Performing Folk Instrumental Music: 
An Anthropological View

Abstract: The paper presents a study of instrumental music performance by applying an anthropological approach to field materials obtained from Bulgarian folklore culture (interviews, observations, folklore texts). Manifestations of physical, social and verbal behavior in making and playing music are considered. The author examines the relationship between the body of the musician and musical instruments and the effects of specific use of bodily parts and organs on instrumental sound and on folk music styles. Development of the musical skills of folk musicians, and their involvement with musical activities and social roles played in a community’s life, are studied at different age periods of a musicians’ life time. It is argued that verbal folklore texts (songs, narratives, etc.) provide valuable information about music and musicians. The case of shepherd as a musician exemplifies verbal folklore knowledge, joining the real and mythological worlds.

Keywords: instrumental music performance in folklore, human body and music instrument, folk musician’s age periods, folk music knowledge

Research insight into music is possible using methods and approaches inherent to musicology and anthropology. For a long time, a musicological approach to the study of musical facts in the oral tradition has dominated in ethnomusicology. Emphasis has been on analysing musical elements and forms, structural features of melody and rhythm, etc., while contextual data about the functioning of music have remained on the periphery of interest. Actually, ethnomusicology is concerned with more than the structural analysis of musical sounds. In an anthropological approach to the study of music, formulated about a half century ago (Merriam 1964), music is regarded as a cultural phenomenon. ‘Anthropologizing’ the musical process is a form of ‘humanization’ of the study of music, shifting interest from the sound product towards man creating, performing and listening to it. Music is a human phenomenon, produced by people for people and existing and functioning in a social situation (Merriam 1964: 184). Music is a product of the behaviour of human groups; it is humanly organized sound (Blacking 1976: 10). Particular emphasis in musical anthropology is placed on human behaviour, which creates music in a human community. Key investigations in the anthropology of music identify several types of musical behavior: physical, verbal, social, and learning behaviour (Merriam 1964).

During the last three decades, I have persistently applied the anthropological approach in my fieldwork and in the research of folk musicians and instrumental music performance in Bulgarian folklore. Analytical studies of field interviews with folk musicians, various folk texts, and field observations on folklore events show manifestations of the mentioned types of human behavior related to the playing of folk music in a traditional musical culture. The following pages present a part of my general conclusions regarding this topic.
Physical behaviour: The human body, folk musical instruments and music

The human body holds a special position in the relationship between nature and culture. As a structure, it is an organic, physical ‘creation’ of nature; simultaneously, physical capabilities are the foundation of the human ability to create culture. Interpretation and ‘usage’ of the body has its own biological and cultural conditioning. The real sources of all culture technology are founded in the human body and in the interaction of human bodies (Blacking 1976: 116). Certain notions about the body also shape perceptions of the human being and the human world (Bogdanov 1989: 26).

Further, my intention is to explore the objectification of the body in the beliefs and practices of instrumental folk music performance. Ethno-musicological observations lead to the important conclusion that people representing different cultures have principally similar attitudes to the realization of music. Presumably, musical cultural patterns of different communities and societies actually express “variations of man and his integrity” (Zhivkov 1994: 7) in a similar way. In Africa or Siberia, South America and Europe, from antiquity to the present day, man has compared musical instruments and their sound with his own body and voice.

Human body as a musical instrument

According to research on the origin of music and the history of musical instruments, man initially found instruments on his own body. Music begins as a movement of the body (Blacking 1976: 111). Clapping of hands, clattering of feet, beating the thighs are first ‘instrumental’ accompaniments to dance. Such body movements are a special feature of many Bulgarian dances and are preserved in both the kinetic and musical folklore dictionary. In their construction and character of the sound, most ancient instruments are instances of objectification and intensification of clapping hands, clattering feet, beating the thighs and, generally, bodily produced ‘music’ (Sachs 1962: 93). They are an extension and enlargement of body organs as well as other instruments of human activity: the fork is an extension of the hand and fingers; the spoon – of the handful; the hammer – of the fist.

