

REVIEW

Marija Klobčar. *Poslušajte štimo moja: potujoči pevci na Slovenskem.*
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978-961-05-0268-5.

“Listen to my voice” (*Poslušajte štimo moja*) is the title of Marija Klobčar’s monograph, published by the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Art in Ljubljana. The poetic title is expanded in the subtitle, “itinerant singers in Slovenia” (*Potujoči pevci na Slovenskem*). This scholarly work illuminates the complexity of the phenomenon of itinerant singers, and if a reader perhaps expects a historical account of itinerant singers, the seemingly diffuse, multifaceted treatment of the subject might be disorienting. The monograph deals with a kind of singing that ethnomusicologists have not managed to situate within the folk song tradition. The emphasis is on the kind of singing that was transferred between separate regions either by itinerant singers or on flyers, by printed texts, and other forms of communication. In the introduction, the author attempts to explain why this field of research was of peripheral interest to folklorists in Slovene ethnomusicology circles, since itinerant singers performed for audiences and were also paid, which was uncharacteristic of the folklore tradition. The introductory chapter, “Kako so se izrisovala vprašanja o potujočih pevcih” (how questions about itinerant singers were developed) thus reveals the phenomenon’s complexity and the author’s postulates and dilemmas, while also setting expectations for the reader for a certain degree of knowledge of and acquaintance with the Slovene narrative tradition and itinerant singers’ subjects.

The extensive monograph is divided into thirteen chapters, with an introduction and conclusion. Each has a two-part title: the first part is a verse from a narrative song or a phrase from a historical source; the second part indicates the chapter's contents—for example, “‘Pevce, o katerem so pripovedovali, da nosi slavca v prsih...’—Od igrcev do viteše ustvarjalnosti” (“A singer who was said to harbor a nightingale in his breast...”—From folk musicians to courtly compositions). The chapters are chronologically arranged and, as the author shows, the different periods reveal the complexity and mutability of the social phenomenon in which singing traveled in very different contexts and by differing means.

The monograph takes us back to the time of courtly song in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and of certain Central European troubadours (Žvoneški, Gornjegrajski, and Ostrovrški). In chapter 2, “Vloga pesemskega obveščanja ob uveljavitvi tiska” (The role of news in song at the dawn of print), we learn how the invention of print and societal changes in the new age influenced new ways of transferring song. Printed flyers were a means of reporting important events and calamities, official announcements, and military encounters. Sometimes the reports were given in song. Klobčar tells us that reports in song did not have a creative impetus and creativity was not compensated, but the possibility of earning money was probably the motivation. The subjects of these songs were Turkish attacks and battles, cholera, and Slovene peasant revolts. Songs with devotional content spread in just the same way.

Chapter 3, “Petje in pesmi kot kateheza” (Singing and songs as catechism) is devoted to songs with religious content during the Counter Reformation. The chapter examines religious propaganda, the role of migrating musicians who worked as organists, the significance of pilgrimage shrines, as well as the importance of songs on flyers for spreading songs.

A somewhat shorter, fourth chapter, “Pesemsko obveščanje in odnos do oblasti” (Reporting in song and its stance towards the authorities) analyzes songs by composers who mediated communications between the authorities and the common people. Thus, a song about the Lisbon earthquake was based on the news, a song about the dispersal and persecution of monks shows the effects of the Josephine reforms, and a song about Urška reflects the death sentence of a young woman for killing a child. All three examples derive from actual eighteenth-century events, and songs about common people report the unusual fates of individuals.

In chapter 5, “Vloga letakov in drugih drobnih tiskov pri širjenju pesemskih sporočil” (The role of flyers and other small documents in spreading song texts) Klobčar acquaints us with yet other, very old bearers of texts in addition to flyers—wayside markers, votive images, *tiski s plohom* (message boards), peepholes, story illustrations on large canvases,

publications (from other places), beehive end plates, book publications, lampoons (or degrading pieces of writing), and so forth.

“Časopisi in spreminjanje prometa in komunikacij” (Newspapers and changes in traffic and communications), chapter 6, describes the importance of newspapers in spreading texts, including of songs. Valentin Vodnik’s *Lublanske novice* had such an important role at the end of the eighteenth century, and Janez Bleiweis’s *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice* in the mid-nineteenth century. Klobčar relates that besides newspapers, mandatory schooling and increasing literacy were significant for written communications and informing people. In addition, the postal service’s role grew, as did that of railroads and the telegraph in the second half of the nineteenth century. New ways of communicating in writing provided periodicals a new social role. At the same time, some newspapers, especially *Kmetijske in rokodelske novice*, also carried records of the folk tradition, especially songs and narratives.

