

CHAPTER 5

Music and Politics



In the summer of 1988 I accompanied two musician friends of mine—Ivan Varimezov and his wife, Tzvetanka Varimezova—to one of their performances (Rice 1994: 275–85). Ivan plays the *gaida* and was at that time the director of the orchestra of a professional ensemble of folk instrumentalists, singers, and dancers from the town of Pazardzhik in the westernmost corner of Thrace. Tzvetanka, an outstanding singer in the local style, was the ensemble's choir director. Both had been trained at the same high school and university-level conservatory where Maria Stoyanova had studied. At the schools they had learned to read musical notation and harmonize and arrange traditional melodies. The ensemble was one of sixteen professional "folk ensembles" located in major cities and towns in Bulgaria (Buchanan 1991: 661–62). I drove with them on a Saturday afternoon to a village near Pazardzhik where they were scheduled to give a concert in the central square.

A PERFORMANCE BY A PROFESSIONAL ENSEMBLE

When we arrived, the street beside the square was lined with vendors of plastic and wooden trinkets, embroidered cloth, and cotton candy. The ensemble's performance was part of a village fair, organized by the village council (*sŭvet*), an institution run by the Communist Party. A sound system with two microphones had been set up on the square in front of the council building. Between the steps of the building and the square stood the national flags of Bulgaria and the Soviet Union, signaling the patriotic and political significance of the event. Villagers, looking rather tired and sunburned—the men dressed in the ubiquitous blue-and-gray pants and jackets of working people—had begun to gather in a large semicircle around the square as the ensemble members made their way into the council building to change into their performing costumes.

The costumes were stylized replicas of traditional village clothing from before World War II. The male instrumentalists wore baggy brown wool pants held in place by a broad swath of cloth and a leather belt at the waist. Their white shirts were embroidered in red geometric patterns down the front and along the outside of the arms. Some wore a vest over their shirts, and each man wore a black wool cap about four inches high. The female singers wore colorfully knitted stockings, wool dresses with an apron over them, and embroidered blouses with a vest or jacket over them. The jackets and dresses were decorated with strands of thread twisted into a thin rope. Some of the women wore jewelry made of gold coins to further adorn their costumes, and some wore flowers in their hair or a scarf or traditional hat. The dancers' costumes were similar, though they changed their outfits as they performed dances from the different musical regions of Bulgaria (figure 5.1).

Arranged Choral Music. The ensemble's performance began with the choir. The group of twelve women entered the square by coming



FIGURE 5.1 A professional folk ensemble. (BalkanTone BHA 1321)

down the steps of the village council building. Forming a line at the two microphones, they sang an arrangement of a traditional song for unaccompanied choir. In their arrangement, the harmonies of European classical music had replaced the solo, unison (or octave) singing of Thrace and the Rhodopes and the drone-based traditional polyphony of the Shop and Pirin regions. They sang instead in a three-part, chordal, homophonic style quite foreign to traditional village practice. They didn't sound like a classical choir, however, because they preserved some elements of traditional practice. Their voice quality was close to the focused sound of traditional village style, giving the group a special tone quality that was unmistakably Bulgarian. They sang village-style ornaments, another musical reference to tradition. One of the parts was close to a drone, which had the effect of creating harmonies that evoked the "dissonance" of traditional drone-based Shop and Pirin singing (CD track 21). The song itself used traditional melodies and rhythms of Bulgarian village singing, further enhancing the impression that this could only be a certain kind of Bulgarian music, not merely classical European music with a Bulgarian tinge. After their song, they exited back up the stairs of the council building as the instrumentalists entered.

ACTIVITY 5.1 *Listening to CD track 21*

Listen to CD track 21, a recording of an arranged folk song sung by the Pazardzhik ensemble choir at a village fair in 1988. Listen for the homophonic texture and the slight "dissonance" of the harmonies.

