

An investigation of the polyphonic folk music of Albania

by

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Abstract

Geographically Albania is divided into two main regions: northern Ghegeria and southern Toskeria. The southern part (Toskeria) consists of two sub-regions, Toske and Laberia. These share many commonalities yet the musical styles of each are distinctly different. The Shkumbini River serves as a boundary between the two main regions, as well as a cultural divide distinguishing the varying musical performances and styles.

Monodic music is practiced mainly in the north whilst polyphonic music is most commonly performed in the south. These two diverse systems impact on the folk songs of the two regions making them sound significantly different. In addition, different folk instruments are used in both regions. The instrumental and vocal monodic music of the north (Ghegeria) is based on the modal system, with Dorian, Aeolian, Mixolydian, Phrygian, Lydian, Ionian and Hypolydian modes being used.

The songs of the north typically portray important historical events or heroic deeds, while the southern songs are not as nationalistic and cover various social themes. They are in general a lot softer and more melodic in character. The folk music of the south (Toskeria) is based on the pentatonic scale, with significant differences which are noticed within the two sub-regions (Toske and Laberia). The vocal music of the south consists of two, three or four vocal parts singing *a capella*, although sometimes instrumental accompaniment is added. The polyphonic music of the sub-region of Toske is characterized by imitative elements utilized in both the melodies and rhythms of the songs, providing a sense of thematic unity, whereas in Laberia contrasting elements are more dominant throughout the songs. Despite these differences, *iso* (or drone) is performed similarly in both sub-regions, and is another important element in the polyphonic music of the south. A notable form of instrumental polyphonic music of Toskeria is that of *Kaba*, performed by *Saze* folk ensembles.

What distinguishes Albanian polyphonic folk music from its counterparts in other areas of the world is that it has not only survived but is flourishing in modern times.

Unlike many other cultures that have excluded polyphonic music from mainstream society, Albanian polyphonic music is known by most Albanians and is well practiced and enjoyed by all age groups, and rural as well as urban Albanians, regardless of their degree of formal musical training.



Key words

Albania

Ghegeria

Toskeria

Monody

Polyphony

Modes

Pentatonic system

Acoustic system

Heterometri

Iso

Drone

Saze

Kaba

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Background to Albania and Albanian culture

Albania is situated in the western part of the Balkan Peninsula, surrounded by the Adriatic and Ionian seas. The country shares its borders with Montenegro, Kosova and Macedonia on the northern and north-eastern sides, and with Greece on the south-eastern side. Albania is a very small country measuring 340km from north to south and 148 km from east to west, yet it possesses a rich spiritual and cultural heritage which has been preserved with great fanaticism from generation to generation.

Albanians are known to be part of one of the oldest communities in the Balkan Peninsula. Research has revealed that Albania is a country with an ancient civilization and the first traces of man in this region go back to the middle and late Paleolithic period. This era (stretching overall from 100, 000 to 10,000 BC) is represented by findings along the shores of the Ionian Sea and at the foot of Mountain Dajti, near Tirane in central Albania. (*The history of Albania* c2008.)

Albanians are the descendants of the Illyrians who, together with the Greeks and the Thracians¹ were the very first inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula. The Illyrians formed and cultivated their culture in their own land which formed the western part of the Balkans. They were occasionally mentioned by ancient writers. The following example, quoted in *Historia e popullit shqiptar* (The history of the Albanian nation) (Jubani in Myzyri & Zeka 1996:13, translated by M. Mahony), was written by Scymni around 300-200 BC: "...then there is Illyria, a land with a large population. Some of

¹ The ancient Thracians were a group of Indo-European tribes who spoke the Thracian language. These people inhabited the Eastern, Central and Southern part of the Balkan Peninsula (*Thracians* c2009).

the people live in the central areas working the land, others on the side of the Adriatic Sea. It is said that these people honour their Gods; they are righteous and very hospitable, given to socializing and living an honourable life.”

Unlike other languages in the Balkans, the origins of the Albanian native language, *Shqip*, remain a mystery as too little is known about the history of the language. The language is considered to be Indo-European although it is not a member of the major branches of the Indo-European family and appears to form a separate branch on its own. According to the Austrian linguist Gustav Mayer (1850-1900), *Shqip* (the Albanian language), *Shqiptar* (Albanian), and *Shqipëria* (Albania) are related to the Albanian verb *shqipoj* (to speak clearly) and *shqiptoj* (to pronounce), and can be linked to the Latin word *excipio* and *excipere*, meaning to listen to, to take up, and to hear (Elsie c2009).

For hundreds of years, the Albanians needed to protect their land from outside invaders. Between the fourteenth and nineteenth century AD Albania was occupied by the armies of the Ottoman Empire, which at the time had invaded a great part of the Balkan Peninsula. The entire region had suffered under the invasion of the Turks who had arrived from central Asia en route to Turkey where they eventually settled in the eleventh century AD. (Bicoku in Myzyri & Zeka 1996:70.)

In 1913, at the Ambassador’s Conference in London, the so-called Great Powers divided the Albanian land unfairly, drastically changing its existing borders. The Albanian cities of Kosova, Tetova and Struga, amongst others, were given to neighbouring countries like Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia and Greece. By the end of the conference, half of the Albanian territories, about 24 000 km² had been handed over to other countries. This impoverished the life, economy, arts and culture of the Albanian nation (Myzyri 1996:216-219). Since the division, parts of the population have been living as minority groups in neighbouring countries whilst preserving their language and most of the Albanian lifestyle, culture and traditions. Even though this study will not focus on the music or other matters of Albanians still living outside the borders, it is important to mention that the folk music as described

in this dissertation has also continued to be performed in these areas to the present day.

According to Misha Glenny the author of *The Balkans 1804-1999* (1999), their language was the key to unity amongst Albanian speaking people. In his book regarding Albania and the other Balkan countries Glenny writes (1999:152):

There had been cultural cross-fertilization between the Albanians and their neighbours. Turks, Greeks, Montenegrins, Serbs and Vlachs had all borrowed from and contributed to aspects of Albanian folklore, cuisine and social habits.

Regarding the musical heritage of Albanian peoples Shuteriqi relates the following:

(<http://www.albca.com/aclis/modules.php?name=Encyclopedia&op=content&tid=605>)

Musical folklore constitutes one of the most precious assets of Albania. Accounts of foreign scholars who visited the country in the 18th and 19th centuries seriously suggested that the principal asset of Albania is the musical folklore, though it is also rich in chromium and oil.

Echoing the words of Shuteriqi, the musical folklore of Albania is truly a precious asset. In Paris, on the 25 November 2005 Albanian polyphonic music was proclaimed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. "The *iso*-polyphony is a highly elaborate musical genre mainly performed by the Tosks and Labs of Southern Albania. This mountainous region gave rise to a unique culture, in which music became an expression of cultural identity" (Tole 2007b:112).

This traditional music is still richly expressed and kept alive from the north to the south. The Shkumbini River runs across Albania separating the country in these two regions. The northern part is called Ghegeria with the Gheg spoken dialect and the southern part Toskeria with the Tosk spoken dialect (see Appendix ***). Laberia is a separate part of the southern region, where Tosk is also spoken. The river is not only a boundary of the two main dialects, but it is also an established boundary of the musical folklore. Tole (2000:7) describes the situation as follows:

To the north of Shkumbini River we have the monodic zone of musical expression (monody, monody with accompaniment and homophony). The monodic zone uses the modal, chromatic and diatonic scales. To the south of the river we have polyphony as the musical expression (with two, three and four voices) as well as the use of the pentatonic scale.

Each region has its own unique characteristics of performance, including their varied and distinctive traditional costumes and folk instruments, which differ in many aspects from the north to the south. The main instruments in the monodic zone (north) are *lahuta*, a one string fiddle instrument – with a similar appearance to a banjo – and *ciftelia*, a plucked two-string lute in which the melody is played on the highest pitched string and the lowest string serves as a drone. One of the main instruments used in the polyphonic zone is *cyla dyjare*, a double flute built from a single piece of wood. *Gajde* is another popular instrument in the south, very similar to a bagpipe, which is very often used as a solo instrument.

For more than 40 years the country was ruled by a communist regime which isolated Albania from the rest of the world. The freedom of word, art, musical expression, ballet and film was very limited at the time. Folk music fortunately survived despite the restrictive dictatorship regime. Indeed, the communist government supported and encouraged the practice of folk music throughout the country. Nevertheless, throughout the years of strict communist rule, there was very little access to the north as the road and rail networks were very poor, making it difficult for people to travel easily. The communist government placed considerable effort into improving the quality of life of central and southern Albanians while the north was relatively neglected. During this period very little research into Albanian folklore and culture was conducted.

Because of its important and unique role in Albanian cultural tradition, polyphony and folk music is studied as a separate subject in art schools and in the Academy of Arts where future ethnomusicologists are being trained. But there is an urgent need for Albania's rich and varied musical heritage to be studied, collated and conserved.

Especially, as most sources are written in Albanian, information needs to be made available to the English-speaking world.

1.2 Personal background

I was born in Albania, where I took my first music lessons and had my first introduction to musical folklore. Growing up, I soon realized that the folk songs and dances were an inseparable and important part of Albanian culture. Folk music was being practiced all around me, as it was throughout the country, as a part of village and town celebrations, in annual song competitions, social gatherings, wedding rituals and mourning songs. This early exposure left me with a love for the folk music of Albania.

Growing up in Albania, I studied folk music at secondary level and later, most importantly, went on to study it as a part of my tertiary music diploma. With this dissertation I wished to pursue this study further both for my personal edification and to bring the situation regarding the folk music of Albania to a wider, English-speaking audience. Especially, the polyphonic folk music is certainly worthy of academic investigation.

1.3 Research questions

- **Main research question:**

What are the elements that provide the polyphonic folk music of Albania with its distinctive character?

- **Sub questions:**

How does the folk music of the northern region and that of the southern region of Albania differ, and why?

What are the differences and the similarities between the polyphonic music of Toskeria and that of Laberia?

What are the folk instruments native to Albania? And which western instruments have been included during the twentieth-century?

1.4 Aim of the study

This study intends to investigate the folk music of the southern part of Albania, with its *iso*-polyphony or polyphony with a drone-base.

