

The Night of *Tarantella* versus The *Căluș* Festival in the Midst of a Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: Unfortunately, this year will see a complete different organization of the 23rd edition of the concert in Melpignano, Puglia; it will be held behind closed doors, due to the pandemic that has had a stark impact worldwide, precisely as it strongly affected most regions of Italy. Therefore, the concert will be broadcast on the Italian channel Rai 2 on Friday 28th August at 10.45 pm. The musical performance is a symbol of a tribute paid to the traditional music of Salento. The renowned composer Paolo Buonvino, along with, will bring joy to their viewers admiring the performance from home by including an emotional soundtrack, as the concert takes inspiration mainly from both various musical traditions and the current situation in Salento, thus the two musicians strive to encapsulate the image of people's misfortunes over the past few months, during lockdown, as everyone seems to have forgotten how to smile lately. Moreover, the accompaniment will also cover a mixture of popular customs of the *pizzica* dance and the world of cinematography. Two notorious orchestras will be performing from the stage of Melpignano, namely the Orchestra Popolare "La Notte della Taranta" and the Orchestra Roma Sinfonietta. The decision to postpone the live performance of the festival was made in order to avoid further transmission of the COVID-19 virus. At the same time, the festival is dedicated to the lion-hearts who fight against the viral disease. The final concert will be held three years from now, in 2023.

KEYWORDS: Festival, Popular Music, Dancing, Tradition, *Căluș*, *Tarantella*

The current situation around the globe in the midst of a pandemic

The big picture of the current situation in Romania has been thoroughly portrayed between the lines of a book in which 50 Romanians have expressed their thoughts in regard to the overall impact that the virus has had on the society. Hence, the book carries a very evocative title – "COVID, colivia noastră" "COVID, our cage" (Șoitu 2020) – in an attempt to emphasize the latest events that occurred in our lives. The volume was published in Iași.

As words have been strewn on the paper, the 50 participants wished to show their unvoiced feelings in these hard times, compiling every single idea into an edited collection. Among the figures who have contributed to the original volume, such as authors, doctors or actors, it is also worth mentioning two important personalities, specifically the President of the Romanian Academy and the Patriarch Daniel of Romania.

The multi-author volume seeks to raise awareness of the disparities between one's points of view, opinions and general perspectives on the side-effects of such an event.

As time flies, you hope that everything will be alright and things will take a positive turn, but as soon as you start to realize how helpless you feel, you begin to rebel; as this sentiment is experienced by one's peers, all feelings turn into a unitary force, ultimately exhibited by a collective group. You just want to be able to bear with it by staying healthy and winning over the situation as you face a hidden enemy, able to spread itself and take different forms. All this general struggle in hopes that, one day, someone will find the cure-all remedy – a vaccine.

Those who represent a significant and memorable part of the society were constantly pulling out all the stops in order to take action and not turn a blind eye to what was happening around them. Apart from the statistics, data, numbers or the toll of deaths and diseases registered on a global level, there are people who truly care about the way society is moving

towards a new direction as they try to outbalance the negative aftermaths of the pandemic by lending others a hand.

Thus, the context gives everyone a deeper insight into the seriousness of the current situation as the pandemic has starkly influenced the socioeconomic status, sprung from a sense of detachment within human relationships. If the pace of things continued to develop steadily, the possibilities of a bright future that could wait ahead of many might be narrowed down and slowly producing a shift within future generations, clipping the wings of the youth ones at the beginning of their lifetime journey.

The Night of Tarantella

“Throughout time, The Night of Tarantella has probably become the most important and prestigious large-scale musical festival on the Italian stage representing an event that has reached an unparalleled level worldwide. It is enough to consider its dimensions: tens of thousands of people, especially the young ones gather every year in Salento. The festival highlights authentic folk music and at the same time promotes Italian folk music having a great worldwide effect (...), The Night of Tarantella ultimately represents a genuine unique cultural institution, with significant effects on economy, tourism, and image, thus, becoming a grandiose musical event” (Quarta 2007, 15).

The Night of Tarantella stands for an important musical choreographic manifestation that takes place in Salento, being undoubtedly considered to be the most well – known “movement” of expression of the folk revival genre of the last century. This movement was created at the end of 1998 out of the necessity of displaying all the folk music bands in Salento or, by any other way, of those that could be attributed to the environments and sounds that belonged to the “pizzicomania” phenomenon (“the art of pinching“). The latter, being considered to be a unique “subculture “, can be identified in The Night of Tarantella in its most illustrious form: the festival represents a remarkable music phenomenon, capable of gathering tens of thousands of people. The founding of the festival owes a great deal to the cooperation of the authorities of GRECIA SALENTINA and THE DIEGO CARPITELLA INSTITUTE in their attempt of reuniting, within one single event, the representative bands of the folk revival genre, or those already belonging to this genre.

It is obvious that GRECIA SALENTINA deals mostly with administrating and managing the activities in the beaurocratic field of The Night of Tarantella event, whereas the structuring and organizing of the event are being managed by a team of specialists.

The first festival of this sort took place in Melpignano (situated in the Lecce province) in August 1998, within which the festival particularly made its debut with a big concert, representing the defining moment of the three days of studies and debates between the “PURISTS“ (who have got as foremost objective promoting traditional sounds) and the “CONTAMINATING“ (the ones that focus on proposing new sounds and musical combinations). The project is being developed under the surveillance of Daniele Sepe, who is a creative musician of Naples, who, despite contrasts and numerous arguments, succeeds in organizing the concert (Quarta 2007, 16).

