

ТРИНАДЕСЕТА НАУЧНА КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ ЗА ДОКТОРАНТИ И  
ПОСТДОКТОРАНТИ С МЕЖДУНАРОДНО УЧАСТИЕ

„МЛАД НАУЧЕН ФОРУМ ЗА МУЗИКА И ТАНЦ“

Сборник 13

## ДОКЛАДИ

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### ИСТОРИЧЕСКИ ПРЕГЛЕД НА ХОРОВОТО ПЕЕНЕ В КОСОВО

АДУРИМ РАСИМИ<sup>1</sup>

### THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CHORAL SINGING IN KOSOVO

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**Резюме:** Докладът представя историческото развитие на хоровото пеене в Косово на фона на общото културно и образователно развитие в различни исторически моменти и до наши дни. В хронологичен порядък се разглеждат хоровите

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групи, които са иницирали и които участват в развитието на любителското хорово пеене. Първите композитори, които допринасят за развитието на този музикален жанр, са също споменати. Текстът разглежда хоровото пеене в общообразователните училища (основни и гимназии) и хорове в специализираните музикални училища (основни и гимназии). Той дава на читателя поглед върху приноса на най-значимите културни институции на страната, които участват в професионалното развитие на хоровото изкуство, като: Факултетът по музика, хорът „Collegium Cantorum“, Хорът при РТП (Радио и телевизия на Прищина), Филхармоничният хор на Косово и др.

Докладът разглежда и културната ситуация през 90-те години на миналия век, породена от проблемите, през които страната преминава в този период, например времето след войната, когато Косово е под международен протекторат до своята независимост през 2008 година. Текстът анализира и развитието на хоровото пеене след този период и до наши дни.

**Ключови думи:** хор, общо образование, музикално образование, културни институции, институции за изкуство

**Summary:** This research presents the historical development of Choral Singing in Kosovo within the context of general cultural and educational development at various historic times to present days. It mentions chronologically the choral groups that have been involved in the progress of amateur choral singing, especially at the beginning of this cultural activity. The first composers who contributed to the development of this musical genre are also pointed out. In this paper, we talk about the choral singing in general education (in primary and secondary schools), proceeding with choral singing in the context of music education (in primary and secondary schools of music). In addition, it provides the reader with the insight about the contribution of most significant educational and cultural institutions that participated in the professional development of choral singing such as: Faculty of

Music, Choir „Collegium Cantorum“, Choir of RTP (Radio and Television of Prishtina), Kosovo Philharmonic Choir, etc.

It also deals with the cultural situation in the 1990s as a result of the difficult time that Kosovo had in this period. In addition, it deals with the development of choral singing after the 1999s, i.e. after the war when Kosovo was under the international protectorate till its independence in 2008; then it proceeds with the development of choral singing to the present day.

**Key words:** choir, general education, music education, cultural institutions, institutions of art

Generally speaking, art and culture in Kosovo before the Second World War had followed a very small development rate. The difficult socio-economic and political conditions, the absence of educational and cultural institutions, could not bear artistic music in general, and any activity of choral singing in particular. It is known that before the Second World War in Kosovo, choral singing was practiced by Catholic Kosovans in churches. In these religious buildings, little amateur cultural activity was developed, where tiny cultural, artistic, and religious shows were organized in Albanian language [Berisha 1997, p. 20]. Musical developments in Kosovo commenced in the late 1940s. Although under difficult circumstances and in founded schools during World War II, at a time when a part of Kosovo was under the administration of Albania, there were attempts to cultivate choral singing. Even though, they were very few, a cultural show organized by the students and teachers of „Skanderbeg“ school in Mitrovica on 25, 26, and 27 August, 1941 took place. The „mixed choir with two or three voices, through short act performances“ performed in this show [Luzha 2004, p. 53].