Arranged Instrumental Music. As the choir exited, the instrumental ensemble came down the steps and formed a line at the microphones. Instead of a single soloist or a small ensemble of three or four instruments, as had been traditional in the prewar era, the nine instrumentalists formed an orchestra consisting of one *kaval*, one *gaida*, three *güdulkas*, a string bass in the shape of a *güdulka*, two *tamburas*, and a *tüpan*.

They played a suite of tunes in different meters (CD track 22). The suite is a new form designed for concert presentation. Traditionally instrumentalists played one dance in one meter, often for a rather long time, stopped, and started up a new dance, often at the dancers' request. Arrangers of folk music used the suite form to create musical variety and hold the attention of a passive, listening audience. The musi-

cians began with some tunes for *pravo horo*, then slowed down and launched into some tunes in perhaps the longest Bulgarian additive meter, 33 pulses to a phrase (notated as 15 + 18 in figure 5.2). Also new to the tradition were chords played on the *tamburas* and *gǔdulkas* and bass *gǔdulka* and countermelodies played by the *gǔdulkas* simultaneously with the main melody. These devices added musical interest for listeners who cared about such things. I doubt whether the assembled villagers did, as they looked on without much enthusiasm and applauded politely at the end. Nonetheless, for many educated, urban listeners, such ensembles create an attractive sound that melds together traditional and modern ways of making music.

ACTIVITY 5.2 *Listening to CD track 22*

Listen to CD track 22, a recording of the suite of instrumental tunes performed by the Pazardzhik ensemble. Listen for the chords and countermelodies in the first section, *pravo horo*. The meter of the second section, called *smeseno horo* (“mixed dance”), is made up of three traditional meters strung together: 15 + 9 + 9 to form a single phrase of 33 pulses, subdivided as follows: 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2/2 + 2 + 2 + 3/2 + 3 + 2 + 2. The second phrase, the B phrase, is shortened to include just the last two sections of nine beats each for a meter of 18. Follow this along aurally while looking at the notation of the melody in figure 5.2.



FIGURE 5.2 Tunes in 33 and 18 meters, CD track 22.

Choreographed Dancing. After the instrumental tune, the male and female dancers of the company came down the steps of the council building, past the Bulgarian and Soviet flags, and performed a series of dances from the Thracian and Shop regions of the country. Instead of the traditional open-circle formation, they altered the basic formal principles of Bulgarian dance in ways at least as profound as the modern musical arrangements altered traditional musical practice. The professional ensembles used choreographers trained in some of the elements of classical ballet to break up the circle and vary the repetitive dance pattern to create interest for a viewing audience. Typically pairs and short lines of dancers faced the audience and rarely moved in a circle, to avoid turning their backs toward the audience. These short lines moved swiftly across the “stage” formed by the open space in the village square. The dancers were enormously skilled, young, and vibrant, their footwork alternately graceful and intense. The audience seemed to appreciate the dancing more than the concert of choral and instrumental music, but many were already looking forward to their chance to dance to the band of wedding instrumentalists setting up on the porch of the council building.

Political Symbolism. Comparing this event to prewar musical life described in the previous chapter makes it clear that Bulgarian traditional music changed dramatically in the second half of the twentieth century. Postwar musical events functioned as government-sponsored entertainment and political symbol. The performance was a microcosm and particular instance of larger political and ideological forces at work in Bulgaria from 1944 to 1989. For some especially skilled instrumentalists, singers, and dancers, what had been primarily a pastime before World War II became a profession. Music, song, and dance, which had been a communal and community activity with the participation of all according to certain gender rules, became a performing art with a sharp split between performers and audience. What had been an important context in which to act out social relations had become a symbol of the Communist Party, the nation, and submission to Soviet domination in cultural, political, and economic matters. When and why and how this happened is the subject of the next section (see also Buchanan 1991, 1995, 1996; Rice 1994: 169–233, 1996; Silverman 1982, 1983).

