

Mirjana Zakić

**THE RITUAL SONGS OF THE WINTER SEMESTER – THE SYSTEM OF SOUND  
SIGNS IN THE SOUTH-EASTERN SERBIAN TRADITION**

In writing the doctoral thesis: *The Ritual Songs of the Winter Semester – The System of Sounds Signs in the South-Eastern Serbian Tradition* Mirjana Zakić sought to address the lack of a synthetic approach and comparative analysis of the songs from the winter semester (in itself, a centre of calendar ritualism) at the broader cultural space of South-Eastern Serbia (which has preserved the ritual heritage longer and better).<sup>1</sup> In so doing, Zakić aimed to determine the musical and poetic identifiers of the analyzed, functionally marked genres. The conceptual frame – focused on the way the music presents the idea of a certain ritual, as well as the essential connection between the musical text and the other texts in the ritual system – required interdisciplinary methodology, based on analytical and critical combinations of ethnomusicological, ethnological, ethnochoreological, sociolinguistic, communicological, and semiological approaches.

In the first chapter, ‘General characteristics of the genres of winter ritual semester’, the author uses five sub-chapters to introduce typical models of presenting and interpreting the thesis: the concept of genre-definition of vocal expression, the concept of the ritual semester, the concept of communicative identification of the ritual, the concept of the semiotic character of the vocal system, and the concept of the semiotic function of poetic texts. By proposing these models as a basis for the interdisciplinary analysis of the ritual, the author moved from the traditional phenomenological position of uncovering and interpreting the ‘phenomena’ of vocal expression to communicative and subsequently semiotic analyses, which show the musical text as a form of production, communication, and reception of meaning within the ritual process.

The second chapter, ‘Principles of modelling and the analyses of the ritual musical texts’, is divided into four subchapters, in which the author presents and elaborates the analytical models of semiotic music, as well as corresponding semiotic-ethnomusicological concepts of importance

---

<sup>1</sup> The doctoral thesis was completed in June 2006 and defending at the Music Academy in Belgrade, on 15 April 2007, before a board consisting of the following: PhD Dragoslav Dević (mentor), PhD Miško Šuvaković (president), PhD Dimitrije O. Golemović, PhD Svanibor Petan, PhD Olivera Vasić.

to the analyses. Music is interpreted as a textual and contextual structure, as well as a form of presenting or representing certain sociological and cultural systems. Special attention is paid to the relationships between cultural discourse, scientific meta-discourse, and the musical model (through the concept of the 'emic' and 'etic' approach, and the interpretation of the notion of *voice*). The proposed analytical model of music, which connects the inner musical semiotics, reference and interpretation, indicates the necessity of synchronic studying, and demonstrates the relation between the object, method and subject of scientific research.

Utilising this model of ethnomusicological-semiological analysis for the first time in Serbian ethnomusicology, the central analytical chapter of this work, 'Musical system of the winter semester rituals' comprises the analytical interpretation of the Christmas songs, songs with the ritual swinging, Saint Lazarus' Day songs and Saint George's Day songs (that is, the ritual vocal categories performed exclusively from Mitrovdan [Saint Demetrius' Day, on November 8<sup>th</sup> according to Julian calendar], to Djurdjevdan [Saint George's Day, April 23<sup>rd</sup> according to Julian calendar]). A detailed analytic-synthetic review of characteristic musical examples (103 transcriptions in the appendix illustrate the specific structural qualities of over 500 analyzed melodies) and their geographic and cultural contexts, explains the structural manifestations and functionally significant totality of ritual music.

The fourth and final chapter, deals with the question of synthesizing aspects of semiotics on a musical level ('Intertextuality on musical system level'), and on the more general level of its subtle relationships with musical and extramusical ritual texts ('Intertextuality on ritual system level'). Such an intertextual approach results in defining the specific phenomenon of the ritual songs of the winter semester, as well as the musically codified system, or the system of genre-defined (functionally marked) intonations, which possess certain semantic characteristics. The same approach, in the context of scientific explication of ritual syncretism, results in defining homologue structures of ritual texts, and the logical connecting of different types of discourses in the ritual, unified by the idea of a given calendar processuality.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović