembles. In 1980, the first seminar of diatonic button accordion was organized in the frame of regular education courses, for which Mile Trampuš, musician and alongside wife Neva also the artistic leader of the well-established folk dance ensemble Koleda from Velenje, prepared written materials for the seminar participants.²⁰ At similar seminars in the following years, experience in diatonic button accordion play was transmitted by various renowned musicians, among the first Lojze Slak, who revived this accordion from oblivion in the 1960s and massively popularized it in the framework of the Slovenian folk pop music (*narodnozabavna glasba*) he was performing.

Julijan Strajnar, a researcher of traditional music at the Institute of Ethnomusicology of the ZRC SAZU, long-time musician in the France Marolt Students’ Folk Dance Ensemble, and author of many musical arrangements for folk dance ensembles, in 1986 in a special themed edition of the magazine *Folklorist* titled *Musicians’ Tunes* (Strajnar, 1986) stressed the important role of the diatonic button accordion in Slovenian traditional music, publishing several field transcripts and music arrangements for the instrument. Mile Trampuš then, in his manual from the early 1990s, already states that the diatonic button accordion is “beyond doubt extremely popular” among the people and has become “the most important Slovenian traditional instrument” (Trampuš, 1993: 3). Nevertheless, due to some of its (musical) limitations and a pronounced connection to the Slovenian space, it was not able to fully replace the “universality” of the piano accordion in folk dance ensembles, especially in the performance of traditions from other Yugoslavian republics. After the year 1991, when all the folk dance ensembles reoriented themselves into the Slovenian program, coupled with the gradual rise in the popularity of the diatonic button accordion in various popular music genres and among youth, and the implementation of its teaching privately and in music schools,²¹

²⁰ In 1993, Mile Trampuš based on his seminar materials published the *Musician’s Manual* (*Godčevski priročnik*, Trampuš, 1993), a workbook for playing the diatonic button accordion introducing students to the instrument in a systematic and simple way, featuring examples of Slovenian folk melodies.

²¹ In the year 2000, the diatonic button accordion course became part of public music education in Slovenia, while the instrument was simultaneously introduced and categorized as a “traditional instrument”.

the diatonic button accordion became the dominant and central instrument of folk dance ensembles in Slovenia.

The emergence, rise to prominence and finally dominance of the diatonic button accordion in Slovenian folk dance ensembles is an apt example; on the one hand reflecting the expert orientation of the folklore activities and on the other the historical circumstances and broader context of presenting “traditional folk music instruments and music” on stage. In the time of the beginning of organized educational activities in the 1970s and the early expert guidance of folklore activities, the shaping of the instrumental music was focused on approaching traditional music, in accordance with the general currents. At that point, the very inclusion of the diatonic button rather than the piano accordion denoted taking a step closer to traditional folk sentiment, as is attested by various records referring to it as a “traditional” or “authentic” instrument.²²

With the rise of the general popularity of the diatonic button accordion, and following Slovenia’s independence also its mass adoption in other musical genres (especially Slovenian folk pop and popular music) along with the media being favourable to this instrument, folk dance ensembles no longer had difficulty finding musicians skilled at the diatonic button accordion. Gradually as well, increasing departures from the traditional style of play began to emerge. Thus, the expert guidance of folk dance ensembles responded with the organizing of numerous music workshops and seminars directed particularly at diatonic button accordion musicians, presenting them with the traditional playing style and folk use. Expert articles and written guidelines concerning the play style of the diatonic button accordion within the framework of the traditional music performance or in folk dance ensembles were also published (e.g. Volk, 2008; Rauch, 2008, 2010). The need for such guidance in time increased, since “ever younger musicians introduced ever more elements of modern playing, along with modern instruments, into folk dance ensembles as well – first to the rehearsals, and then, of course, to the performances” (Rauch, 2010: 20), an influence that has been moving the diatonic button accordion and its playing style away from the traditional playing style of the past.

²² Thus e.g. Ravnikar in his article in 1974 already stresses that the implementation of the diatonic button accordion is sensible “for all those folk dance ensembles whose leadership wishes to seek tradition” (Ravnikar 1974b: 15), while Trampuš points out the use of folk instruments in folk dance ensembles, including the diatonic button accordion: “At our seminars for folk dance ensemble leaders, we constantly recommended the use of traditional folk instruments, the diatonic button accordion in particular” (Trampuš, 1993: 3). In the document *Program tasks and actions of the Association of Cultural Organizations of Slovenia in the field of folklore activities 1983*, education on the diatonic button accordion is simply titled as “seminar for traditional accordion” (*Programske naloge*, 1983).

Conclusion

On the case of the diatonic button accordion we can see how changes in the performing practice, superficial knowledge of the characteristics of traditional instrumental music, modernized line-ups as well as shifts in the views on the presentation of folk tradition on stage have in recent times been shaping in folk dance ensembles a different musical image to that planned in the historic endeavours of education and expert training. Records of guidelines and teachings concerning the performance and arrangement of traditional music in folk dance ensembles had for a considerable time expressed, up until the 2010s, an orientation towards “genuine” folk tradition and custom (cf. Strajnar, 1986; Volk, 2008; Rauch, 2010). Such orientation, which followed the historical and geographical features drawing on ethnographical data, corresponds to the concept of the passive adoption to the stage, meaning the stage presentation of traditional music and dance closely following the original, and with all the characteristic traditional elements.