Both in the distant past and today, people in the world have been making gadgets which, although not qualifiable as musical instruments, are designed to help create sound and melody with available resources taken from nature (plants, minerals, etc.). The sound and timbre that man aims to obtain but his body is unable to produce are achieved by adding new elements to it. The human body as an instrument acquires the opportunity to sound in a different way.

Such forms of instrumental body expression can be found in Bulgarian masquerade games (mummers) performed on the first Sunday before Lent, or the New Year. The only ‘voice’ of the masked men observing the ritual of silence is the sound of pastoral bells knotted around their waist. Body movement and rhythm cause the instruments to sound, encoding the semantic notion of man identified as a bell (Zaharieva 1987: 65–78). Rhythmic and sound effects of the traditional chain dance (horo) during rituals and holidays are produced by items of female clothing, or adornments such as multiple silver necklaces, pendants, breastplates appliquéd with coin decorations. They become a part of the body, and their sound depends entirely on movement. Despite their secondary music-making function, strings of coins find their place in the classification of Bulgarian folk music instruments.

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1 For example – little ‘bells’ made out of fruits and filled with small stones, and attached around the legs of dancers; fruits hollowed out and filled with grains that dancers hold in their hands (Harrison 1973: 16).
Quite similarly, the clapping of hands during a dance can be substituted for by wooden spoons. During wedding dances in the Varna region, dancers emphasize the beat not only with hands, but also with wooden spoons, caught between their fingers with the handle pointing outwards (Todorov 1973: 31).

Using the body as an instrument comes closest to the united body music – movement that produces music represents dance movement as well. Instrumental development breaks this direct bodily link with dance. The musical instrument acquires its own ‘voice’ and ‘body’.

**Musical instrument as a ‘body’**

Historically, a musical instrument is separated both from body gestures and from mouth-produced sounds, i.e. it offers a new quality, a new synthesis (Zemtsovskiy 1987: 127). At the same time, in folklore culture, man identifies musical instruments with his own body, attributing to them his own bodily traits and characteristics, and associating their sound with his voice. The independent objective existence of a musical instrument does not totally eliminate it from the human body at a mental level. Sometimes this can be a reflection of mythological thought. There is information from different cultures about instruments containing parts of dead human bodies. This associates with mythological thinking and with ritual practices that have reached us as an echo of the ancient times, manifesting a tangible, physical connection between man and the musical instrument separated from his body.

Some musical instruments in Bulgarian folklore are related to mythological knowledge of the beyond. According to an etiological legend, the bagpipe (gaida) player is a son of the devil, who has taught him how to make an air stopper in the blow pipe in order not to let “the soul” get out of the bagpipe. There exists a belief that in the world beyond the devil makes bagpipes from the skin of dead men. Therefore, the following precautionary practices have been carried out at traditional funerals: “In earlier times people used to cut the leg or arm of the deceased with a sharp knife to cause bleeding. In this way they prevented the devil from making a bagpipe from the damaged skin and thus turning the dead man into a vampire” (Zahariev 1935: 260).

In many traditional cultures, there are notions of the musical instrument as a magical miracle, a “self-sounding” phenomenon, and it is considered a living thing. Instruments are identified by gender or kinship relations.

We can find such ‘humanizing’ of musical instruments, described as a man with bodily organs and properties, in the image world of Bulgarian riddles. Possessing parts of a human body and voice capabilities, the shepherd’s bell is described like this: “It has a mouth, a tongue but neither eats nor speaks; shake it and it will start singing” (Burmov 1930: 189). The sound of the bagpipe when someone touches it, is likened to a baby crying: “I have a baby. If I take him, he cries. If I leave him, he shuts up” (Stoilov 1914: 105). The shape of the tamboura and the way of playing (strumming the strings on the body of the instrument) are presented in the riddle “I tickle it on the tummy and then it plaintively cries” (Stoychev 1915: 127).

