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## THE RECORDING AND STUDYING OF SERBIAN TRADITIONAL DANCES

**Abstract:** This paper shows which are important steps in the development of Serbian Ethnochoreology from its beginning (1930') till today. Dance notation as the basic form of digitalization needs to be further developed, such as the other also important ways of preserving, studying and practising traditional dances of Serbia.

**Keywords:** Labanotation, research methods, Faculty of Music, digitalization

Looking at digitalization in a broader sense, these digital sources are used in Serbian Ethnochoreology:

1. FILMS about customs where dance played an important part
2. VIDEO and AUDIO recordings made in fieldwork
3. PHOTOS, MANUSCRIPTS, POSTERS
4. MUSICAL NOTATION of dance melodies
5. DANCE NOTATION LANGUAGE – Labanotation
6. COLLECTIONS of fieldwork material

In the past eighty years, the most problematic way of preserving dance heritage was finding the appropriate system of dance notation. In the former Yugoslavia there was a heterogeneity of individual notations. The most widespread system of dance notation among them was the system of the Janković sisters, Danica & Ljubica, whose work on collecting and systematizing traditional dances, mainly from the region of Serbia, has great importance for the beginning of Ethnochoreology in Serbia.

In eight books entitled *Narodne igre (Folk Dances)*, published in the period from 1934 to 1964, the authors elaborated on and further developed their system of notation, working at the same time on collecting and systematizing traditional dances. Precise, simple, visually clear and easy to use, the system of the Janković sisters met with approval of many domestic and foreign experts. The said system comprises pattern, analysis and melody of the dance, auxiliary signs, diagrams and graphs. However, the system of the Janković sisters proved insufficient for scientific research initiated in Serbia at the beginning of the 1970's. The reason for this was the variability of special signs for recording movements that were recorded by words only, that is, descriptively.

The intensive scientific work of Olivera Vasić, Ph.D., conducted at the end of the 1970's, brought about an increased use in Serbian ethnochoreology of a widely accepted way of recording movements, namely Knust-Laban's notation or *Labanotation* for

short. Already in the 1950's experts in the field of dance from the region of the former Yugoslavia became acquainted with the principles of Labanotation and considered the positive and negative aspects of its possible application in the future, albeit without any definite results. It was not until 1990, when the subject Ethnochoreology was introduced at the Faculty of Music as part of the general studies of ethnomusicology, that the students were presented with the opportunity to familiarize themselves, under the guidance of Prof. Vasić, with a new kind of notation, Labanotation, which had by then become standard in Europe. Up until today this system, which has been the basic starting point in ethnochoreological works of different content and scope, has been in use in regular studies.

Labanotation uses a small number of signs that are logically placed in space and can, according to circumstances, be supplemented or modified so as to represent the most diverse movements of man as precisely as possible.

With the foundation of the *Centre for studying folk dances of Serbia* at the Faculty of Music, Labanotation became available to amateurs, too. As part of a seminar organized by the Centre, courses on Labanotation are held on a regular basis and a booklet is published containing dances of a particular area written in this notation. However, Labanotation is very slowly gaining ground among choreographers, amateurs of traditional dance and amateur researchers. Most of them find it unclear, abstract and unpractical which is why a safer method is still in use, namely description of the dance by words, often accompanied by individual signs. The reason behind this is inadequate training of the individual studying the dance and, on the other hand, the doubt whether Labanotation can actually include every detail of the dance.

The recording of dance and music is art of a particular kind and it requires appropriate education. Unlike notating music, the recording of movements is more complex as dance is a temporal and spatial art. The notation of traditional dance consists of three basic constituents of dance, these being time, space and movement. Such tridimensionality of dance translates into linearity on paper, which is a very complex and time-consuming job. In order to achieve objectivity in the scientific sense and at once avoid subjectivity in description by words, it is necessary to keep developing the sign system. Individual systems of notation, starting from the Janković sisters, must be "translated" into another, standard sign system such as Labanotation in order to avoid heterogeneity of individual notations. Only in this manner is the preservation of cultural heritage possible.

When notating, one should consider every dance from all aspects: examine the title, area of diffusion, historical development, dance event (time and place of the performance, participants, musical accompaniment) and record the dance pattern by the standard system. Great attention should be paid to the recording of steps and movements, their creation, way of transformation, variation, intertwining and dynamic and rhythmic complexities. This is fundamental to analytical work and to studying dance units, micro- and macrostructure (motives, phrases, compositional models).

With the adoption of Labanotation, Serbian ethnochoreology witnessed an increased interest in analytical work. Based on the recorded dances from the times of the Janković sisters and by transposing their notation into a new visual idiom, as well as based on subsequent research that has continued up to the present, a systematization of the types of dance in Serbian dance heritage took place. Today's most diffused type of Serbian folk dance is *kolo in three*, which is usually shortened to *kolo* among the people. With the work on Labanotation special attention is called to the development of the dance

pattern from dichotomous to trichotomous structure, which is a characteristic of this type of dance. Using a video recording, this process reveals a diversity in embellishment (the enrichment of dance by leg movements), which is peculiar to Serbian dance heritage. Everything that can be detected on the basis of field recordings, even if it includes individual creations of the folk dancer, is studied and recorded. Permeating the collective and individual dance is that which could be termed *style* in ethnochoreology, and it directly points to the specificities of a particular ethnochoreological area.