Like chapter 4, chapter 7, “Ohranjanje obveščanja s pesmijo v času tiska” (Preservation of reporting in song during the era of print), treats the spread of sung news about sensational events and individual fates. The author first presents songs about cholera and then looks at songs about death sentences. Being sensational news, the latter sold well and thus spread quickly. She also notes sung narratives about people who suffered untimely deaths, offering as examples a song about a jealous lover and one about the 1895 Ljubljana earthquake.

“Nosilci pesemskega sporočila in njihovi prostori” (Bearers of song texts and their spaces) is the title of the eighth chapter, in which Klobčar considers itinerant singers in Slovenia, the authorities’ views of them, and the environs where they worked. She gives detailed descriptions of market singers, traveling craftsmen and peddlers, folk musicians and amateur writers, fiddlers, beggars, blind singers, and the Roma in. She unpacks their social position, in places even citing names and unique features—while fiddlers were greatly liked, since they embodied casualness, market singers and traveling musical craftsmen did not elicit respect. Panhandlers and beggars, especially those who were blind, were another matter. People attributed a special role to them—they saw them as intermediaries between God and humans. Klobčar adduces data to show that people’s sense of justice prevented them from turning beggars away emptyhanded; the latter paid for food and shelter with special prayers or songs.

In chapter 9, we learn that students or scholars—less often teachers (usually called school masters or schoolteachers)—were also counted among itinerant singers. Teachers not infrequently played the organ. Chapter 10, “Značilnosti izročila potujočih pevcev v zapisih” (Written records on the features itinerant singers’ heritage) describes and problematizes the perceptions and attitudes of recorders and collectors of folk materials (from

the beginnings in the 1830s to large collecting activities in the 1910s) to itinerant singers' art.

The situation of active itinerant singers in the context of altered social conditions between the two world wars is outlined in chapter 12, "Radijsko obveščanje in izročilo potujočih pevcev" (Radio broadcasts and the heritage of itinerant singers). Klobčar notes the continuation of the old tradition (she devotes most attention to peddlers), but it is also evident that the new times cast the tradition as a memory. The last part of the chapter is about the 1937 Razstava slovenskega novinarstva (exhibition of the Slovene press) in Ljubljana. The exhibition showed the spread of news in the past and, among other things, revived the historical memory of the role of singing. Klobčar emphasizes that the exhibition clearly pointed to the connection between sung news, moritats (songs about deadly events), and narrative songs.

In her conclusion, the author links selected highlights of the monograph's contents, observing:

"Evidence that there were also itinerant singers in Slovenia changes our understanding of the artists, bearers of the folk heritage: not only the peasantry's culture is expressed in folkways, but also the opus of creative individuals from different classes for whom song was a way to make a living. A realization of the importance of itinerant singers' creations in no way devalues the creations and recreations of rural dwellers; it only broadens the social circle of those who produced songs that, becoming folklore, became part of the folk heritage."

Marija Klobčar's monograph is a very lively description of the chronology and social complexity of the phenomenon of itinerant singers that goes beyond mobile musicians and exposes broader patterns, means of transfer, and "movement" of narrative songs. In addition to finding out that troubadours' singing of the late Middle Ages was present in the territory of today's Slovenia, it is interesting to learn that the demand for information was also an inspiration for song. Therefore, not only individual itinerant singers were of importance, but the means of reporting (flyers, later newspapers) in a given historical period as well. The book makes it clear that the term itinerant singer encompasses the musical activity of individuals from very different social classes (from the educated to the common peasant class and beggars) and later occupations, and likewise defines the varying intentions (transmitting all manner of news, selling handicrafts, religious propaganda, entertainment) that motivated itinerant musicians and the itinerant song and narrative heritage. Consequently, the contents are heterogeneous. They illuminate the temporal and spatial contexts, in which the songs arose. With its thematic focus, each chapter highlights one or more examples of songs, providing textual analyses of them, and contains various

archival illustrations that quickly and intensely acquaint the reader with the past.

Klobčar's book uncovers a wide swath of the heritage—from town to village; from troubadours to beggars; from songs about murders, earthquakes, and plague to craftsmen's calls and songs—that has awaited competent treatment, systematization, and evaluation. Given that many aspects of this art also enter into the folk heritage, the book is a significant contribution to the field of Slovene folklore. This scholarly work rests on a web of a rich selection of primary and secondary sources, and its methodology of exploring research questions offers a basis for further research. Marija Klobčar's work is undoubtedly an indispensable part of the mosaic of studies of traditional Slovene culture.

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