Anthropomorphic signs of musical instruments are preserved in the construction and names of their constituents. In many traditional cultures, artistic elements in the shape of a human head have been used (and still are) in bow string and wind instruments in Europe,

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3 Archive of Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Fund Tsani Ginchev (№ 129 к), а. е. 44, pp. 171–172.
in African harps, in flutes of the North American Indians, etc. (Mačak 1987: 56–57). In Arabic music, as well as in the string instruments of Central Asia, the shape of the instrument and the combination of the strings emphasize similarity between the instrument and the human body.\(^5\)

Bulgarian folk terminology has preserved names that duplicate some parts of the human body as constructional elements of instruments. Our folk culture manifests similar, transcultural principles of understanding the instrument as a synonym for the human body. Generalized field information and research on Bulgarian folk musical instruments show that masters and players look for words to designate parts of instruments after parts of the human body. This fact points to a way of thinking seeking to determine the musical instrument as, to a certain extent, a human equivalent. Besides physical characteristics, musical instruments have more qualities peculiar to man. Building on the intended use for producing sound, they naturally relate to the ability to ‘speak’ and ‘sing’, as man does. Bulgarian folk music includes plenty of instrumental tunes originated from songs. When listening to the melody, the mode of rhythmic fragmentation and phrasing often reflects the rhythm of the song lyrics as they exist in mind of the musician. The relationship between music and language is outlined in the famous verse “the kaval is playing and speaking” found in hundreds of folk songs.

The analogy between playing and speaking is not random, but seems to be deeply rooted in musicians’ knowledge and understanding. They identify the sounds of folk instruments with “voice.” Interviewed folk musicians say “the bagpipe is a loud voice” and the tamboura has “a soft and low voice.” They describe the timbre of a small djura gaida (bagpipe) by means of voice qualities: “It was a very shrill and screaming bagpipe.”

Instrumental sound, understood as speech, storytelling and message transmission, represents a ‘bodily’ property of the instrument. The musical instrument is silent and not ‘alive’ before it gets into the hands of a musician, who can make sound and create a melody with his fingers, mouth, tongue, etc. To ‘speak’ or ‘sing’, the ‘body’ of the instrument should interact with the body of the performer.

The body of the musician and the ‘body’ of the instrument

The concatenation of the relationship man – instrument – music comprises the actor of the musical performance, the mediator, and the result. Movements of the body exert influence on the instrument; they evoke its musical acoustic capacities, and create music. In other words, man must master certain physical behaviors of execution – shrinking of fingers, the use of the lips and the diaphragm – for sound to be produced by a musical instrument (Merriam 1964: 103). Moreover, the musician has to comply with his physical capabilities for an optimal choice of a musical instrument.

The arguments concerning musicians making the right choice of an instrument are varied and individualized. Most often, they depend on the physical comfort of the musician searching for the most convenience in playing. The effort required to play leads to certain instruments being avoided. For instance, blowing a zourna is harder compared with a bagpipe, and zourna-players must be physically stronger. Correlation between the size of musical instruments and the musician’s physical qualities is a contributing factor for choosing an instrument. In the process of initial music training, children play small whistles especially made for them. Afterward, the size and qualities of the selected musical instrument depend again on individual qualities of the players – if they have a large figure, they will take a bigger flute (kaval); and if they are shorter in stature, they will play a bagpipe with a smaller bag.

Each type of instrument requires a specific technique of using bodily parts and organs for creating music. Data from field studies indicates the priority of fingers for playing almost all folk musical instruments. In the process of learning the folk wind instruments, the bagpipe (*gaida*) and the flute (*kaval*), one of the main lessons is to learn how “to stir fingers correctly” and how “to let the melody into the fingers.” The use of another body organ in the playing of wind instruments – the mouth – is emphasized mainly as a facilitator for playing the flute in comparison with the bagpipes.

The relationship between the human body and the ‘body’ of the instrument persists during a musical performance. Based on centuries-old practice, instrumental performance in Bulgarian folk culture has created postulates for a folk theory of music. Therefore, folk musicians have convincing explanations of the relationship between the qualities of the physical body and successful handling of musical instruments. The analyzed dependence between musicians and their instruments focuses on the physical dimensions of the relationship. The next logical step is to address music itself, as the third component of the concatenated sequence introduced above.