It appears that the independence of Slovenia in 1991 primarily facilitated a closer and more comprehensive realization of ideas and concepts that had already been set quite far back in time. With the reorientation of the folk dance ensembles exclusively into repertoire based on the Slovenian folk tradition, the arrangers of the music, musicians, and ensemble leaders were compelled to dedicate themselves to the understanding and presentation of the Slovenian traditional instrumental music, following aspirations whose seeds were planted in the 1970s with the start of systematic education. From this aspect the year 1991, which naturally offered many radical shifts, is perhaps seen as less quintessential for the workings of the folk dance ensembles than the year 1970, when the institutional education and expert guidance focused on the Slovenian tradition first began.

In the last decade then, the expert guidance of musicians and those creating the musical image within folk dance ensembles has focused elsewhere, corresponding more closely to the concept of the active transfer to the stage. Similarly as it has been established by Rebeka Kunej (2018, 2023) within traditional dance, in instrumental traditional music the initial ideas gravitating towards the faithful portrayal of “tradition”, “veracity”, “authenticity” have transformed into an “artistic concept”, in which folk tradition moves into the role of inspiring the creativity of authors. In the *Manual for Folklore Activity* from the year 2017 we thus find instructions that folk dance ensembles may “freely manipulate musical content (e.g. music, lyrics, band line-up) so as to reinterpret it artistically” (Šivic, 2017: 118). In this it is pointed out that “the context of time and space set by the ethnographical data ought to be expanded, taking into account a broader artistic frame”, which incorporates the inclusion of other musical genres, for example Slovenian folk pop, choir, or popular music (Šivic, 2017: 143). Accordingly, the concept and execution of educational activities and expert guidance engaged with folk dance ensembles has changed to a fundamental degree.

In the recent years, all this reflects in the musical arrangements, utilized instruments, instrumental line-ups and style of performance, as well as in the overall stage presentation of music-dance performances. The connection between music and dance is no longer as meaningfully intertwined, mutually dependent and inseparable as it might be expected or was evident in tradition. The reasons for such changes in the approach of expert guidance must be researched in detail, though it would appear they do not arise from the past expert guidance, nor are they directly connected to the consequences of Slovenian independence, but ride the currents of other changes and concepts instead.

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Spreminjajoča se narava instrumentalne glasbe in glasbenikov v folklornih skupinah

Folklorne skupine imajo v Sloveniji že skoraj stoletje dolgo tradicijo in sodijo v širši okvir »folklorne dejavnosti«, ki predstavlja na tradiciji temelječo glasbo, ples, oblačilno kulturo ter šege in navade. Pogosto so ti elementi najbolj celostno zaobjeti prav v folklornih skupinah; te jih združujejo in povezujejo ter v glasbenoplesnih odrskih postavitvah javno predstavljajo na različnih prireditvah.

Čeprav je pogosto poudarjena prevladujoča vloga plesa, pa ima v dejavnostih folklornih skupin pomembno vlogo inštrumentalna glasba. Praviloma jo v živo izvajajo glasbeniki, ki so aktivni člani folklornih skupin, in tako je tudi vloga glasbenikov osrednjega pomena v tem procesu. Namen prispevka je predstaviti vlogo instrumentalne glasbe in glasbenikov v folklornih skupinah ter preučiti različne vplive na oblikovanje glasbene podobe v njej. Obravnavan je čas od leta 1970, ko se je začelo sistematično strokovno izobraževanje in usmerjanje delovanja folklornih skupin, do okoli leta 2015, ko je v vsebinskem konceptu usmerjanja in delovanja folklornih skupin prišlo do bistvenih sprememb in novosti. Pri tem sta pozornosti deležna mejnika, ki sta pomembno vplivala na delovanje folklornih skupin v tem času: prvi predstavlja začetek organiziranih izobraževalnih dejavnosti, seminarjev in srečanj skupin, ki so se v začetku 70. let začela institucionalno izvajati, drugi pa vpliv družbenopolitičnih sprememb zaradi razpada Jugoslavije in osamosvojitve Slovenije leta 1991. V članku je analizirano predvsem, kakšen vpliv je imel začetek strokovnega usmerjanja in izobraževanja na glasbeno podobo v folklornih skupinah in v čem je bilo leto 1991 prelomno tudi za glasbo in glasbenike v njih.

Raziskava je pokazala, da je osamosvojitve Slovenije omogočila predvsem doslednejšo in popolnejšo uresničitev zamisli in konceptov, ki so bili postavljeni že veliko prej. S preusmeritvijo vseh folklornih skupin izključno v repertoar, ki temelji na slovenskem ljudskem izročilu, so se bili glasbeniki, vodje skupin in oblikovalci glasbene podobe v folklornih skupinah primorani temeljiteje posvečati razumevanju in predstavljanju slovenske ljudske inštrumentalne glasbe in dosledneje uresničevati tisto, kar je bilo zasnovano že z začetkom sistematičnega izobraževanja. S tega vidika se pokaže, da je sicer vsestransko prelomno leto 1991 morda manj vplivalo na oblikovanje glasbene podobe v folklornih skupinah kakor čas, ko sta se začela sistematično izobraževanje in strokovno usmerjanje, ki sta gradila na temeljitem poznavanju slovenskega izročila in njegovem predstavljanju na odru.