MODERNIZATION AND A NEW IDEOLOGY COME TO BULGARIA

On 9 September 1944, less than a year before the end of World War II, Bulgarian communists declared a victory over German fascism and a

victory for the Communist Party as the leading state institution. Over the next ten to fifteen years the party consolidated its power, nationalized and collectivized private farmland, created a more powerful industrial economy, and improved educational opportunities for all its citizens.

These changes profoundly affected musical life, tied as it was to farm life in villages. Party ideology, for example, strongly discouraged religious practices. Because churches could no longer be the center of social life on saints' days, and because party officials sometimes intervened to put a stop to fertility and other magical rituals on the grounds that they were "superstitious," many of the most important contexts and excuses for making music disappeared—except in memory. Many young people in their teens or early twenties left their villages to pursue a high school education or a better job in a nearby town. In doing so, they lost touch with the home environment that nurtured traditional music learning and as a result often failed to learn the village repertoire of songs, dances, and instrumental tunes.

At the same time that the forces of ideology and modernization seemed arrayed against traditional music and dance practices, the Communist Party created new institutions and ideas that helped them to flourish in new contexts and new forms. One new idea was that rural music, as an expression of the common man (the proletariat), could be a useful symbol of the new society. As a consequence of this belief, party functionaries invented new institutions to support traditional rural music and place it at the center of national attention and consciousness.

A second new idea suggested that centralized, state support of the arts could be used to create the "new man" that would be necessary to "build communism." For this reason, the communist government supported arts education as strongly as it did education in the sciences and literature. The government, in other words, understood the power of art, especially the performing arts, to symbolically represent a world in an attractive manner full of positive feelings. The world they wanted to represent was not the dreary present with its poverty and struggle—the world of the gray-and-blue-clad workers in the village near Pazardzhik. Rather, it was the bright, happy, prosperous, progressive world of the future promised by communism. The party couldn't create that world in reality because of nearly insurmountable economic problems (and some would say a flawed theory of how to do it), but they could model it ideologically in art, particularly music and dance.

Communist ideology is based on nineteenth-century ideas about the evolution and progress of humankind through stages from the primitive to the civilized. For this reason, all types of art flourished under the patronage of the Bulgarian government during the communist period. New symphony orchestras, opera and ballet companies, and classical music festivals were founded in the major cities. From the early days of the Soviet Union, founded in 1917, and through most of the twentieth century, communist governments in eastern Europe suppressed the possible symbolic association of classical music with the aristocratic and bourgeois classes that patronized it. Instead, they focused on classical music as a symbol of the greatest achievements of Western civilization, ignoring ironically the social classes and economic conditions that fostered that music.

Traditional, rural music was also a symbolic double-edged sword. It was clearly useful as a powerful symbol of national identity and had a great deal of significance and emotional resonance for villagers and workers who migrated to the cities and towns from villages. It was, however, also problematically associated with the poverty and exploitation of those classes by the precommunist economic and social systems.

The solution to the problem and the reconciliation of the double and opposite meanings of both classical and traditional music was to turn one into the other, that is, to imbue traditional music with the aesthetic forms and values and positive symbolic meanings of classical music. This was accomplished by using the techniques of classical music to “arrange” the music—a word with the added implication in Bulgarian of “improving” the music (Buchanan 1991). These techniques include all the devices we observed in the village near Pazardzhik: adding chordal accompaniments and countermelodies to previously unaccompanied melodies; singing in choruses instead of solos or duets; playing in orchestras rather than solo or in small bands; dressing up in old-fashioned costumes for performances; and creating performance situations with a sharp split between the active performers and their passive audience. Other aspects of classical music applied to traditional music included training instrumentalists in musical notation, theory, and composition and allowing them to enter the economic system as full-time professional instrumentalists. (There are always exceptions to such strong generalizations, including Rom instrumentalists who eked out a meager living as professional instrumentalists before World War II.) All of these things were new and foreign to the traditional, prewar practice of Bulgarian village music.