As mentioned in Chapter 1.1 this study aims to bring an investigating approach to the cultural and musical differences found in the different regions of Albania; between the northern regions and the southern regions, and regional differences within these two larger differentiated areas. The study discusses how and why these differences occur, and emphasizes the elements which provide the polyphonic musics of these areas with their distinctive characters.

The study also introduces and describes the traditional instruments used throughout Albania and also the folk music of the northern part of the country, with a general overview of the culture and its history. It will shed some light on the differences and similarities in the music of the north and south and how their music, as well as their rich cultural heritage, have had a major impact on making Albanian musical folklore unique, distinguishing it from any other nation or musical culture.

1.5 Literature review

The literature that was studied in the course of my research study consisted of both Albanian and English language sources. I found and investigated articles from the

internet as well as various newspapers and journals. Sources written in English were collected from the University of Pretoria's Department of Music, the Johannesburg Municipal Music Library and the Sandton Public Library. Further sources were sought and obtained through inter-library loans.

With my recent trips to Albania, in 2007 and 2008, I expanded my research base by finding information written in the Albanian language. These books were sourced from various book stores in Tirana, as well as from the music library of the Academy of Arts, Tirana. Newspaper and journal articles were discovered in the archive of the State Library in Tirana.

The search for material to extend and explain the historical and political backgrounds to the study resulted in the discovery of various useful books, both in Albanian and English, by a variety of authors. Books like *Historia e popullit shqiptar (The history of the Albanian nation)* by H. Myzyri (1996), *Muzika dhe letersia (The music and the literature)* by S.V. Tole (1997) and *The Balkans 1804-1999: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers* by M. Gleny (1999) contributed to my obtaining a clear view of the most relevant cultural, historical and political facts in the history of Albania that have a bearing on the musical traditions.

Research into the musics of the northern region of the country, with a general view of the culture and their music, an explanation of monody, the musical form and structure of the folk music of this region, have been found in *Folklori muzikor-Monodia shqiptare (Musical folklore-Albanian monody)* by Tole (2002), *Muzika e Eposit heroik legjendar (The music of the heroic legendary epos)* by F. Daja (1989) and *Folklori Muzikor Shqiptar (Albanian Musical Folklore)* by S. Shupo (2002).

With regard to the research into the music of the southern region, the main focus of the study, some of the books that informed the study are: *Folklori muzikor – Struktura dhe analize (Musical folklore - structure and analysis)* by Tole (2000), *Folk and traditional music of the western continents* by B. Nettl (1973), *Folklori Muzikor Shqiptar (Albanian Musical Folklore)* by Shupo (2002) and the *Encyclopedia of Albanian Folk Iso-Polyphony (with CD)* edited by Tole (2002).

More books and articles, and internet resources became available as the research progressed, but the above (plus the information gathered through interviews and conversations) represent the main sources utilized.

1.6 Methodology

The research began with an intensive literature research as outlined above. This forms the basis of the dissertation.

A research trip to Albania was undertaken, followed by a second trip in order to consolidate and/or clarify issues that arose while writing my proposal for the acceptance of my research by the University of Pretoria. This research in Albania included interviews with the local people, music students with different backgrounds from the Academy of Arts, a retired traditional dancer, folk musicians from the National Folk Song and Dance Ensemble, Pellumb Vorpsi (a composer and lecturer of musicology in the Academy of Arts, Tirane) and ethnomusicologist Prof Vasil Tole. Their interviews were analyzed and the resulting information, their confirmations of both earlier provided facts and my own perceptions were used as a referral point where needed, and integrated in to the text, fully referenced wherever this was done.

It should be emphasized that these interviews and much of the written information was only accessible to me in Albanian; thus, wherever necessary, translations have been undertaken by me.

A CD has been compiled in order to provide aural representations of some important aspects of the music under discussion. Extracts were sourced from commercially available CDs and from YouTube (see discography).

The study has not attempted to be comparative in any way, and has thus been limited to the polyphonic folk music of Albania.

CHAPTER 2

The music of northern Albania

2.1 Ghegeria: its history, culture and folk music

As generally recognised in Albanian anthropological studies, Albania is divided into two main regions: the northern region Ghegeria and the southern region Toskeria. Ghegeria is surrounded by many mountains, with very cold and harsh weather prevailing for a good part of the year. The character of its people is influenced by this relatively harsh climate, and, while they do share many traits, it is quite different in many respects to that of the people of southern Albania. This is mirrored in the respective sub-cultures, including the type and styles of their folk music.

One aspect that has had a strong bearing on the northern culture is the concept of honour. This was very prevalent in the northern territories, the people preferring death to the breaking of a vow. Many traditional songs strongly stressed the importance of honour or a promise, *besa*, in their community. The song on the accompanying CD (Track 1) speaks clearly about how important *besa* is in the lives of Albanian people. The song is performed using the traditional instrument the *ciftelia* (see Chapter 2.5). *Besa* was a very sacred oath, or promise that one would give. If the promise was not kept the person was considered *I pa bese* and there was no greater insult for him or his family. Dying in the process of fulfilling a given promise and keeping *besa* was considered to be a highly honourable act. Gleny (1999:152) describes the tradition thus:

The Albanian mountain warriors of the north shared many customs with their Montenegrin neighbours, most infamously the *gjakmarrja*, and the vendetta or blood revenge, which in itself was based on the concept of *besa* or honour.

A famous legend in Albanian literature tells of a brother named Konstandin who gave his word, *besa*, to his mother to bring his sister Doruntina home. Doruntina had been given to a marriage thousands of kilometres away from their homeland. Sadly the brother died before fulfilling his promise. The legend has it that he rose from the dead, his tombstone being transformed into his horse, in order that

Doruntina could be brought home as promised. Once the son had kept his word by arriving home with his sister, he then disappeared into the land of the dead. This type of legend has inspired the formation of much of Albania's musical tradition.

Ghegeria is the territory where many songs were dedicated to brave men, fighters, national heroes and men of *besa*. Most of the songs have their roots in ancient traditions. The music of this region, as well as the music throughout the southern areas of Albania, is broadly influenced by the history and the social living of Albanians throughout many generations. It is a reflection of both their uniqueness as a nation and their distinguishing characteristics, lifestyle, culture and traditions. According to Daja (1989:116):

The major spiritual values underpinning the artistic and musical creativity are directly linked with the history of the people themselves. The economic, historical and social factors, and the specific conditions of the Albanian nature, have left indelible traces in the artistic creativity of the people and have also influenced the formation of their aesthetic tastes with their typical, intonative, melorhythmic and modal-harmonious expressions of accompaniment.

2.2 Monody

A large portion of Albanian folk music, especially in Ghegeria, is described as monodic. Tole (2002:7) provides the following background information:

Monody derives from the Greek words *monos*, which means *one*, and *ode*, the word for song. This term was first mentioned in the earliest Greek poems when very frequently the poet would sing his poems alone, accompanying himself with a single musical instrument, usually with the lyre. This was a common practise amongst the ancient Greek tribes, especially amongst the Aeolian and Dorian tribes. Due to these occurrences, their poems were classified as monodic and choral poems.

Kennedy (2005:486) describes monody in more detail:

The term Monody is sometimes used as synonym for monophonic music or for accompanying solo songs. The correct use of the term, however, is

to describe a particular kind of accompanied solo song which developed around 1600 as a reaction against the 16th century polyphonic style. Monophonic music, as opposed to polyphony and homophony, is music which has a single melodic line, without harmonies or melody in counterpoint. This is the oldest type of music, being the only type performed in ancient Greece in the early church music.

Both Tole and Kennedy refer to Greece as being a prime source of monophonic music, Greece and Albania sharing a common border.

In Albania, monodic music is performed extensively in the north, where the main regional repertoire is largely based on it. As defined above, the term 'monodic' is applied in northern Albania to a solo singer or a group of singers performing their songs as a single-lined melody. Besides vocal monody, instrumental monody is also performed when one folk instrument plays alone (or more than one instrument play together in unison). Monody with accompaniment as well takes place, when a singer is accompanied by one instrument, or a group of singers is accompanied by one or more musical instruments. The accompaniment to this originally monodic song may be rhythmic, melodic or harmonic, or a combination of these. Vocal monody, instrumental monody and monody with accompaniment are widely spread throughout Albania. These genres are not homophonic in the true sense as the melody-line was conceived as an entity to be performed alone; the various 'accompaniments' being added at later stages.

Despite the fact that the musical expression that reigns in southern Albania is polyphony, monodic music is performed in a few places of the south also. With regards to polyphonic singing, according to Shupo (2002:352), "...polyphonic singing occurs very rarely in the north and in only a few exclusive places like in the mountains of Tirana, and in Kosova where two-part songs are performed. In these areas, only some of the old epic legendary and historical songs are sung in the polyphonic style".

The monodic performances can be found generally in mourning songs, women's songs, ancient men's songs, wedding songs, children's songs and lullabies. The

wedding songs in Kukesi (an area of northern of Albania) for example, are characterised by lyrical melodies that express warm emotions and happiness, and they are all based in the modal system². The monodic melodies of wedding songs frequently exhibit feelings of optimism, expressing intimate emotions. They are sometimes sung in high spirits with subtle hidden humour and other times in a more reserved manner; this being due to certain traditions of the respective village. Other monodic songs, performed by men, are sung with a sense of pride, expressing in a symbolic way the qualities of the people in the northern parts of Albania, their strength, their bravery and their courage in difficult times.

Geographically, monody is prominently performed in the towns of Diber, Elbasan, Durres, Tirane, Shkoder, Lezhe and Kukes (see map in Appendix 1). Each town exhibits a unique variety of folk music. A number of surrounding villages come under the influence of each town. The number of villages where a single variety of regional monodic music is performed varies from 100 villages per town to 300 or more little villages. This area of Ghegeria is called by ethnomusicologists 'the monodic zone'. It stretches from the Shkumbini river (see map in Appendix 1) to the north and extends beyond the Albanian borders, including the folk music of the Albanians of Kosova, Montenegro and Macedonia (excluding the Tosk Albanians of Macedonia), and the Arber, the name for the Albanians of the south of Italy.