As the system of Labanotation had been precisely determined, a computer program called *Calaban* was designed in Europe in the 1990's. Unfortunately, the *Centre for studying folk dances of Serbia*, as the only institution in Serbia that archives dance heritage, does not possess this program. Folk dances are still recorded manually, with a pen and a ruler. The gathered field material is published through collections, which certainly is an important albeit not final step in organizing material. Computer processing would facilitate the systematization and use of that material. In addition, the ample video library of the Centre is privately owned by rare enthusiasts, senior associates of the Centre, because an appropriate strategy concerning the archiving of video recordings still does not exist. Forming an archive and its corresponding system is an important step in the development of Serbian ethnochoreology and efforts in that field are yet to be made. During the past two years the Centre has published four video editions of certain dances of a particular region of Serbia.

The preservation of cultural heritage is based not only on archiving material, but also on its practical application. Young people have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the dance heritage of Serbia and other countries by virtue of a large number of cultural clubs, festivals and other events, but an appropriate governmental institution that would educate professional dancers and ethnochoreologists, still does not exist. From October 2006 there will be changes in our education because a new department for pedagogues of traditional dance will be opened in Kikinda, a town in Vojvodina.

This short presentation about the recording and studying of Serbian traditional dances could show how much effort needs to be made and how many different media used to preserve only one aspect of cultural heritage – the dance. An oral tradition such as dance needs to be studied, like traditional music, from many different aspects, but in the absence of a serious, thought-out digital system, its preservation is not possible. I hope that in collaboration with scientists from different institutions Ethnochoreology will find the best way of developing.

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### ЗАПИСИВАЊЕ И ПРОУЧАВАЊЕ СРПСКИХ ТРАДИЦИОНАЛНИХ ИГАРА

Записивање традиционалних игара у Србији започело је 30-их година XX века са првим осмишљеним системом чији су аутори биле сестре Даница и Љубица Јанковић, пионири српске етнокореологије. У оквиру осам књига под називом *Народне игре* које су објављене у периоду 1934–1964, ауторке су образложиле и даље усавршавале свој систем бележења радећи истовремено на сакупљању и систематизовању традиционалних игара. Прецизан, једноставан, визуелно јасан и лак за примену, систем сестара Јанковић наишао је на одобравање многих наших и страних стручњака. Међутим, за научна истраживања која су у Србији покренута почетком 70-их година, систем сестара Јанковић показао се као недовољан. Разлог за то јесте непостојаност посебних знакова за записивање покрета који су бележени искључиво речима, дескриптивно.

Крајем 70-их година са интензивним научним радом др Оливере Васић, у српској етнокореологији се у већој мери почиње примењивати широко прихваћен начин записивања покрета, Кнуст-Лабанова нотација или укратко *лабанотација*. Тек 1990. године, са увођењем предмета етнокореологија на Факултету музичке уметности у оквиру основних студија етномузикологије, студенти су имали могућност да се под водством проф. Васић упознају са новим, у Европи тада већ стандардним начином записивања – лабанотацијом. Све до данас се на редовним студијама примењује овај систем који представља основну поставку у етнокореолошким радовима различитог садржаја и обима.

Са оснивањем *Центра за проучавање народних игара Србије* при ФМУ, лабанотација постаје доступна и аматерима. У оквиру семинара које организује Центар редовно се одржавају курсеви лабанотације и издаје се књижица у којој су игре одређене области записане овим писмом. Међутим, лабанотација се веома споро прихвата међу кореографима, љубитељима традиционалне игре и истраживачима-аматерима. Већини је неразумљива, апстрактна и непрактична, зато се и даље користи сигурнији метод – описивање игре речима често праћено индивидуалним знаковима.

Са усвајањем лабанотације у српској етнокореологији започело је све веће интересовање за аналитички рад. На основу забележених игара од времена сестара Јанковић и транспоновањем њиховог записа у нови визуелни израз, као и на основу каснијих истраживања која се настављају и у данашње време, дошло се до систематизовања типова игара у српском играчком наслеђу.

Прецизирањем система лабанотације, у Европи је 90-их година осмишљен компјутерски програм под називом *Калабан*. Центар за проучавање народних игара Србије, као једина институција у Србији која се бави складиштењем играчког наслеђа, нажалост, још увек не поседује овај програм. Народне игре се и даље записују ручно – уз коришћење оловке и лењира. Прикупљена теренска грађа се публикује у виду збирки, што је свакако важан али не и коначан корак у сређивању материјала. Компјутерска обрада свакако би олакшала систематизацију и коришћење те грађе. Поред тога, богата видеотека Центра у приватном је власништву ретких ентузијаста, стручних сарадника Центра, из разлога што у погледу баштињења видео записа још увек не постоји одговарајућа стратегија. Формирање архива и њему одговарајућег система представља важан корак у развоју српске етнокореологије и на том пољу тек предстоје напори.

Очување културне баштине не темељи се само на архивирању материјала већ и у њеној практичној примени. Кроз велики број културно-уметничких друштава, фестивала и других приредби млади имају могућности да се упознају са играчким наслеђем Србије и других земаља, али још увек не постоји одговарајућа државна институција која би школовала професионалне играче и етнокореологе. Од октобра 2006. године можемо се надати променама због отварања новог смера за образовање педагога традиционалних игара у Кикинди.

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