The cultivated music in Kosovo began after the end of World War II. Since its beginnings it was mainly introduced by vocal creativity and vocal performances. Amateur music started to flourish, but also the professional music began its development, especially when it is known that professional music in Kosovo was not traditionally developed at

all. In the urban area, various cultural and artistic societies started their activity“ [Rasimi 2004, p. 16], where, in addition to other musical activities, there were choir groups such as „Agimi“ from Prizren, „Hajdar Dushi“ from Gjakova, „Ramiz Sadiku“ and „Xhemal Kada“ from Peja [Ismaili 2006, p. 2004], „Drita“ from Gjilan etc., performing their activity. Although these cultural and artistic societies exercised extensive artistic activities, not all of them had a choral section. Among the reasons for not providing choral ensembles within these amateur societies, was the lack of singers and professional directors whose professional qualification was conditioned by general, social, political, and economic developments. „Among the first and the most renowned choirs founded at this time was the choir of Artistic Society „Agimi“ from Prizren. This choir has reached an enviable level, due to the pioneering work of Lorenc Antoni and then Rexho Mulliqi, as well as other composers who came after. It is worth mentioning that Lorenc Antoni was the initiator of secular choral music, which is a great contribution to the further advancement of the choral singing“ [Rasimi 2004, p. 16].

The choral activity, in addition to artistic and cultural performances, began to spread in schools as well. A great contribution in this regard was given by the music school in Prizren, founded in 1948, and a year later, by founded schools in Prishtina and several other surrounding cities.

During this time, serious efforts have been made to increase education in general and music education in particular. A great contribution to the development and upgrading of music education and choral music as an integral part, was given by the initiative of the so-called – at that time – Pleqësia për Arsim e Kulturë e Këshillit Popullor Krahinor (1949), which organized „monthly musical courses for leading choirs and orchestras, and for teachers who taught song in primary schools“ [Dymbëdhjetë 1957, p. 31]. Through these seminars organized during the summer holidays, special attention was given on the professional development of professional staff in the field of music education. This probably came as a result of the goal of forming a more massive musical culture. When mentioning the expanded

music activity during this time, it is worth pointing out Festivali i Parë Krahinor i Muzikës – The First District Music Festival „held from 25 to 30 May, 1956, where 51 choirs, 53 orchestras, 37 singers, and 95 soloists, duets, and ensembles with nearly 3,000 and 500 performers performed“ [Dymbëdhjetë 1957, p. 31].

At this time, a tremendous role in increasing education quality played „normal schools“ (five-year secondary school for teacher training), usually the „normal school“ of Gjakova (1946), later transferred to Prishtina (1953), and the other secondary schools of Peja, Prizren, Gjilan, Ferizaj, founded later“ [50 Shkolla 2007, p. 34]. In the framework of „normal schools“, the choirs of these schools were active almost in all major centers of Kosovo such as in Prishtina, Prizren, Gjilan, Mitrovica, Peja, Gjakova, and Ferizaj. These choir groups „performed for the inner needs of schools and towns, and participated in school competitions organized at the state level of the former Yugoslavia“ [Dhomi 2018].

In addition to choral singing in the framework of artistic societies, and choral singing in the framework of general and musical education, the tradition of choral singing continued within the Albanian Catholic Church. According to Dr. Dom Lush Gjergji, the choral ensemble from Janjeva, called „Engjëjt e Bardhë – White Angels“, consisting of approximately 100 children, in the 1960s, had held many concerts in different parts of the former Yugoslavia and Europe. They had even performed in front of the Pope Paul VI“ [Gjergji 2006].

A great contribution in creating new conditions for the development of music education, and producing new professional staff in music education was given by the „high pedagogical school founded in 1962 (when the Music Education Department was a part of it, which then in 1975 became the Faculty of Music within the Academy of Arts)“ [Rxhepagiq, Jashar 1990, p. 61].

With the creation of favorable circumstances, especially in terms of professional training of new musicians in the 1970s, the „*Collegium Cantorum*“ choir was founded. It was directed by the composer Mark Kaçinari [Rasimi 2004, p. 16]. Within a relatively short period of time, this choir managed to have sound foundations for a successful tradition

of vocal-choral singing culture in Kosovo. Mark Kaçinar was an expert of choral singing, and created a standard of interpretation of his choir of a very high and international level. This choir added fame not only to the choral music in Kosovo, but through the musical and cultural activity that consistently developed, made the choral music known even abroad. It is worth mentioning that „in Langolen of England it took the third place in the world“ [Koci 2008, p. 89].

Relying on the fact that general public education schools were met with qualified music teachers, „from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, the competitions of primary school choirs were institutionalized“ [Ramadani 2016], with a lot of participants. Thus, there were a significant number of choirs participating in these competitions, and qualitative preparation and qualitative interpretation was required. Initially, competitions were organized on municipal level, and then the winner choir represented the municipality at the Provincial Competitions (as they were called at that time). And then „the choir that took the first place in these competitions represented Kosovo in the Republican and federal competitions of the former Yugoslavia“ [Osmani 2017].