2.3 Melody, scales and intervals

The melodies of the folk songs of the northern region, as well as the melodies of the instrumental folk music are all based on the modal system. This music is original and authentic, enriched with ethnic flavours and the unique values of the north. The melodies exhibit simple forms – which are thus easily remembered by performers – and have a narrow vocal range. They are considered easy and comfortable to sing, consisting of repetitive patterns with slow-moving note values providing space for performers to express their feelings openly through their individual interpretations of the melodies. Performers may well choose to sing a well-known song at a different

² The modal system is explained in more detail in Chapter 2.3.

pitch level, or sing deliberately slower or faster. Then, individual embellishments may be added; this would include singing certain intervals smaller.

Some performers will tune the *ciftelia* (see *ciftelia* in Chapter 2.5) a little differently to the standard used by other folk musicians. They choose to tune it a little lower in order to suit their individual vocal range or because they prefer the combined singing and playing intonation achieved. As a result of all the above, the same song (whether accompanied by *ciftelia* or not) can sound slightly different from singer to singer due to the performer's individual choice of tuning and embellishing.

The modal system is spread throughout the traditional music of many countries around the world. Kennedy (2005:483) writes that :

Modes were the very old scales which dominated European music from approximately AD 400 to AD 1500 and strongly influenced the composers up to AD 1600. Apart from their use in folk music, they have reappeared in the work of a few East European composers in the first half of the 20th century like Bartok and Kodaly.

Modes are considered to be diatonic and they are an important element in Albanian musical folklore. Tole (2002:22) states that it is important to acknowledge that the modes that form the melodic lines of hundreds of Albanian folk songs show strong similarities with the ancient modes but should not be considered the same, even though they are often referred to by ethnomusicologists by the same names as the ancient modes. This is because, in Albanian music, they developed through centuries of practice, and not from some theoretical basis or a desire to 'copy' the ancient Greek modes.

According to old Greek theories, there are three main diatonic modes:

Dorian-(E-F-G-A-B-C-D-E) with the half tones between the first-second & fifth-sixth steps of the mode.

Phrygian-(D-E-F-G-A-B-C-D) with the half tones between the second-third & sixth-seventh steps of the mode.

Lydian-(C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C) with half tones between the third-fourth & seventh-eighth steps of the mode.

There are other modes which are created as part of the family of each of the above modes. Modes that are placed a fourth above or a fourth below the main mode belong to the same family as the main mode; e.g. the mode that is placed a fourth lower than Dorian is called Mixolydian, the mode placed a fourth higher is Aeolian, and so on; thus, we have the following three families:

Aeolian-(A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A) with half tones (2-3 & 5-6)

Dorian

Mixolydian-(B-C-D-E-F-G-A-B) with half tones (1-2 & 4-5)

Ionian-(G-A-B-C-D-E-F-G) with half tones (3-4 & 6-7)

Phrygian

Aeolian-(A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A) with half tones (2-3 & 5-6)

Hypolydian-(F-G-A-B-C-D-E-F) with half tones (4-5 & 7-8)

Lydian

Ionian-(G-A-B-C-D-E-F-G) with half tones (3-4 & 6-7)

As a result, from around the 2nd century AD, scales were used in seven different ways. The formation of the modes was influenced by the Greeks, their ancient literature and the early Christian Church. Some of the modes were originally named after the Greek respective dialects like the Ionic, Doric and Eolic dialects.

According to Shupo (2002:97): "... the modes that are mostly used in the Albanian folk music are Aeolian and Phrygian...". Importantly, intervals are often deliberately sung with the half tone intervals sung smaller than in Western music in general. This depends on the individual interpretation of a performer and helps lend a unique flavour to Albanian monody. Usually the vocal range of songs is small. The wide repertoire of the folk songs includes compositions of melodies consisting of only one note to combinations of four or five notes.

Songs with only two notes, using a small interval, are mainly found in children's songs or ritual songs. The modes in these songs are not complete and they are called "crippled modes", for example: "*Sleep well my son...*" (Tole 2007a:421):



Andante tranquillo (♩ = 72)

Ma- ni na- ni, mo- re. dja- lë.

Nani nani, more djalë, të thotë nana, mor djalë,
të thotë e bardha nanë, të thot' nana, moj robinë,...

There are a few songs composed and performed using three notes only, for example: “*When we first started to play...*” (Tole 2007a:423):

Allegretto (♩ = 160)

kur e zumë të pa- rën lojn- e,

kur e zumë të pa- rën lojn- e, e kem' ditë se

do t'u knojm- e, e kem' ditë se do t'u knojm- e!

Kur e zumë të parën lojnë, Duel drita, palli murra,
e kem' ditë se do t'u knojmë. na janë zanë do cullë me burra.

As Shupo has stated (2002:97), the Aeolian is one of the most used often modes in the folk music of the north. The songs below both use the Aeolian mode. The first, “*Oh bride, a mother’s daughter*” (Tole 2007a:426), uses combinations of four notes (these types of songs are very popular throughout the entire region of the north) while the second “*Bako my daughter...*” (Tole 2007a:429) utilises five notes.

Allegretto (♩ = 100)

Mo- ri nu- se, bij' e na- nës.

oj. ku ma le gjys- mën e ha- nës, oj!

Mori nuse, bij' e nanës, Tej, moj nane, kur më kishe,
ku ma le gjysmën tej kimetin nuk ma dishe



Allegretto (♩ = 110)

mo-ri Ba-ko, mo-ri bijë,
t'ka rritë na-na na-ze-li, mo-ri
Ba-ko, mo-ri bijë, t'ka rritë
na-na na-ze-li!

Mori Bako, mori bijë,
t'ka rritë nana nazeli,

si ixhija në kuti
si ixhija nder herçel....

2.4 Song types

There are a variety of different songs types that are sung throughout the northern territories of Albania.

2.4.1 Epic songs

When considering the Albanian songs of the northern territories, it is important to emphasize the monodic songs based on Albanian epic tales. Nettl (1973:93) describes epic songs in general as follows:

An epic is a narrative poem, distinctly longer than the ballad. It is usually sung with a main character (often a national hero) who has many adventures in war and love. Its basic unit of organization is usually the individual line of poetry rather than a stanza consisting of several lines.

Even though these songs may have lost the popularity they had in the past, they still preserve the same unique sounds and remain as beautiful treasures in the repertoire of Albanian folk songs. Patriotic feelings and thoughts of both listener and performer can still be stimulated through the relating, through musical means, of the escapades of the various heroic personalities in the history and lives of the Albanian people.

According to Daja (1989:24) the songs of the epos, or the songs of the “heroic legendary epos” as they are called by the native Albanians, are always accompanied by the *lahuta*³. They are even sometimes called the “*lahuta songs*”. An example of this type of song is presented on the accompanying CD (Track 2). In the north, every family is expected to own a *lahuta*, and if one does not have this instrument, the home is called an ‘abandoned home’. This folk instrument is crucial in the performances of these songs, enhancing their emotional impact. The songs of the epic cycle would sound relatively barren without the *lahuta*.

The epic songs are simple and often not very joyful. While sung with the *lahuta*, they give the impression of being recited rather than sung. The melody ‘progresses’ in a repetitive way with little variation from phrase to phrase. These ‘brave man’ songs, as they are sometimes called, have a limited vocal range and usually do not exceed the range of a fifth. The melody consists of free rhythmical patterns, without any bar lines, corresponding with the length of the verses of the poems. These verses may vary considerably in length (Daja1989:100.)

The traditional songs of this region fall into several categories. These are described below.

2.4.2 Legendary songs

Some of the songs are characterized as *legendary songs* because they express reality through mythical and legendary concepts. They are based on rich poems, passed on verbally through the centuries, telling extraordinary stories about various wars and the bravery of the Albanian heroes. They were mostly originally dedicated to the brave men fighting for freedom against the Slavic invasion (around the fifth to the sixth centuries AD). During the cold winter days, these songs are sung at home in front of family members and friends while in summer they are performed outside in the highlands, close to the mountains.

² Described in Chapter 2.5.

2.4.3 Ballads

The *ballads* differ from the legendary songs in that they express the emotional and moral concerns of everyday family and social life. The leading character or hero in the ballad will be the defender of human rights and usually dies whilst protecting another family member or members. The central theme of the ballads is the continuity of life; a hero may request, for example, that he or she be buried in a grave with windows in order to still watch over the beauty of life or look after loved ones. Another example of this type of theme may be found in the well-known ballad *Muri i gjalle* (The wall is alive). In this story, a family struggles to keep a wall from falling down every night, despite numerous attempts to rebuild the wall with a variety of different masonry techniques. The situation is eventually solved when one of the family's daughters-in-law gives her life so that her blood can be mixed with the mortar. Her dying wish however is that her body be embedded in the wall but with half her body exposed. This will allow her to still provide a single breast to suckle her newborn, and to provide access for a hand to hold and an eye to watch over her child.

In all of the above types of songs the melodic movement is limited (some would describe them as quite monotonous) and they are accompanied by the *lahuta*.

2.4.4 Historical songs

The epic *historical* songs play a big role in the musical creativity of the Albanian nation. Similar to the legendary songs,

... the historical songs were born during the Ottoman regime, around the fifteenth century AD. They were sung as a call for resistance against and freedom from outside invaders. In contrast, the historical songs are based on poems using true historical facts, telling the stories in chronological order from the fourteenth century AD to the end of the Second World War (Daja 1989:73).

They show similarities with the legendary songs regarding the verses, the melodies and the rhythmic patterns. Not all these songs are sung with *lahuta*, some

accompaniments use *sharkia* or *ciftelia*, another two important folk instruments mainly used in the northern region. Their structure is more rigid, so allowing very limited space for embellishment or improvisation.

2.4.5 Highland songs

Another group of songs are the *highland* songs which are sung by one or two men together without any accompaniment. These types of songs in the Albanian language are called *majekrahi* – or songs *me dore ne vesh* (with a hand in the ear) – a term that derives its name from the practice of covering one ear whilst singing. It is believed that this practice assists the singer to sing with a loud and resonating voice. The highland songs belong to an ancient style of singing and have been passed on from generation to generation. These songs are dedicated to the highland villagers and their territories, mainly the areas of the north which are known to be very mountainous. The life in this mountainous region was very difficult and their songs often reflected this. The hardships faced, however, were matched by the pride of the highland folk. It was, and still is engrained in their nature that despite the trying conditions faced the songs are to be sung with pride and dignity.