NEW INSTITUTIONS FOR THE NEW FOLK MUSIC

These changes didn't just happen by ideological fiat. They required new institutions, created and backed financially by the government. One of the first things the government did, in 1951, was to invite a well-known classical composer named Phillip Koutev to organize a "State Ensemble of Folk Song and Dance" modeled on similar companies in the Soviet Union (figure 5.3). Koutev and other Bulgarian composers had already been arranging and composing Bulgarian folk songs for classically trained choirs in Sofia before the war, but Koutev understood that such an ensemble would have to be truer to village models than classical ensembles are. So, instead of hiring classically trained instrumentalists and singers, he arranged auditions around the country to find the best village singers, dancers, and instrumentalists. He sent dance specialists to the Soviet Union to learn how to choreograph village dances for presentation on the stage, and he created an orchestra of village instruments and a choir of village singers on the Soviet model that preserved the tone quality of traditional music while dressing it up in new, urbane clothing.

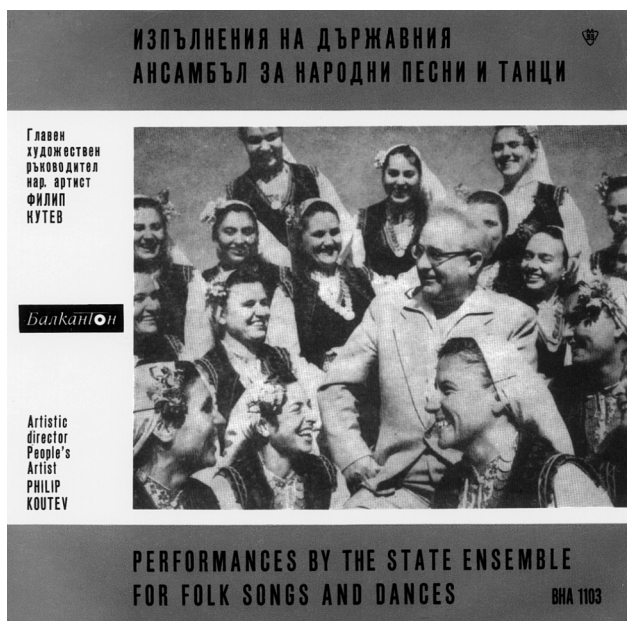


FIGURE 5.3 *Phillip Koutev with his singers.* (Balkanton BHA 1103)

What became known as the “Koutev ensemble” made a positive impression both internally and abroad in the 1950s and 1960s. It was touring to great success in the United States, for example, when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. In 1965 Nonesuch Records released a recording of the ensemble that was influential in the American folk music scene of the 1960s. It was one of the records that got me interested in Bulgarian music. In 1954 a similar orchestra and choir were formed at the national radio station, Radio Sofia. For the next forty years, this kind of “cultivated folk music” filled the airwaves and was produced by the national record company, Balkanton. Eventually nearly every major town had its own professional folk ensemble.

These new ensembles needed good instrumentalists, singers, and dancers. In 1967 a high school to train them was founded, followed by a second one in 1972. A postsecondary “pedagogical institute” continued the training of the high school graduates and prepared them to direct provincial professional ensembles and the many amateur groups that had sprung up in villages all over the country.

Amateur village groups were also part of the new ideological plan for society. They flourished under the direction of an arm of a governmental organization devoted to “artistic amateurism.” Participating in such groups was not just an artistic act but also a political act, if a rather benign one. Rewards included travel around the region and country to folk festivals. The best groups were invited to international festivals in nearby countries, providing one of the few opportunities for travel abroad during the communist era.

These village groups typically didn’t employ the same elaborate arrangements and choreographies as the professional ensembles. They stuck closer to traditional practices. They still required, however, some supervision and direction, either from schoolteachers trained in the “artistic amateurism” organization or graduates of the high schools for folk music. The directors coached the ensembles in such things as intonation, costuming, choice of repertoire, and stage entrances and exits.

