

2022 CIRMMT Inter-Centre Research Exchange Funding Report

From August-September 2022, I was granted the incredible opportunity to travel to Kotel, Bulgaria to the premiere training institution for Bulgarian folk music and dance, The National School of Folk Arts Philip Kutev mentored by Director Dr. Maria Gradeshlieva (to whom I am eternally grateful). There, I was able to gather field singing recordings, conduct interviews, and observe voice lessons from the conservatory and from the festival hosted there. This fully-immersive, on-site experience for field research was invaluable in completing the next phase of my vibrato research, the topic of my Interdisciplinary Ph.D. work in collaboration with CIRMMT members of all Research Axes, Dr. Gary Scavone (Computer Analysis Modeling Laboratory), Dr. Isabelle Cossette (Music Performance & Body Lab), as well as auxiliarily in Dr. Stephen McAdams (Music Perception & Cognition Lab).

Vocal vibrato in non-Western musical genres remains an under-researched topic. Published research on the Bulgarian folk singing style in particular is almost non-existent. A database search yields a single non-Bulgarian native source, (Henrich et al, 2007), mentioning vibrato in one sentence, namely "... vibrato, which is used sparingly in this style of singing." However, a few Bulgarian native sources seem to disagree with this opinion. Several sources (Borisova, 2013; Vekilova and Minkova, 2010; Kukushev, 2012) hint that vibrato is an inherent part of artistic expression in Bulgarian folk singing. Furthermore, multiple sources suggest that there exist various types of vibrato in both solo and choral women's folk singing, perhaps characteristic of the different geographic regions of the country. What is clear from the existing information, however, is that a focused, systematic and comprehensive investigation of the vibrato in the Bulgarian women's folk singing style stands to be performed.

Hence, my objective with the CIRMMT Inter-Centre Research Exchange Funding was to begin this research; evaluating the presence, classification, characteristics, and technical/artistic pedagogical approaches of the vibrato in the Bulgarian women's folk singing style. As a part of this inquiry, I aimed to:

- Meet native vocal research experts and pedagogues with experience in teaching and performing Bulgarian women's folk singing style, and observe its performance and instruction, while identifying the level of understanding and knowledge about vibrato.
- Conduct on site literature and resource searches and interviews with leading Bulgarian folk song vocal teachers and researchers.
- Collect audio recorded samples of various types Bulgarian women's folk singing vibrato.
- Derive variable vibrato characteristics and discuss with leading Bulgarian folk song vocal experts.

By conducting my research internship directly at the conservatory, I was able receive mentorship from Bulgarian folk music researchers and recording engineer specialists to gather vocal vibrato recordings and information on vibrato ornamentation in this genre. Furthermore, I observed several voice lessons of singers in training instructed by renowned Bulgarian folk singing teachers (with special thanks to Professors Galya Petrova-Kirkova, Iliyana Naydenova, Zhenya Stancheva, Gonka Galukova, Dimitrinka Dineva, & Antoaneta Lefterova) through which I collected incredibly specific details about their pedagogical approaches and methodologies for the vocal production and technique of this unique style of singing (and its characteristic vibrato

types). The National School of Folk Arts Philip Kutev houses experts from all major regions in Bulgaria, each of which has its own distinctive ornamental musical features, influencing the various vibrato types and diverse approaches to biomechanical production (unique to Eastern Music which do not often appear in Western Music). The school owns historical recordings, laboratories, and brand-new recording studios which were indispensable to me in gathering new recordings from the professional folk singers who either taught or performed there as a part of the festival hosted there in September.

It was critical that I conducted this field-research on-site from late August-September 2022 at The National School of Folk Arts Philip Kutev, as there was a folk music festival hosted there, in Kotel, Bulgaria, during those weeks. I was able to seize that opportunity and gathered recordings from professional folk singers and instrumentalists (with special thanks to Bulgarian gaidar (or bagpiper) Iliya Uchikov and Rhodope singer Mariana Angelova, as well as Stoyana Todorova Karaivanova) from regions all across Bulgaria, while they attended this festival in one location. I was also able to travel to nearby villages to meet and record local singers, both as individuals and as groups, who I recorded performing original regional songs unique to the villages and towns. Additionally, the institution were installing their brand-new recording facilities as a part of a renovation for outfitted and equipped recording studios and voice measurements laboratories, which was an incredible incentive for me to be on location there. The administration opened them to me, as well as their archives and library resources (from which I gained access to non-digitally available Bulgarian books and papers that were vital to my research), and even asked me to consult on the design and tools of the acoustic labs for most optimal use for future voice research!

Finally, immersion in Bulgarian folk music culture was a crucial aspect of achieving a depth of understanding of this genre and style. The National School of Folk Arts Philip Kutev graciously allowed me to reside in their dormitories for face-to-face networking and discussion with students, faculty, and staff. I was able to learn more about the traditions, history, style, and technique that contribute to the way vocal vibrato in Bulgarian folk music is sung, heard, taught, and deliberately crafted. As a Bulgarian national fluent in both written and spoken Bulgarian, I could more deeply and innately connect fully and understand the nuances of the discussions, lessons, and writings surrounding vibrato. On a more personal level, this field research was truly a full circle experience of sorts, as my great-uncle, ethnomusicologist Dr. Manol Todorov, was a great supporter of The National School of Folk Arts Philip, and upon his recent passing, donated his library to the school. His mother (my great-grandmother) was one of the first recorded Bulgarian folk singers at the Bulgarian National Radio, Atanaska Todorova. I carry her legacy on, though I am a trained classical singer, through an interesting similarity in our vocal timbre. But now, with this project, I am grateful to be able to add yet another dimension of connection—through my research which will be applied to performance and pedagogy.

One of the most striking discoveries for me was how the vocal technique, sound production, and resulting vibrato variability is so inherently connected and closely tied to the region from which the song or singer emerges. These provincial differences are extremely interesting and have a great impact on not only the linguistic and phonetic dialect, but also the musical content and aesthetic characteristics in singing. This affects the vibrato (with its many archetypes and delineations) of both the voices and the traditional instruments (whose vibrato

Theodora Nestorova, Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Student, McGill University Schulich School of Music
CIRMMT Supervisor: Gary Scavone / Advisory Committee: Across Both Performance & Research Depts.

style is influenced and modeled on singing), as well as the general approach to technique and artistry in the voice. I am currently working on writing up these fascinating findings in several articles to be published on the multi-disciplinary topics of Slavic Lyric Diction & Repertoire as well as Vocal Vibrato Acoustics, Perception, and Production.

I am extremely thankful to the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Music, Media, and Technology (CIRMMT) for awarding me the Inter-Centre Research Exchange Funding that made this instrumental and impactful field research trip at The National School of Folk Arts Philip possible, thereby opening the doors to even greater research experiences and future opportunities.

Some moments captured over the course of the research trip:



Source:

<http://folkcostume.blogspot.com/2012/11/costume-of-sofia-area-shop-region.html>