All the song-types discussed above have melodies which are simple, with an eight syllable verse line and display very little progression. The modes are considered diatonic, sometimes chromatic. Although the diatonic modes are used mainly in the songs of the north, the chromatic modes⁴ are used also. According to Shupo (2002:111) the ‘chromatic modes’ became part of the Albanian folk music when the Ottoman troupes invaded the country. The Ottoman oriental influences were noticed initially in the music and the culture of the towns of Albania, and later on in folk music of the smaller villages, mainly in the villages of the north. They can be performed sitting down in a cross-legged position or standing up, the standing position being more common. Depending on the situation, the songs can also be

⁴ The chromatic modes were used initially by amateur musicians, influenced by oriental music. With little musical knowledge, they started to insert chromatic notes. In modern music a chromatic scale refers to 12 half tones placed in ascending or descending order, while in the Albanian music of the north the so-called chromatic modes represent a chromatic alteration to an existing three or four note mode. This is usually used during the embellishment of a song.

performed whilst walking; it is not uncommon to hear a group singing while on their way to a wedding or a family event.

To the foreign listener unaccustomed to these songs, the type of singing may sound a little jarring and forced. Ironically, nothing could be further from the truth, as this style of singing is sung effortlessly by the highlanders themselves.

2.4.6 Funeral laments

The last group of songs consists of *funeral laments*. In the north, these laments are called 'disaster songs' and they are performed by a large group of singers. The Albanian lament is a musical drama similar to the ancient tragedies. In the case of a death in the family, it is customary for one person to notify the audience by declaring the passing of the person. This declaration is not done as part of the song and precedes the subsequent lament. Kondi (2005:54) provides the following example:

The language used also depends on the manner in which the person passed away. For example, if 'Petrit' died from natural causes then something to the effect of '*Oh ka deke Petrit*' (Petrit died) would be shouted out, however if he was killed, then the spokesmen would cry out '*Oh ka mbete Petriti*', meaning Petrit has been left by the wayside.

The sad occasion can be marked by a collection of songs that are sung in different places and at different stages of the mourning process. While performing, the group of singers (usually men) will scratch their faces and beat their chests with their fists. A funeral lament may begin in the home of the deceased, move towards the grave and finally flow out into the street as the mourners disperse and go their separate ways. It is noteworthy to highlight that this stage, sung on public roads and by smaller groups of mourners, is sung by women only and is less structured as the people split up and move homewards.

The melodies of the laments sung in the north are similar to the *lahuta* songs, moving towards the expression of sadness through saying or crying "ah-aha", with many voices starting randomly at different times.

2.5 The main folk instruments of the northern territories⁵

Lahuta – This is a one string lute. A *lahuta* is played using the range of a fifth and it is tuned mostly according to the singer’s voice, usually around middle C. It has a round body made of wood and is shaped like a halved pear. The top part of the body is covered with a tightly-stretched animal skin, preferably a rabbit or kid skin which creates an acoustically resonant sound compared to any other materials. The bow, a flexible stick shaped in a half-circle, with horse hair stretched across it, is used to produce sound from the string. The quality of the sound is not affected by the type of wood as much as by the quality of the skin and the way it has been tightened. Another important component that influences the quality of the sound is the quality of the string. To the present day, the strings of a *lahuta* are made of horse tail. (Sokoli & Miso 1991:308.) With a relatively short, flat neck the *lahuta* is beautifully engraved at the end of the neck with the shape of an animal or the face of any of the Albanian national heroes. It is usually played by men, in a sitting position. While it is a rare occurrence, it has also, on occasion, been played by women.

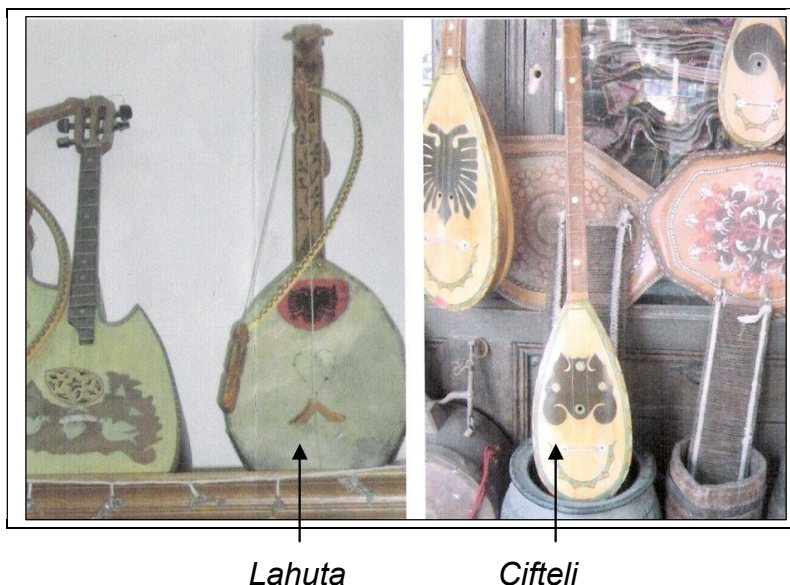


Figure 1: From a postcard purchased by M.Mahony, December 2007 in Tirana, Albania.

⁵ The musical instruments common in the southern areas of Albania are discussed in Chapter 3.

Ciftelia – This is a two-stringed lute plucked with a quill. The body is oval shaped and has a very long neck divided by 11 to 13 frets (see Figure 1). A single piece of wood is used in making the body. The back is round and is covered by a flat piece of wood on the top. There are three types of *ciftelia*, built exactly the same but in different sizes; the small one which plays in the high register, a medium-sized one and a large one.

The tuning of the instrument varies: most often the two strings are tuned in unison with each other, but they can be tuned in seconds, fourths or fifths. The melody is played on the first string while the second serves as a drone. The *ciftelia* is used for the accompaniment of both songs and folk dances. The melodic line is simple without large intervals. The *ciftelia* is mainly used in the north of Albania as well as across the borders, in Kosova and other territories inhabited by Albanians.

Sharkia – This is a similar-looking instrument to the *ciftelia* but is larger in size and has more strings (see Figure 2). According to Miso (in Sokoli & Miso 1991:166) there are various types of *sharkia*, namely ones with 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10 or 12 strings. The main types of *sharkia* are considered to be the ones with 4 or 5 strings, whilst the less popular *sharkia* has 3 strings. The home of this instrument is Gjakova, a town in Kosova, but it is also used in other Kosova villages and is wide-spread in the north as well as appearing in a few southern and western areas of Albania.

In Albania the *sharkia* started being used by the Kosova people who then moved into different territories after 1912. They brought this instrument with them and since then the *sharkia* has taken on an important role in the folk music of northern Albania.

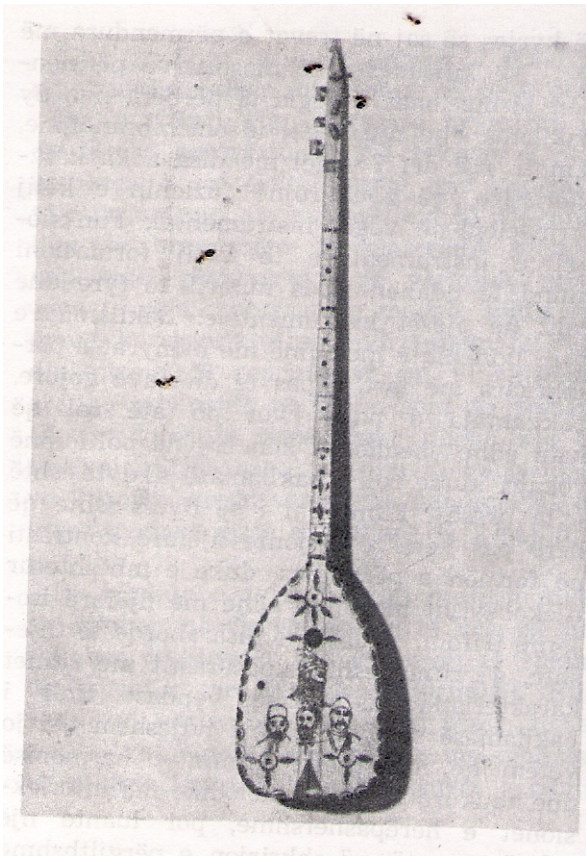


Figure 2: Sharkia (Sokoli & Miso 1991:166)

Zumare – This is a similar instrument to a pennywhistle (see Figure 3). It is constructed as two twin pennywhistles joined together. The length of both tubes is exactly the same and in each part's surface there are five holes lined up equidistant from each other. The material used to make a *zumare* is either metal or is taken from the legs of tall birds. The sound is produced by blowing through the instrument. A wooden piece is placed at the end of the *zumare* in the shape of a horn in order to make it resonate more. While playing the *zumare* the top two holes of each tube are closed at the same time by the fingers of the left hand (using different areas of the fingers), and the bottom three holes are similarly closed by the right hand fingers. The melodies played with this instrument are homophonic as both parts of the *zumare* sound in unison. The *zumare*'s tone sounds nasal as well as very strong and powerful which limits the instrument's ability to play softly. This instrument was initially played alone and by men only, but nowadays it is used together with other folk instruments, accompanying various folk songs and dances.