CULTIVATED FOLK MUSIC

A more detailed examination of the way Phillip Koutev and those who followed after him treated Bulgarian traditional music helps to understand how they sought to make “cultivated folk music” symbolically appropriate to the new state and aesthetically pleasing to an audience with a higher degree of education than the prewar, rural performers of folk music. Examining the structures of this new music helps make clear the art that went into these arrangements and compositions.

One of Koutev's most famous and effective choral compositions is a song called "Polegnala e Todora" (Todora was taking a nap). Koutev began with a traditional song tune in four measures in a meter of 11 (2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2), but everything else about the piece is composed. First he added a second melody of four measures to lengthen the song's form. Then his wife, Maria Kouteva, composed a new text on a folk theme. The text tells of a girl who lies down to rest in the shade of a tree, but she becomes annoyed when falling leaves interrupt her dreams of a boyfriend (CD track 23). Koutev created a three-part choral score for the original melody and set his composed melody for a quartet of soloists (figure 5.4). In the first section, Koutev divided the choir into two groups so they could sing antiphonally, a common traditional performance practice. The accompanying parts move in the same rhythm as the melody to create a smooth homophonic texture that emphasizes the melody and words. The harmonies are based on the most basic chords of European classical music. In the four-part section Koutev injected a bit of the traditional texture of village singing by holding one part as close as possible to a drone. Finally, the traditional elements were cemented in place by the singers' throaty vocal quality and ornamentation, recorded in the notation with grace notes sung right on the beat before moving on to the main melody note.

ACTIVITY 5.3 *Listening to and singing the song on CD track 23*
Listen to CD track 23, Phillip Koutev's composition "Polegnala e Todora," while following the notation in figure 5.4. In the B section, find the part closest to a drone. Listen for the grace notes. Organize a group and try singing the song. The text concerns a girl dreaming of becoming engaged. Each line of text is followed by a refrain, and the line plus refrain are each sung twice. Notice that when sung, Todora is pronounced Tudora.

Polegnala e Todora
moma Todoro Todoro
 Pod dŭrvo, pod maslinovo
 Poveya vetrets, gornenets.
 Otkŭrshi klonka maslina,
 Che si Todora šŭbudi
 A tya mu se lyuto šŭrdi:
 Vetre le nenaveyniko,
 Seg a li nayde da veesh?

Todora was taking a nap
O maiden Todora, Todora (refrain)
 Underneath a tree, an olive tree.
 A wind blew, a north wind.
 It snapped off an olive branch,
 So that Todora woke up.
 And she angrily scolded it:
 "Unwanted wind,
 Why now did you decide to blow?

Sladka si šūnya šūnuvah,	I was dreaming a sweet dream,
Che mi doshlo pūrvo libe	That my first love had come,
I doneslo pūstra kitka,	And brought me a colorful bouquet,
I doneslo pūstra kitka,	And brought me a colorful bouquet,
A na kitka zlaten prūsten.	And on the bouquet a gold
	[wedding] ring.”

Group 1

Po-leg-na - la e To-do - ra mo-ma To - do - ro To-do - ro

5 Group 2

Po-leg-na - la e To-do - ra mo-ma To - do -

8 Quartet

ro To - do - ro Pod dūr - vo pod ma - sli - no - vo

11

mo-ma To - do - ro To-do - ro ro To-do - ro



FIGURE 5.4 “Polegnala e Todora” by Phillip Koutev, CD track 23. (Used by kind permission of Rykomusic Inc.)

Arrangements of instrumental dance music used the same classical music aesthetic applied to the newly created orchestra of traditional instruments. One such arrangement, *krivo plovdivsko horo* (Crooked Dance from the Plovdiv Region), is in a meter of 13 organized 2 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2 (CD track 24). Like so many of these arrangements, it harkens back to traditional practice by featuring a soloist, in this case the famous *kaval* player Nikola Ganchev, who played with the Koutev ensemble. The arrangement is also traditionally structured into a series of tunes, each played twice. New to the tradition are harmonies and accompaniments added to create musical interest for listeners rather than dancers. Each new tune is usually marked by a change in the accompaniment. Some of the compositional devices include (1) bass note and chord in alternation; (2) block chords punching out the rhythm with pauses for emphasis; (3) a contrast between full orchestra and thinner textures with just the *tamburas* plucking; and (4) chords plus counter-melodies.