But it is these very contrasts that create new introductions and musical arrangements. Thus, a new Salento style of music is officially created: innovative musical instruments are used for the first time which are representative for the folk music, such as: drums, synthesizers, keyboards and many such others. It is in this way that the concert disappoints the PURISTS objectives, but delights the audience and makes them dance.

On the other hand, these compositions have become the main elements both for the folk revival genre, and also for The Night of Tarantella.

A concert organization “netwise” was chosen within the 1998 edition, before the final concert: this meant a simultaneous show accomplished by several bands in the main centers of

the south of GRECIA SALENTINA, performed a few days before the gathering of Melpignano. The Melpignano concert consists of improvised music sessions of folk music of Salento. Even the following editions of this manifestation have stirred a major interest, being able to attract the young people of all Italy.

Together with Daniele Sepe, among the concert maestros that have hosted the event we can remind the Italian musician Vittorio Cosma, who had a collaboration with the musical bands Premiata Forneria Marconi and Elio e le Storie Tese, hosting the 2002 edition, but also the ethnomusicologist (and musician) Ambrogio Sparagna, fond of folk music, and who managed the 2004 - 2006 editions.

The Folk Orchestra of the Festival The Night of Tarantella, appeared together with the concerts organized by Sparagna which creates the sounds of the traditional “pizzica” dance by means of the instrumental ensemble specific to orchestra. Among the people mentioned before there is also the multi-instrumentalist Mauro Pagani, who hosted the three editions between 2007 and 2009, who collaborated with numerous Italian musicians, such as de Andre, Ligabue, Vecchioni and many others.

The last two editions of the Salento festival, performed in 2010, respectively 2011, were organized by Ludovico Einaudi, from Turin, a piano player and chamber and classical music composer; his work consists of numerous compositions that are part of the soundtracks of well-known films.

The event has got remarkable notoriety, keeping its continuity throughout the years, which is due both to the decisive collaboration between different generations of the people of Salento, but also to the expanding, first to the national level, and then, to the international level, of the local knowledge and the traditional-choreographic music of Salento.

The Romanian *Căluș* Festival in the midst of a pandemic

In 2019, from 18th to 22nd of June, the “Romanian *Căluș*” Festival, held in Slatina, Olt County, has reached its 21st edition, after having displayed various performing arts of the *călușari* groups, along with instrumentalists and dancers. The festival creates a magical show for the Romanian spectators as it contributed to the enhancement of the city’s reputation for the second time, making it worthy of a decent title in the World Records.

Moreover, the *căluș* dance has been included in UNESCO’s List of Intangible Cultural Heritage, in 2005, as it represents an important national emblem and a symbol of Romanian identity. Following this event, the festival has then been officially recognized worldwide on the 7th of June, 2017 after exhibiting an awe-inspiring choreographical scenery.

On this occasion, a group consisting of more than 1052 dancers was admirably led by the illustrious choreographer Nichita Dragomira. The 21st edition has seen about 2500 dancers of different age participating at the festival.

However, on the 5th of May, this year, it was concluded that the festival would eventually be postponed due to the pandemic that has had an overwhelming impact around the globe. It appears that this phenomenon might have produced a result that was hardly “accomplished” during the communist regime, which would often ban the *căluș* dance performances over the week. In addition to this, the shows held right before Whitsunday were suspended, as well as the *călușari* parties being restricted from increasing their number of members.

As the PHD (Public Health Direction) enforced the law according to which such social events should not be held, the authentic traditions are bound to disappear, thus fostering an emergent and less substantial perspective on the *căluș* dance, now viewed purely as a form of entertainment.

As a consequence, nowadays it seems that no one is capable enough to impersonate the famous character of the *căluș* dance, the *mute*, hence his unique mysterious and charming

traits never get to be fully mastered. This might lead to a decrease in members among the *călușari* groups.

Nevertheless, it has also become clear that the young generations are engrossed in exploring the secrets of both customs and means of entertainment that this dance has yet to offer to its admirers.

Last year has also greeted us with the 50th edition of the International Folklore Festival “The Romanian *Căluș*”, in Caracal, organized from 21st to 23rd of June; an impeccable and veritable popular show which contributed to a further development of Romanian traditions.

Regrettably, this year’s festival has been delayed once again. As the pandemic has gradually „taken over the world”, the measures including social distancing and the wearing of the mask seem to hinder the public’s opportunity to admire the mastery of the ritualistic dance, hinted by the freedom to rhythmically lift your feet off the floor and express yourself – the key to create art and magic inside the world of dancing.

However, magic suddenly vanishes as one begins to feel trapped inside human limits, being helpless against a hidden malicious force, capable of “paralysing” anyone whom it encounters, as if it would “put a curse” on them.

Conclusion

Although both festivals have been delayed, the professional *călușari* performers still don’t give up hope as they prepare themselves for important shows and try to keep the unity for when they are about to perform on stage after the pandemic. The tradition of this ritualistic dance is very rich in peculiar meanings as the *căluș* dance itself is a millenary custom.

Despite not being able to participate in such events this year, the bystanders, especially the youths, might have the possibility to gaze at the performance of various small *călușari* groups in the town, as they have displayed a sheer interest towards the idea of preserving traditions and customs for the future generations. This might bring a lot of positive aspects, as the *căluș* dance is mainly known for bringing good luck, keeping away evil spirits or holding healing powers.

Therefore, this year the night of the tarantula will be held behind closed doors and the amazing Festival of our callus in Slatina, as well as the one in Caracal, was not held at all. We return to normalcy, to a life without fear.

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