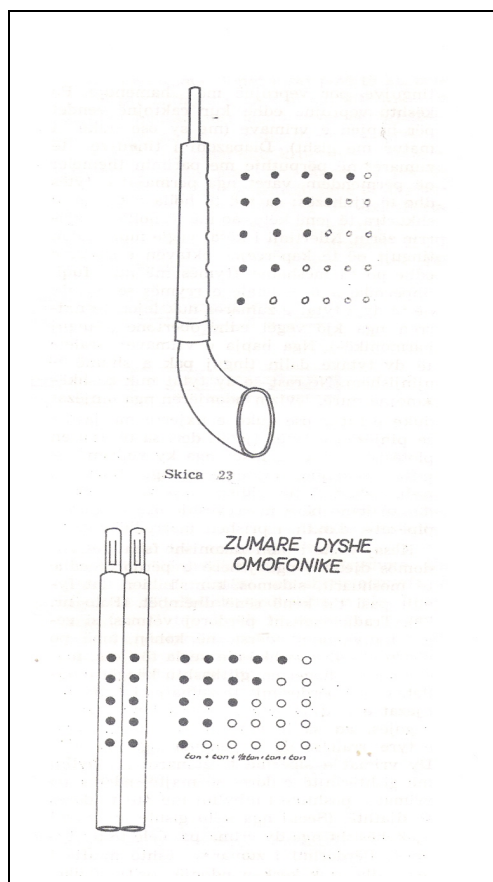


Figure 3: Zumare (Sokoli & Miso 1991:166)

Violina – The *violina* (which is in reality a violin) is also called *qemane*, a term used often by the old people throughout the country. The violin is used in both the northern and southern territories of Albania. It is difficult to discover exactly when the violin was first introduced and brought in to the country. According to Miso (in Miso & Sokli 1991:223) the violin became part of one of the well-known bands in Shkodra in 1825 and it was liked so much by the musicians that some of them attempted to build violins themselves. In those days, the violin was held in a vertical position like a violoncello or a *lahuta* (see Figure 4), but nowadays this practice is not used anymore. The violin players would play with many glissandos (or *portato*), which is an integral part of Albanian instrumental tradition, aiming to achieve from the violin similar effects and sounds to the traditional folk instruments. The tuning of the instrument also was also different from traditional western tuning. Sokoli (1991:224) relates that “the *ahengxhinjte* (violin players) would tune the [highest] first string (E) a fourth over the second string (A) and the rest of the strings just the same as the western violin, (only for melodic effects) so the tuning would be D-A-D-G. This practice lasted until around 1940.” Later, the tuning reverted to normal western violin tuning and the playing position also changed to the western horizontal (under the chin) position. In the past, as well as currently, the violin has played and still plays a very important role in the folk bands of both northern and southern regions and it is a very well-liked instrument by musicians and audiences alike.



Figure 4: The violin played in a vertical position. (Sokoli & Miso 1991:224)

The instruments of the southern areas of Albania are discussed in Chapter 4.1.

CHAPTER 3

Vocal polyphony with two, three and four vocal parts

3.1 Toskeria: the region's culture

The polyphonic music of Albania is mainly performed in the southern region which is called Toskeria. According to Tole (2007a:69):

Toskeria, along with its polyphonic music, is divided into four main dialects which are named after four ethnic sub-regions of the south: Toske in the East, Myzeqe in the West, Laberia in the South West, and Cameria in the South. The Toske region begins with the Shkumbini River and extends to the southern-most point of the Albanian territories, extending south beyond the Albanian political borders and including a few regions of Greece inhabited by a minority group of Albanians.

This chapter will focus solely on the music of Toske and Laberia due to the distinctive characteristics of their music. Despite the sub-divisions of the southern territory of Albania, and the slight differences in their dialects, usually the south is referred to as two sub-regions, the ones mentioned above, Toske and Laberia. The dialects are also noticed in the singing styles of the south which are similarly divided, the Toske singing dialect and the Laberia singing dialect.

According to Albanian anthropologists, the Albanians are a homogeneous race despite the fact that the dialects of the language differ from area to area, and these regions and their sub-regions display a variety of songs and dances, distinctive traditional costumes and unique folk instruments. Although the people of each region may appear to have well-defined differences, Albanians are also very united. Not only do they share the same language, but from the earliest times these territories have shared the same traditions, interests, styles of living, histories and political views and concerns.

In an interview with Klara Alia⁶ which took place in Albania, December 2007, she stated that Albanian folk music is born from within the people. Both the polyphonic music and the monodic music are a sincere expression of the people's needs and emotions and the writing of the songs has been inspired for decades by their own experiences throughout their own and their ancestors' lives.

The polyphonic music of the south of Albania is very expressive, meaningful, mysterious and beautiful. Indeed, it has an important effect on the people that have grown up with it, and many have taken this music with them to wherever they have migrated. The songs that have been passed orally from one generation to the next continue to hold powerful meanings not only in the music but also in the verses and the poems upon which the songs are based, as they bring to life the deepest emotions of human nature.

One of the events that has encouraged the continuity of polyphonic music is The National Folklore Festival. It is one of the largest events highlighting Albanian folk music and their cultural heritage. Tole (2007b:89) describes this important event thus:

It was first held in Tirana in 1959 with the participation of folk musicians from all around the country. The festival is concluded with the awarding of various prizes and diplomas for the best performers. Gjirokastra became the home of this event and the festival continues to be held at five year intervals. In 1978, 53,000 participants competed in all the selective stages and 1560 were chosen to perform during the period of the festival. The National Folklore Festival is approved by the Albanian Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and is the most significant musical event which still takes place to the present day.

⁶ Klara Alia is an Albanian citizen. She is an opera singer who has a very good understanding of Albanian polyphonic music as well as of Albanian customs and traditions.

The song with *lahuta* on the accompanying CD (Track 2) was performed during the National Folklore Festival held in Gjirokastra in 2009.

The folk costumes in Toske, as well as throughout the south, are colourful and diverse and each village has its own unique costumes. This is significant as there are many hundreds of villages, both large and small, throughout Albania and their folk costumes are interesting and distinct.

Another town boasting a strong history of folk music performance is the town of Berat. By the 19th century this ancient town, whose history spans 2400 years, was highly developed from a cultural and commercial point of view. The reputation of Berat as a musical centre, where folk music was regularly performed in dozens of places, attracted many famous musicians moving from all over Albania to live and perform there. Unlike the other towns of Toskeria, the music of Berat was monodic with influences from Persian-Arab-Turkish culture. Berat was one of the favourite cultural centres of the Ottoman Empire (which was still in power at the end of the 19th-century) resulting in the music of Berat taking a different course to the rest of Toskeria, with polyphonic music taking a back seat to more monodic music. However, their influence was not to last. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, at the beginning of the 20th century, new influences flooded in and a revival of polyphonic folk music took place. This marked the return to early cultural traditions, those preceding the Turkish occupation.

The folk musicians of Berat and all the surrounding villages continue to perform to this day in both musical languages, monodic and polyphonic. It is clear that all invaders throughout the history of Albania have left their mark in some way or other on the social and cultural habits of the Albanian people. There are many musicians today continuing to perform in a variety of social situations, making a large contribution to the cultivation of the songs of Berat as well as the polyphonic songs of the south in general.

3.2 Polyphony with *iso*

Albanian polyphony⁷ and its place in the music of the southern region of Albania date back hundreds of years. Regarding its origins, it is difficult to accurately date correctly as this matter is still open to debate. The engraved picture of an ancient musical instrument is found on one of the tombstones of the first inhabitants of Albania. The picture in question shows a double-sounding flute, and many ethnomusicologists think that the use of polyphony may have been present at those early times (Shupo 2002:393). In the Albanian language this double flute which is made from a single block of wood is called *cyla dyjare*. As distinct from the other folk instruments, it is the only instrument constructed intentionally as a polyphonic instrument and it is performed mainly in Laberia.

This study will continue to use the terms polyphony, *iso*-polyphony and polyphony with *iso*, to describe the music of southern Albania. These are the most common terms used by the majority of the ethnomusicologists in Albania. The term *iso* can be translated as 'drone', a single pitch that provides the basis for melodic invention. According to Jordania (2006:23-24):

... [q]uite a few different terms had been used in ethnomusicology to denote the phenomenon of singing in more than one part. 'Polyphony' seems to be the most widely used term, although not universally accepted. 'Multi-part music' is maybe the next most popular English term used widely in ethnomusicological publications. 'Polyvocality', 'plurivocality' and 'multiphony' also made appearances. They denote generally the same phenomenon and could be used as the uniting word for this phenomenon.

Albanian polyphonic music has been transmitted and preserved from oral primitive traditions and according to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Bithel 2001: 79) it forms part of non-Western polyphony:

In the Mediterranean area, including Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Italy, Sicily, Sardinia,

⁷ In the Greek language polyphony means many sounds, in which several simultaneous voices or instrumental parts are combined contrapuntally (Kennedy 2005:570).

Corsica and Portugal, polyphony is found among agro-pastoral communities organized on a strong collective basis, in mountainous regions where indigenous population have habitually found refuge in the face of invasion and whose inaccessibility has allowed for the preservation of numerous archaisms.

Shupo (2002:396) states that “in the eighteenth century, Forensie, a French traveller who was visiting Albania at the time, said that he had heard a slow mourning song which was dedicated to the Albanian national hero Gjergj Kastriot Skenderbeu. Many polyphonic and monodic songs have been dedicated to this Albanian hero, his battles and his resistance against the Turkish invasion. “Various eastern European countries including Albania have continuously been invaded from outsiders like Turks, Mongols, Romans and Germans” (Nettl 1973:83).

Although Albanian polyphonic music is fairly distinctive and, as the Albanian people say, “the folk songs are the songs of the nation”, nevertheless, due to these constant invasions, it is inevitable that Albanian music has been influenced by the cultural and musical flavours of other nations. Because of the impact that different wars had on the Balkan Peninsula, the customs and traditions in these countries have numerous origins, among them Islamic, Oriental, North Asian and Hellenistic. According to Nettl (1973:83) “...musical influences have come from sources as diverse as the chants of the Byzantine Church, the pentatonic⁸ tunes of Mongolia, and the complex rhythms of the Arabic and Hindu spheres...”. He further states that “...it is also important to bear in mind the fact that while there is a common flavour to East European folk music, there is probably more variety of practices and styles in each of its nations than there is in the typical Western European country...”.

