

By Elsa Demo – “Shekulli” - 19.04.2012

The public is presented with a rare musical collection from two eras of the 20th century. “Discovering Albania” is an album featuring the earliest recordings ever made among Albanians, dating back to 1903, as well as recordings from the first Albanian-German expedition of 1957. These treasures have been sourced from the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv and the Ethnological Museum – State Museum of Berlin. The CD has been compiled and annotated by Albanian researcher Ardian Ahmedaja, while the restoration and sound processing have been carried out by Albrecht Wiedmann. It is published by the Ulysses Foundation in Tirana as part of the DISMARC (Discovering Music Archives) project, supported by the European Union.

This world premiere is taking place as part of the activities marking the 100th anniversary of Albania's independence. However, this musical document, older than the Albanian state itself, is being released in a limited edition of 1,000 copies, not for sale, on April 23 at 3:00 PM at the Rogner Hotel.

During that same period, from April 22-29, the *Second Conference of the ICTM Study Group for Multipart Music* will be held in Tirana, organized by the Ulysses Foundation, led by artist Emi Alička-Ebhardt. Emi has been involved in the publication of the CD from the very beginning. "There were two reasons that motivated us to release these rare recordings," she says. "First, local music in Albania is almost entirely unknown to international audiences, and second, a high-quality technical edition was necessary."

The album contains recordings from the *Traeger Albanien 1903* and *Stockmann Albanien 1957* collections. These collections have a rich history – where, when, and how they were created – information that is shared with the public through a booklet attached to the CD. The booklet features an essay by ethnomusicologist Ardian Ahmedaja (University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna), who illustrates the collections' descriptions with photos, sketches, and song lyrics, based on the documentation of Albanian traditional music by Paul Traeger and Erich Stockmann. Many of these songs continue to be performed today.

The first recordings by Traeger were made in 1903 in Northern Albania. These recordings were rediscovered in the mid-1990s during work on the project *Preserving Early Traditional Music Collections* – a rescue and transfer initiative that aimed to safeguard historic recordings from the famous Berlin Phonogram Archive (1893–1954), which included wax cylinders and vinyl records.

The German ethnographer Paul Traeger (1867–1933) traveled to Albania multiple times and wrote several articles for the scientific journal of the Berlin Anthropological Society, focusing on burial sites and tumuli in Albania and Macedonia. However, the Albanian people themselves were also central to his studies. During his travels up to 1904, he conducted anthropological measurements on Albanians.

The impact and joy that his research in Albania brought him can be seen in a letter he sent to the Berlin Society from Tunisia, shortly after returning from Albania. He wrote: "*I collected*

the songs mainly among the independent mountain tribes. Songs of this kind, in their pure form, had been previously unknown. I was completely astonished. My philological studies of the German language from my youth have been revived, because here, as in their customs, their archaic character in both form and content has been preserved like amber."

Traeger's recordings include both vocal and instrumental pieces, primarily from the regions of Mirdita and Shkodër. Among them are a lullaby sung by Ndre Marka Kola from Nënshat, Shkodër; *The Song of Mamut Pasha* performed by Marie from Shkodër; *Kangë majekrahi* (a type of epic song) sung by Kolë Marashi from Planti; songs accompanied by traditional instruments such as the *tamërr*, *çifteli*, and *lahutë*; urban songs from Shkodër sung by women; and flute music. Traeger also studied and meticulously sketched these instruments.

Researcher Ardian Ahmedaja notes that many questions can be raised about these recordings. For example, how did Traeger select the musicians? Their names indicate that they were all Catholic. Ahmedaja speculates that the German anthropologist may have found skilled performers through Catholic priests. Perhaps Traeger believed that in a country where the population had been converted to Islam for centuries, Christians had managed to preserve the old culture, maintaining the native songs and music. Ahmedaja emphasizes this point, highlighting the historical significance of this collection, which makes it highly valuable not only to the public but also to scholars.

Half a century after Paul Traeger, the recordings of Erich Stockmann followed. Between May and July 1957, he led the first true German-Albanian expedition in Albania. However, this collection also remains largely unknown to the international public.

Erich Stockmann (1926–2003) was well known in the international scientific community as the founder, in 1962, of the *Study Group on Folk Music* and as the head of the ICTM (International Council for Traditional Music) from 1982 to 1997.

The German team of the expedition consisted of Stockmann, linguist Wilfried Fiedler, and Johannes Kyritz (technician). The Albanian team included musicologist Albert Paparisto, a professor at the Higher Institute of Arts in Tirana, and Ramadan Sokoli, a pioneer of ethnomusicological studies in Albania. This expedition provided the first comprehensive overview of Albania's local musical traditions. Despite challenging conditions, the team managed to record nearly 30 hours of material.

The recordings among Albania's Cham community, Aromanian populations, and Greek minorities represent an invaluable treasure in this collection. Based on these recordings, two studies on Cham traditional music were published in 1963 and 1966, followed by a third book in 1965, authored by Erich Stockmann and Wilfried Fiedler.

However, the album *Discovering Albania* also includes recordings in the Gheg dialect from the 1957 collection. Nevertheless, most of the recordings come from the southern regions. These include songs from Toskëria, Myzeqe, and Labëria, as well as instrumental music, such as:

- *E qarë me gërnëtë Kolonjarçe* (a lament played on the clarinet), performed by the Janushi family from Leskovik.
- *E qarë me llautë* (a lament played on the lute), also by the Janushi family from Leskovik – some of these men were born in the late 19th century.
- *Vajtim për djalë* (a lament for a son) performed by Shin Spiropani from Borsh.
- From Çamëria, *Kënga e Çelo Mezanit* (The Song of Çelo Mezani), performed by a group of men from Vola, near Igoumenitsa.
- *Ma ke belin shumë nazike* (*Your waist is so beautiful*) a dance song performed by a group of men from Podgorie in Maliq, and many more.

Emi Aliçka-Ebhardt notes that presenting Albania's cultural heritage in this way is significant, as its value extends beyond the country's borders but remains largely unknown. Therefore, the way it is introduced to both local and international audiences is crucial. This is why the album is being presented as a model for musical publishing. Despite being published in English due to financial constraints – and without any contribution from Albanian institutions – it serves as an important step in making this heritage accessible to a wider audience.

[photograph legends:]

Erich Stockmann in 1957
(Discovering Albania 2012, 16)

Ramadan Sokoli in 1955
(Discovering Albania 2012, 17)

Translated from Albanian into English by Sokol Çunga