In the 1980s, more and more opportunities for professional music arose. At this time, the first cadres from the Faculty of Music also emerge, which then contributed to the development of choral singing in the framework of general education (in public schools) as well as in the professional field.

The highest contribution in the advancement of choral singing was obviously given by the Professional Choir of Production of Music of Radio and Television of Prishtina (RTP). The choir „started working in September 1980, and had 30 members only, but after a short time the number of members increased“ [Fletushkë 1985, p. 1]. This choir was mainly composed by young graduate musicians or students of the Faculty of Arts of Prishtina, which was led by renowned composer and conductor Rafet Rudi. We can say that this coral formation is the first completed choir with professional staff and leadership. The main activity of the choir was devoted to the needs of the Radio and Television of Prishtina program. In addition, the choir appeared many

times in the public, whether on the occasion of various manifestations or solo concerts. RTP's Choir, besides numerous works or Capella, made some achievements in vocal-instrumental field together with RTP's orchestra. It participated in important festivals, including „Tribuna e kijimtarisë muzikore e Jugosllavisë – The Yugoslavia's Musical Theater“ in Opatija (Croatia), „Lojërat verore të Dubrovnikut – Summer Games of Dubrovnik“, „Vera e Ohërit – Summer of Ohrid“, etc. [Rasimi 2008, p. 117].

On the other hand, in January 1981, the Children's Choir came to scene as part of the Musical Production of Radio and Television of Prishtina. The members of this choir were talented children coming from the lower-secondary music school and from various primary schools of Prishtina. RTP's Children's Choir performed choral and different other songs for the needs of children's program only. Since 1981, the RTP Children's Choir, led by conductor Ramadan Ramadani has been introduced with great success in renowned children's song festivals such as „Akordet e Kosovës – Kosovo Accords“, „Skena Muzikore e Prishtinës – Prishtina Music Scenes“, „Ditët e Muzikës Kosovare – Kosovo Music Days“ [Ramadani 2016]. These were very important festivals organized by the Kosorvo composers' association.

The Children Choir of the Radio and Television of Prishtina performed in different cultural manifestations, in joint programs with the choir „Colegium Cantorum“ and the professional choir of RTP. Among the most popular choirs were also the Choir of the „Faculty of Arts of Prishtina“ with a high artistic level, the choir of „Men of Gjakova“, and „Men's Octet“ in Prishtina, etc. Likewise, there were also active chorals in high musical schools, where choral singing was obligatory, and the choirs of the lower-secondary music schools were activated only on voluntary basis rather than as a mandatory attending program.

Although, since 1945, there has been a continuous rise of choral singing in all areas of the cultural life, this process has been interrupted for more than a decade, between 1989 and 1999, i.e. at the time when Kosovan education and all institutional activities were expelled from public institutions and had to work in „home-schools“,

or they organized cultural activities in private homes.<sup>3</sup> Under these circumstances, there were no basic conditions for choirs and other ensembles' operation, and as a consequence life was paralyzed in all areas. As the ethnomusicologist R. Munishi says, there are rare historical cases when people cease singing, cease creating, stop listening to music... However, it happened to Kosovans in the former Yugoslavia temporarily; they ceased singing, ceased their joy, their celebration [Munishi 1997, p. 263].

Despite the difficult situation during these 10 years, a spark of choral singing revived. During this time, the Choir of the Faculty of Arts operated. It exercised its activity in private homes, because the respective institutions were usurped. With the help of the „SOROS“ Foundation and Professors Bahri Çela and Jehona Zajmi's support, a choir in Prishtina was founded during 1996-1997. It was attended by professional singers, musicians as well as a small number of foreign singers, who at that time worked in humanitarian organizations in Kosovo and staged the Requiem of Domenico Cimarosa, a concert that was held in the A.C.Ch „Saint Ndou“ in Prishtina [Rasimi 2004, p. 16].

After the war in 1999 when Kosovo was under the international protectorate until its independence on February 17, 2008, the situation began to change for better. However, the consequences were great after a decade's long pause. This may be due to the fact that some of the music professionals such as composers, conductors, instrumentalists, and singers went into exile and started a new life there.

Since 2000, primary and secondary music schools have been founded in all cities of Kosovo. The high school choirs, according to curriculum, are obliged to attend choral singing course. In addition to public appearances for school needs, choirs usually participate in various cultural activities within the cities they operate. The primary school choirs are not mandatory according to the curriculum, and probably that is the reason why those are not functional in all schools.