However, concerning the influence of Byzantine music on the polyphonic singing of the south of Albania, research has shown that the polyphonic singing of southern Albania is based on *iso* (the drone-based sound) and shows no influence from the

⁸ Albanian polyphonic music is mainly based on the pentatonic system and this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.4.

early chants of the Byzantine church. According to Tole (2007a:44) "... iso was used in the songs of the Byzantine church, but it was not authentic. The scale used in Albanian polyphony is the pentatonic scale, differing from the chants of Byzantine music which applies modal scales...". Tole (2007a:46) further states that "...there are two groups of theories: one group believes that the polyphonic singing in Albania as well as in the Balkan region reflects the musical culture of Byzantia, while the other group claims that the music of Byzantia was always blended with the folk music of the countries they had conquered".

This chapter makes no attempt to solve this matter as this is a debatable issue, open to more discussion and further detailed research.

3.3 The use of *iso*-polyphony

Because of *iso*'s significant place in the polyphonic music of southern Albania, Tole was the first Albanian ethnomusicologist to use the term '*iso*-polyphony'. This polyphonic music has been passed on from parents to children, but due to economic problems and a large migration of the population to other countries, this form of transmission is seen less and less these days, although different groups of political and musical organizations are trying to revive it.

The most common vowels on which the *iso* is based are *a* (as in the word *car*), *e* (as in *there*) and *o* (as in *door*), although in Toskeria, the vowel *e* is found to be more common than the other vowels. In Laberia there are a few additional vowels used like *i* (sounding like *he*), *u* (like *who*) and *eu* (like *blur*). Depending on the group of people singing the songs and the dialect region they belong to, *iso* is either sung using a single vowel for the complete song or using different combinations of vowel sounds. When the combination of the vowels is varied, the vowels are chosen to form a solid foundation for, and to enhance, the interpretation of the song.

The length of the drone sound also varies and *iso* can be either one continuous sound or rhythmically intoned. According to Shupo (2002:319) there are three variations in the duration and use of *iso*, namely:

1. *Iso* is sung continuously from the beginning to the end of the song; thus the length of *iso* is considered to be the same as the length of the song. This is achieved by the singers taking turns, one at a time, to rest and breathe, and so between them holding the sound continuously for the duration of the song.
2. The duration of *iso* is the same as the duration of each musical phrase, with breathing being determined by the inherent phrasing of each individual song. This is found usually in the Laberian singing.
3. *Iso* is sung for as long as the singers are able to sing on one breath. A short rest is added for each breath to be taken, thus changing the length of *iso* many times during the song.

Iso appears to have no distinct origin and is as old as Albanian music. Gerson-Kiwi stated in 1972 (in Pistrick 2005:24) that *iso* serves as a reference sound preserving the characteristics of a pentatonic scale against the “splitting forces of progressive ornamentation”. Shituni (in Pistrick 2005:24) says that *iso* offers a tonal centre for the scales and has an influence on the homogeneity between the singers through the attraction that happens both horizontally and vertically. Expressions of this ‘attraction’ are heard in the undulating and interweaving melodies of the first part (*marres*) and the second part (*kthyes*) in relation to *iso* (see Chapter 3.5 for further descriptions).

In polyphonic singing, when all the parts join together, microtonal shifts can take place in the *iso* part. This happens when one of the singers from the *iso* chorus is not completely in unison with the other singers, and although this ‘inaccuracy’ in the intonation may not be noticed by a lay audience, this is considered a normal process in the *iso* part. Bledar Kondi⁹ told me that these microtonal movements are noticed also in the vocal performances of the Laberian songs where minor thirds and major seconds are sometimes characterized by intonation instabilities. The

⁹ Based on telephonic conversation with the Albanian ethnomusicologists Bledar Kondi, in March 2010

minor third interval, for example C-A descending, is sung somewhere between the major second and the minor third. Also during the performance of a lament as well as during the conclusion of a song with a long held note, microtonal oscillations are noticed. This is a normal process, occurring due to the slightly different ways in which different folk singers perform the same songs. It is acceptable to perform in this manner, and for it to still be considered in good harmony with the other parts of the song.

While to the Albanian listener this music comes very naturally and is easy to listen to, for the listener who is not used to such music, or perhaps is more in tune with Western musical systems, the folk music might sound unusual and strangely dissonant at first. One would also struggle to sing the songs or play them correctly on the piano just through hearing them. They may sound out of tune to some extent, but the more one familiarizes oneself with this kind of music, the easier it is to adapt to it and appreciate it.

3.4 The pentatonic system in the folk music of Albania

The pentatonic system is found to be practiced world wide, but it forms an essential element in the folk music of Albania and in the music of other Eastern European countries. Bartok describes it as an old rural style and he states that it is at least fifteen hundred years old. In the Encyclopaedia Britannica (*Pentatonic scale* c2009) it is mentioned that pentatonic scales may have been used in ancient times to tune the Greek *kithara* (lyre).

In the folk music of southern Albania, the absence of semitones is very noticeable, while in the music of the northern part of the country, semitones are used in almost every type of song. According to Shupo (2002:4) there are four melodic systems used in Albania: the tonal system (major-minor), the modal system, the acoustic system¹⁰ and the pentatonic system. This study will emphasize mainly the

¹⁰ The ‘acoustic system’ is also called the ‘natural system’, although it is rarely used in the folk music of Albania nowadays. For example, the sounds produced from a single,

pentatonic system as it plays the major role in the majority of the folk music of southern Albania.

Ethnomusicology commonly classifies pentatonic scales as either hemitonic or unhemitonic. Hemitonic scales contain one or more semitones, and unhemitonic scales do not contain semitones. The construction of unhemitonic scales takes five consecutive pitches from the circle of fifths: starting on C these are C, G, D, A, E. The interval between the starting note C and last note E is the one of a major third. This is an important detail that makes it easier to identify a pentatonic scale from tetratonic¹¹, tritonic or bitonic scales. Transposing these pitches to fit into one octave rearranges the pitches into the pentatonic scale C, D, E, G, A.

Most Albanian polyphonic songs are based on unhemitonic systems. The pentatonic melodies tend to follow a descending pattern and this phenomenon is noticed often when the tonic is placed as the lowest note of the melody. As Tole (2007:278) describes it "... a melody is considered descending when the length of the time when the melody progresses towards the higher pitches or even stays on a higher note is shorter than the length of the time that the melody takes to follow a descending flow".

unchanging fingering on a flute, using only increasing support of the airflow from the diaphragm and adjustment of the lips, are produced in a natural order; these are the overtones or the notes of the harmonic series. "Overtones are the ingredients in sound which give the basic or 'fundamental' tone its colour and character" (Wye 1999:6). This occurrence is also noticed when playing the *bobla*, an aerophone folk instrument used in the south west Albania (see Chapter 4.1). The sounds are produced by blowing through a *bobla* with an increasingly fast and well-supported airstream, leading to the production of these overtones "in the natural order", and the 'scale' produced to the acoustic system. (Information based on verbal communications with Bledar Kondi, an Albanian ethnomusicologist, which took place in March 2010.)

The notes of the modal or pentatonic system can be placed and arranged to fit an octave, but the scale of the acoustic system cannot be adjusted likewise; as a result it exceeds the octave, forming some large intervals (including the perfect fifth and fourth). This limits the use of the acoustic system, especially in vocal polyphonic performances; therefore it has been used mainly in instrumental performances of ancient Albanian music.

¹¹ The tetratonic scale will be explained later in the chapter

The pentatonic scales create a comfortable base for the vocal range of polyphonic songs, usually less than or up to an octave (and rarely exceeding an octave), and because of this, in the past they were considered easy for vocal performances.

The vocal range in all polyphonic songs of Albania is affected and influenced by the varied musical styles spread throughout different parts of the country, and not by an individual's vocal abilities. Although a singer's vocal capacity allows him or her to sing higher or lower than the range required, performers must interpret according to the style of the song. Many songs have distinctive characteristics according to the age of the intended singer; for example, in the Laberia region there are songs intended to be sung by old men, "the old men songs" (*pleqerishte*). They are sung slowly and in a calm way, as well as sounding somewhat "heavy" and "forceful", expressing intense emotions. Other songs are sung by the young men (*djalerishte*), and are characterised by a faster, lighter and livelier nature. Some characteristics are also highlighted according to the singer's gender; women are able to produce a faster vibrato, that being more difficult for men to achieve naturally. With regard to the tessitura of the songs, women's songs are usually sung one octave higher than men's songs.

The pentatonic system in the Albanian folk music consists of five main scales which are described below:

The pentatonic scale contains five notes of the pentatonic system; based on the circle of fifths they are C, D, E, G and A. Typical of this scale is the major third between C and E. This scale is the most important and influential scale used in the folk music of the southern Albania. It is possible for this scale and other scales of the pentatonic system to be used in either their complete or their incomplete forms (*pentaton i gjymte*). As Shupo (2002:8) writes:

Pentatonic relations are not only noticed between five sounds but also between three and four sounds. These groups of sounds share the same pentatonic relations and functions, and the same melodic stability, therefore they were all grouped under one melodic system, the pentatonic system.

The complete and incomplete forms are equally distributed in Albanian polyphonic music. According to Tole (2007a:244) “an incomplete pentatonic scale is when one or more of the notes are missing”. This is frequently noticed in the structures of the folk songs of the south. Example 1 shows a folk song from Miras village in the town of Korca which is built on the pentatonic scale. The notes of the melody are F, G, A, C. Although there are only four notes, with the sixth degree (D) absent, the scale remains pentatonic because of the presence of the major third. The major third interval is obtained between F and A and it is more easily discerned when delineating the scale in its original form; thus, based on the circle of fifths, the notes of the scale are F, C, G, D and A. (See Example 1).

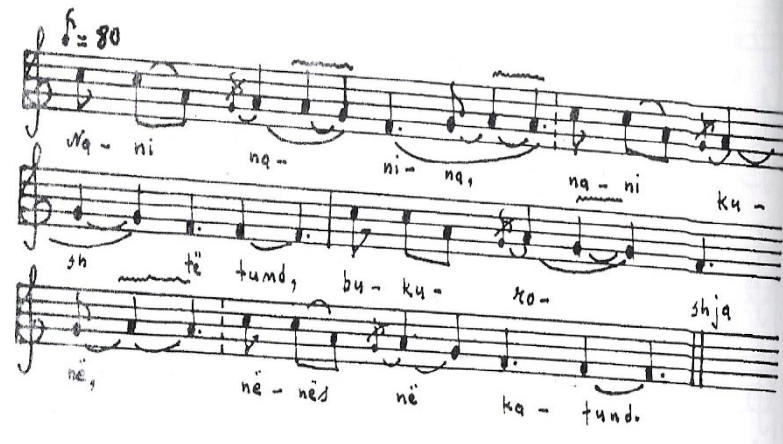
In order for a scale to remain pentatonic, the missing note must not be the one that forms this major third. The absence of that particular note will lead to another scale of the pentatonic system, which is the **tretratonic scale**. The tetratonic scale contains four notes, (always based on the circle of fifths) for instance C, D, G, A. Characteristic of this scale is the presence of the major sixth interval between C and the last note of the scale, A.