ACTIVITY 5.4 *Listening to CD track 24*

Listen to CD track 24, an arrangement of krivo plovdivsko horo. Your first task is to find the basic meter (2 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2). Then try to hear the four-measure phrases, each repeated once. Listen also for the accompaniment texture of each melody, described below.

AA full orchestra

BB kaval solo with tamburas; on the repeat gūdulkas and low strings enter with bass and chords

CC kaval solo, bass and chords with countermelody, full orchestra on repeat

DD kaval, bass and chords, full orchestra in second half of repeat

EE kaval, tamburas with bass and chords, full orchestra

FF kaval and tamburas; bass enters on repeat

GG fade out

For most of the forty-five-year-long communist period, this style of cultivated folk music became the standard way “folk music” (*narodna muzika*, “people’s music”) was presented on the radio and in recordings

and concerts. Many composers produced similar compositions for the growing number of professional and amateur folk orchestras and choirs. While the same basic techniques were used, the style evolved somewhat during that period (Buchanan 1991: 377–405). For example, in choral compositions composers began to experiment with a greater use of dissonance to replace the consonant harmonies that Koutev used in the early years of the communist period. This experiment with dissonance worked well at least partly because there was such a good match between the dissonant sound of modern, twentieth-century classical music and the traditional dissonance created by drone-based singing from the Shop and Pirin regions.



ACTIVITY 5.5 *Listening to CD track 25*

Listen to CD track 25, a composition entitled “Zaspala e moma” (A girl fell asleep) by Stefan Dragostinov, who served as artistic director of the Koutev ensemble in the 1980s. Compare its dissonant, close harmonies to those of Koutev’s in “Polegnala e Todora” on CD track 23. Which composition do you prefer, and why?

NEW MEANING FOR WEDDING MUSIC

At the same time that these musical and cultural developments were changing the artistic form, symbolic meaning, and economic value of traditional music, Bulgarians continued to marry and to need instrumentalists to play for wedding celebrations. Before World War II most weddings would have been accompanied by the villagers’ own singing and playing, or they might have hired some local Roma for a small sum of money. During the communist period, with the growth of a money economy and state support of a new class of professional instrumentalists, more people could afford to hire instrumentalists—and there were more professional instrumentalists to hire. These instrumentalists were not only Roma, who had been professionals in the past, but also Bulgarians who had become professionals for state ensembles or who, as semiprofessional part-time instrumentalists, had the skills to make money in the new “grey” economy.

One of the early modernizing moves in the wedding music tradition, starting in the late nineteenth century, was the incorporation of manu-

factured instruments to replace traditional Bulgarian instruments. The clarinet and the accordion became the most important and widespread wedding music instruments by the mid-twentieth century in many parts of the country. In western Bulgaria, the trumpet and entire brass bands gained prominence (figure 5.5). In northern Bulgaria, the violin entered the tradition, probably owing to influence from Romania, where the instrument is commonly used. The *tŭpan* is still used, but drummers often add a cymbal to the body. Eventually an entire drum kit became common, and over time other modern instruments have been added to wedding bands, including saxophone, electric bass and guitar, and synthesizer. These last instruments require sound systems and electronic amplification, which had become a crucial element in the sound of wedding music by the late 1970s.

The structure of performances has otherwise remained traditional. For a given *horo*, the entire band plays a few tunes that they know in common and then each melodic instrument takes a solo. The main new development was that, since these modern instruments are not as limited in range as traditional ones are, the range of melodies increased



FIGURE 5.5 A Bulgarian brass band playing at a wedding. (Timothy Rice, 1972)



substantially. Also, since modern instruments can play easily and chromatically in many keys, rapid changes from key to key and arpeggiated and chromatic melodies became a hallmark of wedding music (CD tracks 26, 27).