**Body organs, instrumental sounds and regional folk music styles**

The identification of a musical instrument with the human body also manifests in its understanding as a vehicle through which the player expresses himself. A melody performing instrument can enrich and develop the musical features of the human voice. In Bulgarian folklore, the ‘voice’ of the instrument represents an altered voice of man, more precisely of the male. Thereby, the main gender differentiation is manifested in musical activities – women sing while men play instruments. There are performing techniques for the
simultaneous mixing of vocal and instrumental timbres while playing wind instruments. Throat tones and instrumental sounds merge into a peculiar timbre. In Bulgarian folk culture, this old musical practice is resorted to when playing the duduk. Today, we can hear it in the masterly performances of the famous kaval player Theodosii Spassov, who finds different timbre nuances to enrich instrumental capabilities.

Improvement of instrumental timbre is the main measure of a musician’s skills. Timbre diversity in different types of instruments is achieved with the use of different body organs or their substitutes. In the case of percussion instruments, playing with fingers, palms of the hands or a wooden stick (a hand extension) produces a lot of sound colors depending on the materials that interact. The softness of the direct contact between human fingers and hands and the animal leather of the tarambuka and the daire (tambourine) produces an organic, warm, ‘lively’ sound. It is heard well, but only in a close, intimate circle and in the accompaniment of songs. Mediating between human hands and the leather membrane of the tapan (drum), thin and thick sticks make a louder, harsh, public sound. Therefore, the functional use of the drum is mostly at the joint horo dances in the village square.

The mutual relationships and the effects of the body parts and organs on the quality of instrumental sounds are deeply conscious in musical practice. Folklore instrumentalism has built its own system of music norms, which are strictly followed by musicians. Moreover, repetition and adherence to these norms provide for the stylistic specificities of instrumental folk music.

Certainly, the stylistic features found when playing different instruments represent a complex set of cultural prerequisites, regional requirements, technological music factors, potentialities of performers, etc. I will focus on some differences in local folk styles created by the manner of playing. What is important for this research topic is to see how the interaction between the instrument and the musician’s body affects some characteristics of the folk musical styles.

Specific kaval playing styles depend on the position of the lips and fingers, their movement and manner of vibration. The Thracian instrumental style from South-East Bulgaria is remarkable for its soft articulation and, accordingly, deep and soft sounds. The Shopp kaval players from the West Bulgaria (Sofia region) articulate with the tip of the tongue, so the tone is sharp and staccato. A salient feature of the Thracian kaval style is a softening sound realized through horizontal movements of the fingers, unlike the vertical movements of the West Bulgarian players, which produce melodies fragmented into a staccato. The same applies to the West Bulgarian gaida playing manner, also resulting in sharp and strident sounds. Playing the gadulka (a string bowed instrument) depends entirely on the finger and bow techniques. Their specificity determines the performing styles, as well as the varieties of instruments. The gadulka players from Dobrudzha (North-East Bulgaria) have used an old fiddler instrumental technique: the left hand is stationary, playing in one position and with three fingers. This manner strongly impacts on the distinctiveness of the Dobrudzha gadulka playing style. The Thracian performers have a more developed technique; their left hand is movable, and they play with four fingers in different positions. Therefore, they have achieved an advanced instrumental style with rich ornamentation and improvising possibilities. The use of strokes and the speed of the bow movement complement the stylistic features. The Thracian flowing melody is produced due to gentle movement of the bow while the sharp melody of the gadulka from West Bulgaria is the result of jerky frugal movement of the bow.

These examples summarize a small part of the vast research field into the practice of folk music instrumentalism and the relationship between instrumental technique and style. The essential conclusion is that the real distinctions between instrumental folk musical styles started with different acts of the body upon the musical instrument.
Social behaviour: The ages of the folk musician

There is a specific division into periods of human life formulated in different societies and cultures. Separating chronological sections on the basis of meaning, people have attempted to structure the passage of time. The periodization of the lifecycle always correlates with the norms of culture (Kon 1988: 65, 99). In the early stages of the development of society, the individual lifespan was directed by the system of age groups passed over at different periods of a person’s life. Transition from one age period to another was performed simultaneously for all members of the relevant age group, along with changing of their social status. Studies on the perception of a life course in traditional (folk) culture show that man is included in the cycles of nature, the rotation of the agricultural cycle; his lifetime is arranged according to the cyclical sequence of related activities. Changes in human lives are associated with the replacement of some social roles and the acquisition of others. In this sense, the importance of the human chronological age dissolves in the social age, which is more considerable for traditional culture (Bokova 1992: 115–120).