Following the same practise as with the pentatonic scale, the absence of the sixth (A) will lead to the **tritonic scale** consisting of three notes, C, D and G. Distinguishing the tritonic scale from the other scales is the major second between the first and the last notes of the cycle of fifths, C, G and D. The last scale of the pentatonic system is the **bitonic scale** consisting of two notes C and G.

The last two scales are not used very often in the practise of polyphonic music of the south. In rare cases, they appear in sections of the melodies, when the main part of the song uses the tetratonic scale for example. It is possible for folk melodies to use a pentatonic and a tetratonic scale, and/or combinations of all the other scales in one song. These scales are all part of the same system (pentatonic) and therefore combining them in one song can be done without sounding false or clumsy.

AIKP
Bob. 1358/6 (19874)

Kënduar: Hamdie Laska
Miras, Korçë



na - ni na - ni - na, na - ni ku -
sh të tund, bu - ku - xo - shja
në, në - nëd në ka - tund.

Example 1 Tole a 2007:248

3.5 The structure of polyphony with many parts

As mentioned in the previous section, the polyphonic music of the south consists of many vocal parts singing *a capella* or (rarely) with accompaniment. Albanian polyphonic singing is commonly performed without accompaniment, *a capella*. The only accompanied songs are the two-part songs, and this occurs very rarely in either the Toske or the Laberia regions. These songs are accompanied by a small folk music band. The types of songs vary from region to region, for example in the Toske region the polyphonic songs consist of only two or three vocal parts whereas

in Laberia the songs are with two, three or four vocal parts. These melodic parts do not stand or exist on their own but always have to be combined and performed according to the particular characteristics of each town or village within the region. The songs of Toske region are very melodious and expressive in comparison to the 'parlando' type of singing of the Laberia region.

The naming of these different vocal parts or voices was done according to the role that each single part plays. The names describe the functionality of each voice as well as the contrasts that are formed between these parts. The terminology of the parts is used only in southern Albania and cannot be found amongst the Albanians in neighbouring countries.

In the Toske sub-region the names of the parts are as follows:

- Vocal polyphony with two parts:

First part – *marres* which means taker, the one who starts the song.

Second part – *kthyes*, the one who returns it, who answers, who picks it up.

Sometimes this second part can be an *iso* part instead of *kthyes*.

- Vocal polyphony with three parts:

First part – *marres* which means taker, the one who starts the song.

Second part – *kthyes*, the one who returns it, who answers, who picks it up.

Third part – *mbajne ze*, the one who holds the voice, (i.e. *iso* or drone) that fills in.

In Laberia, the naming is the same as in the Toske region for the two and the three-part songs, but in Laberia there is one more extended song type, that with four parts:

- Vocal polyphony with four parts

First part – *marres* which means taker, the one who starts the song.

Second part – *kthyes*, the one who returns it, picks it up.

Third part – *hedhes*, the thrower.

Fourth part – *mbajne ze*, the one who holds the voice, (i.e. *iso* or drone) that fills in.

Normally, the first part (*marres*) leads the polyphonic song in all aspects and it is considered to be the first (principal) soloist. The second part (*kthyes*) is the second soloist which answers and creates contrasts with or imitates the first. The third one (*hedhesi*) enriches the song harmonically and the last one (*mbajne ze*), *iso*, brings stability and creates a solid tonal base for the parts to move and progress against. (Shituni in Gjokutaj & Zadeja 1997:144.)

3.6 Vocal polyphony with two parts

Vocal polyphony with two parts is widely performed in the southern part of Albania, as well as in a few places in the neighbouring countries inhabited by Albanians, such as Kosova, Macedonia and the south of Italy. The two-part singing is usually performed by two groups of singers. Performances using a group or a choir are typical for the two-part songs. This type of polyphony is mainly performed by women *a capella*, except for in the towns of Vlora, Fier and Permet where the singing can be either accompanied by a small folk band or sung *a capella*. “It is considered by some scholars to be the original style from which other polyphonic forms developed...” (Pistrick 2005:17).

The characteristics of songs differ according to the places where they are performed. These songs express some characteristics that are unique to their respective villages or towns (see below). Based on Shupo’s description (Shupo 2002:398-401) some of the characteristics of the form of two-part vocal polyphony are explained below:

- The melody (*marres*) is sung over *iso* which is held continuously throughout the performance of the song. Less often, *iso* can form a rhythmical pattern following the same pattern as the song’s text, usually at the beginning or the end of a phrase, while the middle will be sung on a single long note.
- *Iso* follows rhythmically the text of the song which is sung from the first voice. Occasionally *iso* can be rhythmical from the beginning to the end of a song.

- Both the melody and the *iso* shift from one part to the other, creating an impression of a continuous melody and drone. The movement from one part to the other happens at the beginning of a phrase and *iso* is held for as long as the phrase. *Iso* takes on a very important role and is a central part of the structure of the song.
- Both parts progress melodically with equal importance.
- The second part starts after the first part has finished its first phrase. In these songs the first part repeats the first phrase indicating the *start* of the second part. The second part is situated lower than the first part, obtaining a relationship of major seconds, thirds and fourths in relation to the first part. This occurrence is noticed mainly in the songs of Korca and Pogradec.
- The second part possesses a larger range and is more florid than the first. It also stands out in comparison with the first part. Thirds and fourths are emphasized while the song is generally concluded on a major second interval.
- The second part exists basically as an imitation of the first part so that the song sounds very similar to a canon-type song. Both parts are situated in the same register although sometimes the second part's range is more limited than the first.

These are the most common forms of two-part vocal polyphony in the southern part of Albania, although a few other forms that include different intervals, like the emphasis on parallel thirds, are noticed in the songs of the Albanians of Macedonia. Another variation is found in the village of Opoja where both parts progress in unison and only towards the end of the songs do these voices separate into two different melodic lines.

There is a vast repertoire of two-part polyphonic songs in the Laberia and Toske regions. The two main types of songs are the women's songs and the men's songs, although occasionally the men and the women will perform the so-called 'diverse' songs together.

Despite the limitations of these two-part songs based on pentatonic scales, the above-mentioned forms combine to create much textural variety. This leads to the possibility, as mentioned earlier (Pistrick 2005:17), that vocal polyphony with two parts does not only exist as a separate entity, as complete and separate musical forms, but represents a step towards the three- and four-part polyphony.

3.7 Vocal polyphony with three and four parts

Vocal polyphony with three parts is widely spread throughout the rural and urban areas of southern Albania, including both Toske and Laberia regions. This is the most popular form of singing amongst Albanians who gather to sing at social events, harvest feasts, funerals, religious celebrations, weddings, festivals, provincial and national folk competitions as well as in international events. Unlike the two-part polyphony which is performed widely inside and outside the borders of Albania, this form of singing does not stretch across the borders and is only utilized in places that are known for the more intricate polyphonic nature of their music. And vocal polyphony with four parts is only sung in parts of Laberia, geographically starting from the coastal village of Himara and stretching southwards towards the town of Gjirokastra.

The three-part polyphony is mostly performed by a group of singers, although in a few places it can be performed by three solo singers. *Iso* once more plays a crucial role in this three-part singing as it forms the tonic drone and remains unchanged throughout the song.

According to Shupo (2002:402) there are different ways in which the three-part polyphonic songs start and progress. There are two main types of three-part singing with *iso*. The first type being the one sung in the Laberia region and the second one in the Toske region. The first type is characterised by vertical tendencies where the parts progress simultaneously (i.e. homophonically) using similar rhythmic patterns. The vocal range is limited.

The second type mainly progresses in a horizontal plan with the parts being imitative in nature. Normally the second part starts at the end of the first phrase of the first part, which stimulates a conversation between the two parts, where one

(*marres*) asks and the other (*kthyes*) answers. The “question and answer” nature of these songs is typical of the men’s songs of the Toske region. Other forms of imitation are shown when the second voice does not start at the end but in the middle of the first phrase of the first voice. The range can vary from a sixth to a tenth, with the melodies normally being built on the pentatonic scale. The three-part singing in some of the men’s songs of the Toske region consists of free rhythms, which draws attention to the relative independence of the voices. This freedom is noticed in melodies that allow for much individual expression, due to the character and the extended range of the song text. In other men’s songs of the region a few rhythmic patterns are set at the beginning of the song and continue for the duration.

In the four-part polyphony an important and interesting element is the third part which adds much diversity to the harmony of the song. In the third part (*hedhes* or the “thrower”) the voice part often only utilizes the two notes of the minor third (e.g. E-G, above the tonic C). This occurrence is often noticed in the women’s song repertoire, although generally the women’s vocal range can differ from song to song. In the men’s songs this limited range of the third part can sometimes reach a seventh (e.g. E-D). The fourth part, *iso*, utilizes rhythmic patterns.

In the four-part polyphonic singing the four parts create contrasts between the lines. *Marres*, the “taker” who leads the song, is followed by the contrapuntal melody line of the second part (*kthyes*, “the one who returns it”) serving as an accompaniment throughout the song. The style of singing is similar to the three-part polyphony with the only difference being that the third part (*hedhes* or the “thrower”) joins in at the same time as the fourth (*mbajne ze* or *iso*).

Both the three and the four-part vocal polyphony have similar structures to one another. Although the three-part polyphony is more popular in the south of Albania, the four-part type is rapidly gaining the same popularity and has started being performed beyond its initial limited musical borders. It is expanding towards many new places which in the past did not include this form of polyphonic singing. Cipa (2007:27) writes euphorically that Albanian polyphony of the south “represents the clarity of the voices of the night. The day is overwhelmed by many outside noises, but at night these voices are as clear as crystal”.

