

Rumanian

FOLK SONGS

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FROM the remotest times songs have been the dearest friends of the Rumanian people, accompanying them everywhere and at all times, in joy and sadness, in everyday life, within the family, at work, and in the stress of their valiant struggles. Rumanian folk songs are a proof of the inexhaustible force of the people, of the splendid virtues which have guided them in the decisive moments of their history, so full of vicissitudes.

The beauty and richness of the Rumanian folklore today arouses growing enthusiasm, both within the country and abroad. It is a live thing.

In the creative process, the songs—items of wide circulation, polished by the centuries—represent a lofty and highly finished stage of crystallisation in the region of the country where they originate.

Indeed, the songs connected with certain ceremonial occasions being traditional have stability but restricted creative initiative and are performed collectively whereas those songs which are not connected with any special occasion and which are more closely linked with everyday life are more liable to continuous transformation, to evolution, as individual performance gives greater freedom and give scope for the mood of the singer to come into play.

Improvisation being the singer's method, he is no longer a mere performer. In most cases he is also a creator. When the innovations of the performers endowed with a more powerful personality are adopted by the com-

munity, they enter the patrimony of tradition and are handed down to the future generations. Improvisation enriches the repertoire, with variants not only of the same song, but also with completely new songs. In the present repertoire of the Rumanian people there are songs which, though originally identical, now represent different stages of development, a different outlook.

The life of the songs is linked with their circulation. It is this circulation which makes folk songs of them and gives them the opportunity of asserting their validity in the respective community, at the same time giving an opportunity to the emotional interpretation of each individual. Circulation favours and gives wider scope to producing variants and new style. The songs live and develop through circulation, which is the yardstick of their significance in the life of the people. Some of the songs having undergone numerous transformations in the process of intensive circulation, become unrecognisable: they have turned into completely new songs. This is the people's creation. The repertoire is enriched without cessation break through borrowing and adaptation of songs from other regions, from various people inhabiting the country and the peoples on the borders.

The great variety of Rumanian folk songs may be divided into two main groups:

A.—Songs with a ceremonial function such as the songs and dances connected with the countryman's pursuits, certain periods of the year, and important events in family life.

B.—Songs inspired by everyday life, viz., children's songs and games, lullabies, lyrical and epic songs, and dances.

A. Work in the fields and at home has inspired three categories of songs: drought, harvesting, and bee songs.

The drought songs, part of age-old ritual (magic) practices, were designed to propitiate nature and render it favourable to man. They have been preserved to this day in the form of traditional customs and are sung by the children. The text consists of invocations for rainfall, the tune is simple in the nature of a recitation.

The harvesting songs are sung by the women in the North of the country during the gathering in of the harvest—a ceremonial procession from the field to the house of the person whose grain is harvested. The epic-legendary text is sung to a dignified and solemn tune.

Bee songs are sung by women—both the married and the unmarried ones—at the end of an evening spent in collective work; wool or hemp spinning or maize husking.

Of all ceremonial occasions, the *Winter Feasts* have the richest repertoire. The customs prevalent on these occasions originate in the pagan festivals of the winter solstice, with additions of religious elements under the influence of the Christian Church which celebrates Christ's nativity.

The most representative in this category of songs are the carols which fall under four headings: *profane (pagan) carols* of an epic-legendary nature with wishes of prosperity for the new agricultural year and allusions to the inmates of the house where the carol-singers are received: the master or mistress of the house, the sons, daughters or children. *Religious carols* of more recent origin which deal with Christ's nativity and finally the *star songs*—exclusively religious songs of recent origin composed by scholars and without great literary or musical value.

Carols are sung antiphonally by groups of young men. The tune followed by a short refrain, an exclamation or invocation, is short and lively, the rhythm pregnant with changing measures.

This is where we should mention the performers, in order to convey their good wishes on their round of the town or village houses, disguise themselves into animals: a deer, goat or bull.

The plough ceremony is performed on the occasion of the New year.

The ceremonials on the occasion of funerals and weddings are among the outstanding events of family life.

Funeral songs, like carols, belong to a group of Rumanian folk music dating back to very remote times. They are sung only by women—married or unmarried—and fall into two categories: *ritual songs*, which are sung by groups of people at certain moments of the ceremonial and which have a definite form and a solemn character; and *the Dirges*, individual songs sung in spontaneous outbursts of grief, with improvised words suited to the moment and the relation of the singer to the dead person; the tunes are no less expressive than the words. From among ritual songs we mention here the *Fir's Song*, *Daybreak Song*, *Calls at the Window* and *Song on the Way to Everlasting Rest*.

A *wedding* is an occasion of entertainment in which young and old participate to celebrate the founding of a new family. Songs and dances are usual on such occasions. Apart from strictly ritual songs dating back to remote times, new ones have cropped up, adapted from the local lyrical repertoire. A ritual song is of solemn character, sung by the wedding guests and deals with the change from maidenhood to the married state.

Another ceremonial, non-ritual song is the *Shaving of the Bridegroom* sung by professional musicians.

B.—Among the songs inspired by everyday life, *lullabies* take the first place through their simplicity. As is natural, the words of such songs suggest simple and touching images from the world of the little ones, or express the mother's wishes for the child's future and the parent's worries.

The *Doina* is a song which allows great freedom and is not divided into stanzas; it is an improvised chant with two or three set motifs which recur, ending in a recitative. Performed with many flourishes by one vocalist or one instrumentalist, this lyrical song

about nature, love of life or some grief occasioned by the hardships of life, varies from region to region.

Concurrently with the lyrical *doina*, the ballad has developed—an epic song. The very long epic text of the ballad deals with phantastic subjects, feats of arms or the struggle against oppressors. The tunes of the ballads like those of the *doinas*, are based on improvisation with three or four set motifs; the atmosphere, however, is more dramatic and the recitation longer. The ballads are sung on solemn occasions—christenings and weddings and by one vocalist accompanied by a small band, with preludes and interludes, before an audience which is prepared for them spiritually. Ballads are still very frequent in the south of the country.

The songs proper are widespread throughout the territory of the country, though they show certain differences from one region to the other. These essentially lyrical songs are divided into stanzas, generally of two to five lines, the refrain included, and are sung by indi-

vidual vocalists or by groups. As they are not connected with any special occasion but are inspired by everyday life, they easily undergo transformation and evolution. Among them we will distinguish the songs in the old style which are long drawn out and with numerous flourishes, and whose rhythm is irregular, and the songs in the new, advanced style, with regular rhythm, pruned of flourishes, in the modern major or minor scales.

The Rumanian folklore also includes a very rich repertoire of dances, a fact which is accounted for by regional differences and isolation due to various political rules in the past. Rumanian dances are characterised by liveliness and grace.

The Rumanian folklore lives and develops unhindered under the patronage of our people's democratic regime which attaches great importance to the role of folk creation as an educational means and as reference material, and does its utmost to show it to best advantage.