The wedding and state-supported folk music traditions developed in parallel for many years, from the 1950s through the 1970s. But in the 1980s, the last decade of the communist period, they began to diverge musically, economically, and symbolically.

The first cause of these changes was probably economic. The communist economy did not work on a supply-and-demand principle. It was, rather, a "command economy." The problem with such economies is that government-run industries typically produce too much of what people don't want and too little of what they do. In particular, consumer goods were always in short supply. As a consequence of not having much to buy, Bulgarians built up large reserves of savings. They then spent their savings on private services, such as foreign-language lessons for their children, and symbolic display, such as hiring the best, most famous instrumentalists and singers for lavish weddings, like the ones I described in chapter 1. The economic power of this private economy was so great by the 1980s that many instrumentalists in the state-supported ensembles had left or were contemplating leaving to play in the more lucrative wedding music scene. Many wedding instrumentalists had become stars, better known around the country than all but a handful of folk singers and instrumentalists. The most famous was a clarinetist named Ivo Papazov, whose recordings were released in the United States (Buchanan 1996).

Changes in the Sound of Wedding Music. As wedding music developed under the patronage of an increasingly wealthy private economy beyond state control, instrumentalists began to expand its musical properties without the supervision of government authorities from the Ministry of Culture and the national radio and recording industries. These developments occurred in virtually every aspect of the music (Rice 1996).

First, wedding instrumentalists' and their clients' sensibilities gravitated more toward popular music than the classical aesthetic being imposed on folk music by classically trained composers. Instrumentalists pumped up the sound of the music through ever more elaborate and powerful sound systems, which they could afford to buy with all the money being thrown at them.

Second, since many of the bands played nearly every day of the week at weddings and other family celebrations (sending boys off to military

service had become another popular event requiring music), their playing technique developed spectacularly. They had complete command of their instruments, and they began to play at extraordinarily fast tempos to show off their virtuosity. They also began to play more elaborate, wider-ranging improvisations, filled with syncopations, chromaticisms, and arpeggios inspired by jazz and popular music.

Third, since they worked outside government control, they were no longer bound by the nationalistic agenda associated with “folk music.” Since many wedding instrumentalists were Roma, they played Rom music, especially a dance called *kyuchek*. Primarily a solo dance with rapid hip movements that resemble what Americans know as “belly dancing,” to Bulgarians in the 1980s it seemed sexually suggestive and therefore either liberating or licentious, depending in part on their political point of view. Rom wedding instrumentalists also introduced what some Bulgarians called “oriental” elements into their playing such as nonmetrical improvisations over the basic beat of the dance. They also played popular hits from neighboring countries, especially Serbia, Romania, Turkey, and Greece. The freedom of their playing and their freedom from the restraints imposed on folk music helped wedding music become wildly popular during the 1980s.

ACTIVITY 5.6 *Listening to CD tracks 26 and 27*

On the audio CD, tracks 26 and 27 contain examples of wedding music from the 1980s. CD track 26, recorded by Ivo Papazov is a studio recording and, although technically brilliant, is rather restrained compared to his wildest playing at weddings. Still, it shows off some of his instrumental skills and the fast tempos, key changes, melodic arpeggiations, syncopations, and chromaticisms that characterize wedding music. CD track 27, recorded by another excellent band at a festival devoted to wedding music, captures the raw energy and the rough sound quality of live performances.



The Politics of Wedding Music. Besides the brilliance of the instrumentalists, people’s increasing dissatisfaction with the communist government also contributed to the enormous popularity of wedding