The study of Bulgarian folk musicians’ individual lifetimes reveals specific attitudes towards age periodization. The life course of members of a folk culture is destined to pass according to the rules of their community, within the frames of social roles and types of activities outlined for each age period. According to studies of traditional society, interrelations within the age groups are strictly regulated; everyone knows his/her place and no disputes arise (Mead 1970: 21).

The musician’s lifetime contains all the activities that are part of the life of each member of the community. He learns and practices all the skills and responsibilities of everyday life.
Together with his coevals, the folk music player passes through the rituals of transition and enacts social roles relevant for each age period. At the same time, by virtue of his musical talent and playing skills, his personal life is organized through the implementation of a specific social role for carrying out rituals and feasts in the community’s life.

Research analysis of the Bulgarian fieldwork materials indicates that the lifespan can be generally split into four stages: childhood, bachelorhood, adulthood (after marriage) and old age. The informants specify and distinguish these periods focusing not just on the completed years, but on a particular social identity (Bokova 1994: 47–48). The interviews conducted with folk musicians of various generations confirm the validity of ‘folkloric’ age periodization with regard to the development and changes in the life course of an individual involved in artistic activities. Playing musical instruments also has been specifically arranged in the sequence of age stages and ranges. Different degrees of musical skills and knowledge mark segmentation in the growth of an instrumentalist. The collected materials show chronological ages most often mentioned and important for the growth of a musician: 6-8 years, 12-13 years, and 14-16 years. After that, chronological age is not mentioned explicitly, and the informants use combinations of words for designating social ages: “when I took getting a bachelor”, “as a grown bachelor”, “when I became ready for marriage”, “when I finished the army service”, “when I got married”, “as an old man”. It appears that chronological age has no importance for the age coordinates of the individual after he has left the childhood stage. This point correlates highly with the entrance of an individual into social roles, required by the community in certain periods of his life course.

**Childhood**

Interest in music occurs around the age of 6, when a little boy with musical abilities begins to consciously listen to the sounds of the world around him and to develop his own musical talent. Early vocation for music is manifested by playing handmade sound toys made of natural materials – whistles made of elderberry, rye straw, willow bark, pear leaves, etc. During the so-called “play age” (Erikson), children begin to understand the roles that they are expected to play later in the world of adults. Thus, the prospective folk musician gets into the mood of preparing his own way for learning and playing music.

The real training in folk instrumental music starts a little later – at school age. This is a short but intensive period for the gifted boys to build themselves up as musicians. Most of the rural musicians interviewed had attended primary school and at the same time been actively involved in the labor activities of their families. Children begin to understand and learn some instrumental technologies of the culture to which they belong. The biographies of many folk musicians start with them making musical training instruments for themselves – with their own hands. Other musicians begin by learning real musical instruments which are easy to play – pastoral whistles, an ocarina, a bagpipe without a drone (a long three-piece tube).

The choice of such instruments is not only because of children’s musical inexperience, but also due to physical factors. Although rarely mentioned in the interviews, physical capacities are quite important for the musician during the period of childhood. In contrast to the *kaval*, the shepherd’s whistle or the *duduk* require less effort in blowing, and the distances between the finger holes are accessible for the children’s hands. The bagpipe is an instrument that is much harder than those suitable for a player not yet grown up, and it has been often adjusted to children's physical capacities. Instrument makers have also made special small chanters (melody pipes) for children.

Along with getting to learn instrumental music techniques, young musicians begin to accumulate aural experience, retain tunes, construct folk-type musical thinking, and learn the regulatory requirements of their folk culture. All these activities unfold implicitly and
progressively, through steady listening to the ambient music world and by attempting to adapt to it. Playing musical instruments is done in parallel with the work activities in aid of the family which are inherent to that age – shepherding and herding. In the musicians’ memory, this is a key relation, which provides the possibility of training in instrumental playing. Stabilization of the folk sound system in the mind of the musician continues simultaneously with the improvement of his technical skills in the next age period.