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<sup>3</sup> Clarification: On March 23, 1989, in the Kosovo Province Assembly, contrary to the will of the citizens, the 1974 Constitution was amended, which suppressed Kosovo's autonomy in the Federation of Yugoslavia, leaving Kosovo as an integral part of Serbia.



From 2000 to 2010, the Children's Choir of Gjilan Music School was very active. During this time, it organized concerts in all centers of Kosovo, including the traditional Christmas concert as well as the concerts performed abroad as it was the case with the joint project „KoriChoir“ where, together with the choir of Zurich music school, they performed in different cities of Switzerland. Other elementary music schools' choirs, which were and continue to be active, are the choir of the elementary music school in Ferizaj, and Gjakova.

Although in general educations (public schools) there are qualified music teachers, yet again the condition of choral singing in Kosovo leaves much to be desired. Although in the 1970s till the end of the 1980s, competition of elementary school choirs was institutionalized, unfortunately, on the other hand, to this day on there is no reorganization of these competitions, which would affect the quality of work of general school choirs. In Prishtina, with the initiative of the Directorate for Culture, Youth, and Sports, in honor of the Liberation Day (June 15th), the meeting of choirs of all the schools of the Municipality of Prishtina is organized. The appearance of the choirs is not of competitive character; rather it is of more symbolic and festive character. It is to be noted that there is no quality interpretation of such choral works at all. This should be explored, indeed. It is worth mentioning that in the framework of the music festival „ReMusica“ organized every year in Prishtina (this year is held the 17th edition), a single evening is devoted to all high school choirs, which offer diversified programs and have a satisfactory level of interpretation.

Though, there is enough qualified staff, the number of graduates in various music branches is rising every day. Thus, various initiatives for the formation of choral groups emerge. Some „city choirs“ have been founded in different cities such as Gjilan, Prizren, Ferizaj, Peja, and so on. These choral ensembles, unfortunately, in most cases exist only by their volunteer work, neglected totally and without any institutional support, and consequently are only activated from time to time and do not operate on continuous basis.

The situation with the choirs of music faculties operating in Kosovo is different. These choirs have a higher level of artistic interpre-

tation. Here belongs the Choir of the Faculty of Music of the University „Hasan Prishtina“ in Prishtina, which continues its tradition since 1975, the Choir of Haxhi Zeka Music School in Peja, the Choir of AAB University. On behalf of finishing academic year, these institutions offer diversified performances in front of the public. Lately, the Youth's Choir „Rexho Mulliqi“ consisting of orchestra and choir of young qualified professionals or students are well known. This formation has held many concerts around European countries, and is known for its high level of interpretation. Then the Newborn Choir, which has participated in many cultural and commemorative events in Kosovo is famous too. Also, the Choir „Seperantum“ is very well known and very active. Recently, it has represented Kosovo in choral competition in France. Less known are the Women Choir „Lira“ and the choir of girls „Laides Voices“.

Of all the choir ensembles, one of the most well-known and most important is the Choir of the Philharmonic of Kosovo. This choir is a professional ensemble with 50 members acting as the second unit within the Kosovo Philharmonic Orchestra. After a pause for a decade (1990-2000), it was reactivated in 2000, and continues the work of the former RTP's professional choir, which has been working successfully since 1980, precisely under the direction of Rafet Rudi. This choir has a very high level of interpretation, which from 2000 to the present day, has performed in different concerts in Kosovo, and many different countries of Europe and worldwide.

Based on the circumstances in which choral singing has been developed in our country, we can say that because of general socio-cultural conditions, there was a delayed activation of choral singing even after the Second World War. However, from this time until 1989, there was a satisfying development of choral singing in the amateur level – which developed within the amateur societies and the general education, – as well as continuous progress was emphasized in the professional level within the musical education and other cultural institutions. Then, for a decade (1989-1999), the whole cultural and institutional life was paralyzed as a consequence of the prevailing

situation at that time. From 2000 up to the present day, there is continuous progress of choral singing on the professional level, where various choral formations of young professionals who have recently completed adequate studies have been founded. On the other hand, the situation in choral singing in general education is not satisfactory, although 95% of music teachers have the relevant qualification. We hope that the choral singing will be more present and more qualitative within the general education as it has marked a qualitative rise in other cultural levels in our country.

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