

LIVING TRADITIONS: THE KALOFER'S BAGPIPES

The interview with Mr. Miroslav Vassilev was conducted by Mrs. Ivanka Baltova



Mr. Miroslav Vassilev is a choreographer-pedagogue, Master of Directing, PhD student in Musicology, Music and Dance art, author and music editor, leading music and folklore programs at the Bulgarian National Radio, Radio Plovdiv, Radio Stara Zagora, editor of the Folklore newspaper “folk horizon”, choreography teacher in primary school and leader of the dance ensemble “Rose Valley” in Karlovo. Among the many awards for the active creative activity of Miroslav Vassilev is the Award of the City of Karlovo for 2019, "Golden Lyre" /2017/ of the Union of Bulgarian Music and Dance Masters, Grand Prix of the International Festival - Poland /2015/, "Orphan Wanderer" for the section "Thematic radio broadcasts" /2010/.

The bagpipe accompanies every local holiday in Kalofer. The instrument is the musical emblem of the town.

Mr. Vassilev, when did bagpipes enter the town?

It is assumed that bagpipes entered the town through settlers (such as Vasil the Bagpiper from the village of Mitirizovo) and established themselves as a local tradition, especially with the development of animal husbandry. In the first half of the twentieth century, the mastery of the Kalofer bagpipers gained wide popularity, their performances came into the focus of the gramophone industry, radio and music folklore. The earliest audio documents date from that time. We find the first ones in the personal collection of gramophone records of Larry Weiner (USA) - recordings of Slavi Velev Dermendzhiev (bagpiper and singer), published by the gramophone company "Favorite Records" (1911). Bai Slavi, as he was called, was the first bagpiper to play "live" on the program of the state Radio Sofia in January 1936. In the middle of the last century, folklorist Raina Katsarova recorded "in the field" another prominent bagpiper - Fallyo Vasilyov Tsvyatkov. The fame of the Kalofer bagpipers grew quickly. With their performing activity, recording activities, and media appearances the local musical dialect reached new audiences. Even today the bagpipe is a precious instrument for Kalofer residents. Hereditary musicians learn the bagpipe craft in the family, the skills are passed from father to son, from grandfather to grandson.

What is the local music repertoire in Kalofer?

With regard to the local musical repertoire, we can outline two types of songs and melodies that are performed on different occasions: 1) first type – traditional: for Christmas, for the custom named “Steam cock”, for custom-named “walk on the beech”, for the wedding procession, for

the games “on your way”, at the festive round dance at the square, etc .; 2) modern marches, hymns, apothotic songs, author's in urban-Renaissance style. The migration to Kalofer had a strong influence on the song repertoire in terms of metro rhythmic, with the predominance of songs in asymmetrical metre. Such are "Played great round dance" (5/8), transferred from the village of Vasil Levski, a song about Peva Braikova (7/8 A), "Bacho Nikola" (7/8 B), found in 8/8, 9/8, as well as in mixed sizes. The best musicians with improvisational abilities develop round dance motives, their well-played songs gather the round dancers and create a good mood.

Do young people follow the tradition?

There is at least one bagpipe in each Kalofer house. The musical families in Kalofer are no exception. Nedyalko Tonev plays together with his sons Hristo and Anton. Among the oldest musicians in Kalofer at the moment is 72-year-old Marin Hristov. Five generations in his family are heirs to the old bagpipe tradition. He learned the skills from his father, known in the past as Peyo the Bagpiper. In recent years there has been great interest in bagpipes, many of the children in the town began to study in the community cultural centre. Kalofer is a unique town in its own way and the traditions that have remained from the old times are typical only for this place.

Despite the modern mechanisms of training and mastering the instrumental style and repertoire, the playing of bagpipes in Kalofer remains one of the oldest forms of local performance, and the town is a kind of centre of the bagpipe tradition in the sub-Balkan valley (in the southern foothills of the Stara Planina Mountain).