music. The government created problems for itself in the 1980s by instituting draconian measures against the Turks and Roma, Bulgaria's Muslim minorities (Poulton 1990, Silverman 1989). Apparently fearing that these minorities had grown so large in number that they might begin to demand cultural autonomy, the government decided to solve the problem by symbolically erasing them and their culture from the national consciousness. They did this by forcing Muslims to change their names to Christian ones or some other approved Bulgarian name. For example, Ivo Papazov had first gained fame as Ibryam Hapazov, but was required to change his name. The government apparently reasoned that without Muslim names they could no longer be identified in a census. They also banned nearly all forms of "oriental" public cultural display, including speaking Turkish, the wearing of traditional pants (*shalvori*) by women, and the playing of Rom forms of music and dance such as *kyuchek*, with its elaborate nonmetrical improvisations. One of the reasons the Roma at the wedding I described in chapter 1 were dancing *rŭchenitsas* and not their own *kyucheks* was precisely because of this ban on Rom cultural display. Bulgarian cultural officials began to claim that all these practices, including much of what was popular about wedding music, were "aggressively antistate."

At one level wedding music was antistate simply because it operated in an economic sphere largely beyond state control. But in the highly charged political environment in Bulgaria in the late 1980s, the musical form of wedding music also became an icon of people's hopes for freedom and a more democratic form of government. An icon is a symbolic form that possesses some of the properties of the thing it represents. Wedding music's emphasis on improvisation by individual instrumentalists, and especially forms of improvisation that broke the bounds of traditional practice, could be interpreted as an iconic representation of the individual freedom Bulgarians increasingly sought in the political arena. It also provided a new "structure of feeling" that allowed people to experience some release and relief within an otherwise repressive and restrictive society (Williams 1977: 128–35).

Furthermore, if folk music, including all its features (highly arranged, emphasis on traditional instruments, narrow-range diatonic melodies, lack of real improvisation), was by its association with government institutions an obvious symbol of the state, then wedding music, with all its contrasting features, could be interpreted as a symbol of antistate sentiments. Those features included a flexible structure that was responsive to the audience rather than completely prearranged; an emphasis on modern instruments; wide-ranging, chromatic melodies; and a prefer-

ence for amplified over acoustic sound. While these features by themselves cannot be said to be iconic of anything, let alone antitotalitarian feelings, in this particular context, where they existed in striking contrast to the music patronized by the state, such features can be interpreted as expressions of the yearning for political freedom (Rice 2001).

One of the general lessons that this Bulgarian example teaches is that music can have referential meaning. The way it “means” something, however, is highly variable and linked to specific cultural, social, and performance situations. A second general lesson is that the meaning of music and musical performance can be carried in the sound of the music, not just in the texts. The song texts of wedding music remained rather traditional and nothing like the protest songs associated with many oppositional political movements around the world. Still, antigovernment sentiments were carried no less effectively and possibly even more powerfully in the musical sounds themselves.

FROM BEHAVIOR TO SYMBOL TO COMMODITY

In the second half of the twentieth century, modernization all over the world has threatened the continued existence of rural musical traditions. In Bulgaria many traditional practices nearly died owing to economic changes or were banned in the name of the new communist ideology. What helped save these traditions was the interest the state took in them for ideological reasons. Though the government transformed tradition in significant ways through arrangements and choreographies, it nonetheless created an intellectual, artistic, and economic environment that demanded *gaidas* and *kavals* and singers and dancers who could perform in the old village manner.

Many Bulgarians’ love of village music and dance, even after they moved to cities, meant that they patronized the tradition by paying musicians to play at elaborate family celebrations, particularly weddings. Thus politics, aesthetics, economics, and social behavior meshed in a particularly productive way to keep Bulgarian traditional music alive, vital, and changing to meet the needs of Bulgarians living in a vastly different world from the one in which the music had been originally created.

Through state and private patronage, this new music, which some scholars call neotraditional music, had become a kind of commodity. Instrumentalists could, in the communist economy, sell their musical labor on an increasingly lucrative mass-mediated market. State ensembles toured abroad, spreading the ideological message of the state

in wonderfully pleasing theatrical forms. Some Bulgarian recordings over the years slipped into the international market for what came to be called around 1989 “world music.” That process of commodification and the subsequent escape of Bulgarian music from local and national meanings is an important element in understanding many kinds of traditional music from around the world. I’ll take this topic up in chapter 6.