**Bachelorhood**

The period of bachelorhood, which in folk culture begins around the age of 15, is extremely intense and fruitful for the development of a musician. Along with continued instrumental training, the young player is loaded with social obligations related to his musical skills. His life comes under increasing normative regulation from the cultural community, as required by virtue of his specific musical specialization. The player simultaneously performs the roles imposed on him on account of his social age.

A typical example of a situation combining the defined roles of a bachelor and a musician is that of Christmas carolling. This is one of the best known Bulgarian folklore rituals, with the mandatory participation of bachelors, through which they gain the right to marry. In many Bulgarian regions, the groups of young men going and singing around the village are accompanied by a musician performing song tunes called “on the way.” If the music player is a bachelor, he repeatedly changes his activities during the ritual. Along the way, he acts as the musical leader of the group, playing the instrument, and then, upon entry into a house, he associates with the group as a carol singer. Thus, he performs the actions required to implement his own socialization as a member of the bachelors’ group. Moreover, his mu-
sical skills put him in a position of a special ceremonial person distinguished to assist with
the music ritual passage of the young men.

The importance of social age in a musician’s life is confirmed when considering the same
ritual situation but with the participation of an already married musician. When the player is
a married man at a mature age, he enters into a completely different relationship with the
group of carol singers. Being an external person with respect to their age group, he must be
specially invited to play for them, and in most cases he should receive a pre-arranged fee.
Because of his elevated social position, he has a choice to participate in the ritual or not. When
the musician participates in a ritual situation as part of the group of his coevals, he performs
the act of playing for free by applying his specific talents and skills for the benefit of the com-
munity. But when he has a higher social status, his ‘return’ to serve with music to another age
group of a lower position in the community seems to be a fulfillment of a cultural order.

On other musical occasions during the age period described, the musicians manifest the
experience achieved in playing the instruments and the scope of their musical repertoire.
The folk musician first demonstrates his skills inside the group of his coevals. One of his first
musical appearances is at a working-bee. This is an event where young people – girls and
boys – perform collective work, communicate, choose a future marriage partner and con-
duct varied artistic activities (Ganeva 1991: 259). Girls sing a special folk song repertoire,
and the musical participation of young men comes from those knowing how to play a musi-
cal instrument. The emphasis obviously falls on the individual skills and abilities of the
players, who excel their peers in musical talent and therefore occupy a special position
among them.

The acquired self-confidence in playing and the grown repertoire, including more and
more music from the village and the region, allow young musicians to face a wider audience
than their peer group. They get the opportunity to present themselves as musicians to the
local community at festive ring and chain dances (horo) organized on every Sunday in the
village square. For the musician, bachelorhood is a time to strengthen his position as a mu-
ician player in the local community. In the development of young musicians, playing at a horo
dance confirms their public recognition. At such an event the music player joins the rural
musicians’ community, complements his musical knowledge and improves his instrumental
mastery. The hierarchic arrangement of the rural musicians is reflected in the order and
manner in which they provide the horo music: in compliance with both chronological age
(the younger bachelors being ‘lower’ musicians than the elder ones) and the social age (bach-
elors playing voluntarily and gratis, while elderly married musician – for a fee). Field re-
search suggests that feast dancing performed in the village square functions primarily as a
venue for pre-marital communication, so the interest of an already married musician is re-
duced. Young musicians are preferred by their coevals for playing at horo dances because
they ‘serve’ the cultural needs of the respective age. They know and play new tunes that
come into fashion. Older musicians are fans of the traditional repertoire and are less flexible
in adopting news. Thus, successive generations change the concrete repertoire contents of a
village’s musical culture.

The period of bachelorhood is a relatively short part of folk musicians’ life course. For
5-10 years, young men develop intensively as musicians and enter the social life of their
community.

