

BULGARIAN FOLKLORE IN CANADA: SOME SOURCES AND OBSERVATIONS*

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This overview proposes paths for future explorations on the under-researched topic of Bulgarian folklore in Canada. The relative obscurity of the topic has allowed me to compile a list of sources and contact information, which would allow for the planning of a future research approach.

As a Bulgarian musician living in Montréal, Canada, upon introduced to someone, my nationality often becomes the source of fascination and the target of many a question. Depending on the generation of the person with whom I am in the process of becoming acquainted, the conversation usually unfolds in one in three ways:

Conversation type 1:

Person-born-before-1960ish: “You have an interesting accent. Where are you from?”

I: “Bulgaria.”

Person-born-before-1960ish: “Bulgaria? Wow! I have wonderful memories of the Bulgarian pavilion at Expo 67! I love Bulgarian folklore!”

(optional addition)

“I started dancing folklore dances because of Bulgaria’s pavilion at Expo 67!”

* This short essay was originally written on the occasion of the round table “Ethnomusicology between two centuries”, honouring Bulgarian musicologists *Acad. Dr.Sc* Nikolay Kaufman, *Assoc. Prof. Dr.Sc* Ruja Neykova and *Assoc. Prof. Dr.* Nataliya Rashkova, which took place on December 10, 2015 in Sofia, Bulgaria. The event was organized by the Institute of Ethnology and folklore studies with Ethnography Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences.

Conversation type 2:

Person-born-between-1960-and-1980: “You have an interesting accent. Where are you from?”

I: “Bulgaria.”

Person-born-between-1960-and-1980: “My parents told me so much about the Bulgarian Pavilion at Expo 67! I have also heard the ‘Mystery of Bulgarian voices:’ choir. Are they coming back to Canada?”¹

Conversation type 3:

Person-born-between-1980-and-2000: “You have an interesting accent. Where are you from?”

I: “Bulgaria.”

Person-born-between-1980-and-2000: “Oh, I know a Bulgarian. S/he is (was) my teacher. Such a smart intelligent person, wonderful scientist. I know you have wonderful cheese, yogurt and folklore. Great rhythms! Also, Eurovision!”

These conversations are so frequent that I have grown to expect them every time I meet a new person. Inspired by the average Canadian’s immediate connection between Bulgaria and the interesting folklore, (and, for the younger generation, between Bulgaria and good teachers) I have compiled a list of sources that would help people locate Bulgarian folklore in Canada.

Yves Moreau has probably contributed most for the popularization of Bulgarian folklore in Canada. A brief biography of him in Bulgarian, as well as a personal story by someone who has been inspired by him, can be found in “Journal 8”.² Moreau has taught Bulgarian folklore dances across Canada and abroad. The large network and infrastructure of collaborators he created flourishes today.³

Many of the people who Moreau inspired have expanded their interest in folklore to include cultures other than the Bulgarian one. The *Association montréalaise des arts et des traditions populaires* teaches folklore dancing on the peak of the Mont Royal mountain (in reality a large elevation) in Montréal yearly, every June through September. On Mondays people learn folklore dances, of which

¹ Good news! The ‘Mystery of Bulgarian Voices’ choir is indeed coming back to Canada this year! For more information, please, visit “The Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices – Women’s Choir.” The Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices RSS. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.themysteryofthebulgarianvoices.com/>>.

² Милчева, Женья. “Любов в 7/8.” *Списание 8 8* (56) (2013): 82–88. Print.

³ “Bourque-Moreau Associés (BMA) Folklore Productions.” *Bourque-Moreau Associés Folklore Productions*. N.p., 2014. Web. 04 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.bourque-moreau.com/>>.

Bulgarian dances form a very large part. Then on Thursdays they congregate to dance them.⁴

Research-wise, there are precious little sources available that pertain to the practice of Bulgarian folklore in Canada. I have compiled a bibliography that comprises one single encyclopedic article on Bulgarian music in Canada, written by Bulgarian-Canadian ethnomusicologist Irene Markoff.⁵ Markoff enumerates a number of Bulgarian musicians who at various times have established themselves in Canada and does mention a bit the practice of Bulgarian folklore.

Stefan Hintersteiner from the Canadian Music Centre (CMC) conducted a research on my request and compiled a list of works by Canadian composers that, according to their composers, were inspired by Bulgarian folklore. Those works are found in the CMC archives and encompass only composers who are members of the centre.⁶

“Ancient Legends – The Mystery and the Pagan Dances (chamber orchestra) / Vania Angelova <http://www.musiccentre.ca/node/83264> Bulgarian Dance (piano) / James Hiscott <http://www.musiccentre.ca/node/5025> Three Bulgarian Dances (clarinet, piano) / Blago Simeonov <http://www.musiccentre.ca/node/3807> Martin Ivanov is another Bulgarian-Canadian composer, although we do not currently have his scores in our collection. <http://www.musiccentre.ca/node/37753/biography>“

In a subsequent message from the same day, Hintersteiner sent me two more titles, of which one featured a work not currently found at the CMC:

“Firewalk (two pianos) / Colin MacDonald <https://soundcloud.com/colinmacdonald-1/firewalk-mp3> Wine, Candelight and Hot Chili Peppers / Roussi Tarmakov <http://www.ubc-bg.com/en/composer/75> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TJgF3n1IEt0>”⁷

Not all musicians are members of the CMC and not all feel the need to always announce their cultural influences on their output. The music of Bulgarian-Canadians Todor Kobakov, Dimitar Pentchev and Alexandra Fol, for example, displays – in some works more than others – the influence of Bulgarian folklore.

⁴ “Dances Plein-air 2015.” *Association Montréalaise Des Arts Et Des Traditions Populaires*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.amatp.org/dances-plein-air.html>>.

⁵ Markoff, Irene. “Bulgarian Music in Canada.” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Historica Canada, 23 Jan. 2014. Web. 04 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/bulgaria-emc/>>.

⁶ Hintersteiner, Stefan. “RE: Musique Influencée Par Le Folklore Bulgare Music Influenced by Bulgarian Folklore.” Message to the author. 4 Nov. 2015. E-mail.

⁷ Hintersteiner, Stefan. “RE: Musique Influencée Par Le Folklore Bulgare Music Influenced by Bulgarian Folklore.” Message to the author. 4 Nov. 2015. E-mail (2).

My biography references the official websites of independent Bulgarian folklore groups in Canada, one in Ottawa, one in Montréal, one in Toronto, one in Vancouver one in Calgary Those groups focus mostly on dancing, with the exception of Montréal, where the community maintains folklore singing. Bulgarian church communities also maintain the dance traditions on important holidays.⁸

I hope that my short overview will inspire an in-depth research project by a folklorist on the fascinating topic of Bulgarian folklore and its place in the multi-cultural Canadian society.

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⁸ From my personal observation, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Montreal, St. Ivan Rilski, always hires instrumentalists to perform at large community celebrations.

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