**Adulthood**

In the folkloric age periodization, adulthood encompasses the course of life after
marriage. For the next several decades of his life, a man in a traditional society establishes
himself in the roles of the husband, the father, the member of the patriarchal kin, and the
head of the family. The studied interviews with folk instrumentalists show a typical musical
pattern. In contrast to bachelorhood, which is marked for accelerated musical progress and saturated with important events in a personal life, stimulating musical activities and the growth of musical knowledge and skills, the period of adulthood seems to be calm and even monotonous. In their biographical stories, musicians do not report impressive events. These merge in the musicians’ memory because of the multiplicity of the performances given. The only mentioned life events from this age period are the marriage and the army service. Playing music has become an almost professional activity by then, associated mainly with rituals (weddings) and festivities in the village culture. At the time of adulthood, chronological age differentiation by years is not mentioned. The segmentation of this period is usually described by comparative degrees such as “younger” and “older”, but actually covers the longest age stage of a lifetime.

At his mature age, the folk music player is confident about his good playing skills; he proves to be a master of his instrument, well versed in the local musical repertoire and instrumental style. Together with other musicians, he shares and deepens his musical knowledge and demonstrates his own creative talent. His position strengthens in the village and in the local community owing to his achievements as a musician. The criteria for success are that the musician is sought-after to play at local and family holidays; he gets approval, praise, and wins public recognition from the users of his music.

Old age
The category of old age does not belong to commonly accepted and accurately described scholarly concepts, and varies for different cultures in different moments of their historical development. In folk culture, the beginning of old age is not defined in precise
chronological parameters. The signs of aging appear in a different manner for musicians. When the musician has left his active middle age, his social functions gradually drop out. The reason for this is mainly attributed to the loss of physical strength, which leads to thinning of the instrumentalist’s social obligations. At the time of interviewing, old age was the current age stage for several musicians. They shared both their individual experiences, and memories of previous generations of musicians, whose renowned playing acts they had witnessed. Descriptions of the musicians’ old age phase emphasise physical incapacity and the weakening of musical memory. Not least vital is the fact that the cultural space in the musical folklore is dominated by the next generation of mature musicians, who are in the prime of life and skills and who have thus displaced older players. The younger musicians, however, notice and respect the experience of the older ones; they play together with them and learn from them. In this way, continuity of the oral culture is accomplished.

Irrespective of any changes resulting from advancement in years, the vocation and the longing for music do not go out for most players. Some of them practice untiringly until a late age if their health allows. Nevertheless, the period of old age is characterized by a decrease and almost total exhaustion of playing activity. Elderly musicians cease their activity, giving up their place to the next generation accustomed to their musical heritage.

Verbal behaviour: Folk knowledge about the shepherd as a musician

Collective memory consists of traditional knowledge about the folk musical culture as well as the role and behavior of musicians. Verbal texts in the Bulgarian folklore retain a lot of information about music and musical activities. Folk knowledge can be extracted from song lyrics and narratives (tales, stories, legends and mythological beliefs).

A good part of this interesting knowledge relates to the musical behavior of shepherds. Folklore texts regard the shepherd-player as a ‘magician’ who performs miracles with his wind instrument – honey (or copper) kaval, golden pipe, silver whistle (tzafara). On the mythological level, pastoralism comes closer to rituality than to labor practices. Music information appears in texts in which mythological knowledge is coded – etiological legends, fairy tales, ballads, epic songs and other song lyrics. By using his pipe, the shepherd comes into contact with the beyond, with demonological beings, and becomes an intermediary between the natural and the cultural worlds.

According to a folk legend, the shepherds’ skill of playing a wind instrument is derived from God. During summer time, his sheep used to stand still in one place. The shepherd could not make them move. Then came the Lord, stood in front of them and blew a wooden flute (kaval). The sheep went after him. Ever since then the shepherds played the pipe ahead of the flock to lead it. The Lord himself had taught them how to play.7

Playing near the flock, and keeping and leading the sheep with the tune of his pipe are the typical functional uses of the shepherd’s music. The ability to influence the herd with music is a recognized quality. Playing the kaval is considered a shepherd’s acknowledged professional attribute. In a popular song theme, a shepherd, accused of robbery and impris-

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6 There is a common word in Bulgarian language – meden – translated with the attributes of honey and copper. The first meaning characterizes the sound timbre, and the second one relates to the material of which the instrument is made.

7 The folk legend is from the village of Gurmazovo, Sofia region (Talkuvania 1893: 135–136).
oned, insists on being given his kaval and plays a short tune. He manages to call his flock and dogs with his melody, which is sufficient to prove that he is a shepherd and not a robber.\(^8\)

In the actual practice of pastoralism, playing a wind musical instrument is an inherent skill. Playing for the flock marks the whole process of the training of the musician – learning the instrumental techniques, creating a repertoire, improvisational skills and masterful playing of the special melodies, which guide the grazing sheep.

Bulgaria’s most widespread masterpiece of instrumental shepherd music, the “Lost flock” melodies, are an authentic expression of the improvisational freedom of performance. This is a program melody, performed on a kaval or gaida. The musical structure is based on a story narrative that the performers can express in both verbal and musical language. The tune portrays with sounds the following story. A shepherd fell asleep and lost his sheep. He was at a loss about what to do, so he took out his kaval and, playing a sad melody, went looking for the flock. Seeing some white stones in the distance, the shepherd thought these could be his lost sheep and started a joyful horo-dance melody. On nearing, however, he saw that he had been misled and so he again played the ‘heartbreaking’ melody. The shepherd’s dog barked, the cocks crowed, and still the sheep were missing. He sadly blew his pipe again. Suddenly he heard bells clang and sheep bleat, but again they were not from his flock, so he went on. When he finally found his sheep, he was filled with joy and played a cheerful dance melody. Depending on the figurative intension, emotional attitude and narrative abilities of the players, this story is told in a more or less expanded form.

\(^8\) See, for instance, song texts № 1370 and № 1372, Baladi (1994).
In folklore texts with a mythological basis, the shepherd and his kaval are often represented in connection with the cult of chthonic beings. The dual nature of the snake (Benovska-Sabkova 1992: 23-41) is interpreted through its contradictory effect on people – both good and evil. In fairy tales and song lyrics, the shepherd rescues a snake from a fire, reaching out with his kaval to the snake and getting it out of the fire. The grateful snake gilds the shepherd’s kaval or sends him understanding of animals’ language by “spitting” into the instrument. In another story, the snake, a bearer of death, re-uses the pipe to sneak through it and bites the shepherd fatally on the tongue. The shepherds-music player’s extraordinary impact on the surrounding world suggests that his wind instrument is loaded with magical powers to mediate between the cultural and the natural worlds whilst the shepherd masters the art of applying these powers.

In stories about encounters with demonological characters, in fairy tales and song lyrics, the shepherd’s music attracts the fairies (samodivi), devils, vampires. Again, the position of the musician reflects a duality of positive and negative terms. For example, a shepherd playing in the forest with a shupelka (a whistle) is blinded by fairies; he plays a second time – they punish him by drying his hands. Another story tells of a shepherd-musician who plays his “whistle – the nice chatter”; on hearing him play the fairies “rob him of his voice.” In contrast to these risks of the contact with demonological beings, in some texts the good effect of music overcomes the “wickedness”. Another song describes a bet on endurance between fairies and a shepherd – he plays, they dance. The shepherd wins and takes one of them as his wife.

This brief overview of folklore texts containing information about the shepherd as a musician outlines his overall image as a culture hero. His musical activity follows a mythological prototype. In the long journey through time, folk musical knowledge comes to us amazingly intact and the contents of verbal texts related to music seem to inhabit the borderline between the mythological and the real.

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The anthropological view of music is a way to observe, reveal and explain the variety of models and processes embedded in music cultures. Linking music to the anthropological approach continues to provide beneficial results. Musical anthropology is an established research field with broad perspectives for studying the position of music in human life and for understanding human musical behavior within culture.

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9 See song № 992, Rashkova (2009); Arnaudov (1930: 27).
10 See song № 188, Baladi (1993).
11 See song № 1006, Rashkova (2009).
12 See Arnaudov (1905: 42).
13 See song № 114, Gorov (1983).
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