3.8 The polyphonic songs of the Toske region

Geographically, the towns, and their accompanying villages, that fall under the Toske region include: Korce, Permet, Fier, Skrapar, Berat, Kucove, Lushnje, Kolonje, Devoll, Pogradec, Gramsh and Librazhd. Different from the mountainous land of the north, with its cold winters and cool summers, the southern land has flatter terrain (although in a few areas it is relatively hilly) and is known for its softer winters and hot, dry summers. The agricultural southern lowlands have a larger population than the highlands of the north, the people are wealthier and life is considered to be easier. This appears to have influenced the songs of the region.

The music of the people of Toske in general is gentle and sweet. This is a characteristic of their nature as individuals, as they are known to be hardworking, gentle and very hospitable. The songs are mainly about love and work; they include sweet lullabies, wedding songs, old men's songs, young men's songs, women's songs, village songs and other, less often heard types of songs. Track 3 on the accompanying CD is a lullaby from the town of Korca. Most of the songs are polyphonic in nature and are characterized by melodious and expressive singing with extensive use of vibrato and beautiful ornaments. Even though the south of Albania is considered to be the home of polyphony it is possible to find areas within the region where monody is also present.

The songs of the Toske region are usually classified as either women's songs or men's songs. Examples of both a women's song and a men's song are presented on the accompanying CD (Tracks 4 and 5). The women's songs, especially, vary from one area to another. As Shupo (2002:429) relates:

Some melodies of women's songs can sound a little "edgy" and not as sweet and gentle as other women's songs of the region. This happens as a result of the different intervallic effects used during the song. Very often the major third, the fourth, the fifth and the major sixth intervals play a key role in the melody. Parallel and unison movement of the voices are highlighted during the song mainly by using the minor third and the fifth interval.

Men's songs demonstrate interesting characteristics. In general, the structure of the men's songs consists of an introduction which leads to two periods concluding with a final cadence. One period consists of two or three phrases or sentences. The introduction has a tendency towards free rhythm although the rest of the song continues with a regular pulse. The most frequently used meters are 3/8 and 5/8. Contrasts between quavers, crotchets and minims are noticed in the case of the section with free rhythm which suggests a Cadenza-like freedom of expression. When the pulse is regular, rhythmic contrasts occur between the parts using various strict rhythmic groupings.

Throughout the song imitative elements are noticed, which emphasise the imitative nature of the polyphonic songs of Toske. The imitation uses both melodic and rhythmic elements. The second part (*kthyes*) progresses throughout in imitation of the first part (*marres*), merely adding small variations to the melody-line of the first. Both parts develop using the same pentatonic scale, different to the Laberien polyphony in which the melodies of both the first and the second parts are usually based on various scales (see Chapter 3.7). With regards to the rhythm, similarities are noticed as well, where the second part tends to imitate the first rhythmically using the same note values and rhythmic patterns. Usually the melodies in the Toske songs will conclude with long note values.

Other types of songs that play an important part in the polyphonic music of Toske are the songs of Gjerbe village in Skrapar. The repertoire of these songs contains songs that emphasize social and political concerns.

Demir Zyko was one of the folk musicians who became well known across Albania for his beautiful and unique interpretation of these types of songs. He was born in Gjerbe in 1911 and from an early age was very involved in all the musical circles that encouraged and promoted the performance of Albanian folk music at the time. In January 1968 he participated in the National Folklore Festival with the song "Mbece more shok mbece" which continues to be performed at different events to this day. He gained great admiration from the audience and fellow musicians, and since then he continued to perform countrywide until the late 80's when he fell ill

and was forced to stop singing. He died in 1994. In a 2007 interview with Miss Alia, who was also born in Skrapar, she informed me that in Demir Zyko's honour, in 1999, the music foundation and the folk ensemble Demir Zyko was established.

3.9 The polyphonic songs of Laberia

The Laberien polyphonic song repertoire includes love songs and strong epic-lyrical songs. The polyphonic singing is considered to evoke mystery. The overall effect of the voices singing together is to reflect the sounds of nature, the night and the earth. According to Tole (2007a:72) "the *iso*-polyphony that is sung in the hilly areas of Laberia is called 'dry polyphony' and the *iso*-polyphony that is sung close to the sea is called 'sea polyphony'". The terms 'dry' and 'sea' derive from both geographical and figurative meanings. 'Sea polyphony' is influenced by the impressions left by the sea itself; namely those impressions created by the water's tidal movements, waves and currents. 'Dry polyphony' on the other hand is influenced by and evokes the harsher mountainous landscape that forms part of Laberia's topography.

An Albanian poet, Lefter Cipa describes the Laberien polyphony in a poetic way. He writes (Chipa 2007:10-11) that:

... the first voice is the sea and the waves that can't rest until they tell their story, the second voice is the one that agrees, that reflects while breathing in the fresh air of a summer evening, the third is the fire, as well as a human voice that calls out for peace, bringing you close to eternity, and the fourth is the earth, that holds and brings everything together in unity.

Gjirokastra is one of the oldest towns in the Laberia region in which the customs and traditions of the people, including the musical culture, are preserved with fanaticism. The polyphonic songs of this town consist of four parts and they are known as “the old men songs” (*pleqerishte*). The style of singing reflects a very old singing style which has remained unchanged for many generations. As Tole (2007a:96) states:

Gjirokastra is the only town in Albania that did not allow folk ensembles to accompany their polyphonic songs. To this day “a capella” singing continues to be a tradition of this town which is different to the majority of the towns of southern Albania.

The songs of the Laberia region are generally slow paced with an epic-lyrical feel. The polyphonic melodies and the way of singing are characterised by a declamatory style and are oratorical in nature. This is noticed more when the soloist starts the song and during the concluding phrases, while in the middle section of the songs, when all the voices enter, the voices are a little less declamatory and more melodious. The term “declamatory” refers to a way of singing that is similar to talking. By listening to the songs it is easy to recognise not only the language dialect but also the musical ‘dialect’ of the region. In Gjirokastra some of the songs, especially the two-part songs of women (without *iso*), are sung from the beginning to the end in a declamatory way. Track 6 on the accompanying CD is another example of a song from the Laberia region.

Unlike the Toske songs, the Laberien songs’ melodies gradually progress using small intervals, mainly seconds and thirds. There is a free expressivity during phrases which in most of the songs are not of equal length. In general, the melody develops horizontally, but is supported vertically by the other voices; thus the progression of the voices happens homophonically, or chorale-like.

The polyphonic music of Laberia is characterised by contrast. These disparities are noticed especially between the first part (*marres*) and the second part (*kthyes*), where the two parts differ melodically and progress independently. Their development is based on two different pentatonic scales with the second part

creating complex counterpoint. Contrast is noticed with regards to both the melodic construction and the rhythmic values. The note values are smaller in the second part than in the first, usually consisting of sixteenth and thirty-second notes. Other value notes can be present also, but always in smaller units than the note values of the first part.

In general, Laberien songs exhibit only slight differences between them. The vocal range of individual parts is limited, and only in one type of song, Bence's songs, does it consist of a seventh.

The polyphonic songs of Laberia are all based on the pentatonic system and the occurrence of *heterometri*. According to Shupo (2002:332) *heterometri* is when different meters occur in the same melody and this is quite a common phenomenon in the folk music of most places in Albania. Often the introduction starts on 2/8 and changes to 3/8. The melody will either continue in 3/8 or, after the exposure of the first phrase will return to its initial time signature. Generally, in the polyphonic songs of Laberia, *heterometri* occurs only at the beginning of the song. Heterometri is present in almost all songs, except in the village of Himara where the phenomenon is absent.

Normally all songs are brought to a close with held long notes. This is one area where the songs of both Laberia and Toskeria show congruency.

3.10 Conclusion

As the above discussion has revealed, the southern region of Albania has a rich and varied musical heritage. While much of this is vocally based, the contribution of a variety of musical instruments to the musical traditions of both northern and southern regions of Albania cannot be ignored. They add much variety, both independently and when accompanying the vocally produced polyphony.

CHAPTER 4

Albanian instrumental polyphony

4.1 Albanian folk instruments

Archeological findings have brought to light many facts with regards to the economy, the history, the music and the culture of Albanian ancestors. These findings have revealed the existence of Albanian folk instruments dating back to ancient times

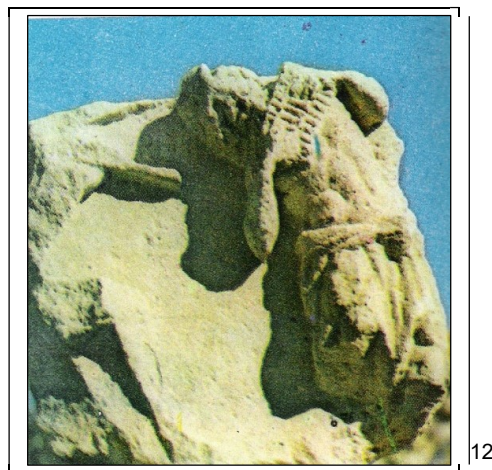
Over a number of decades, this archeological research has uncovered the ruins of many entertainment venues such as large arenas, odeons, theatre buildings and amphitheatres, which are spread all over Illyria. Illyria was one of the largest territories in the Balkan region with a well-established economic and cultural life. The remains of temples, libraries, as well as sculptures and paintings of ancient dancers, singers and musical instruments, were found in the territories inhabited by the Illyrians. The Illyrians are known to have been a highly developed civilization with intense spiritual beliefs. (Sokoli in Sokoli & Miso 1991:23.)

Illyrians and their music were mentioned in some of the books of ancient writers. In the first century BC Straboni (Jubani in Myzyri & Zeka 1996:29) wrote about Dardania, an Illyrian kingdom during the 4th century B.C: "... The people of Dardania don't ignore their music. In the contrary, they play their flutes and their string instruments very frequently...".

A recent archeological discovery in the ruins of the Apollonia amphitheatre in the town of Fieri, shows the sculpture of an Illyrian leader, Pani (See Figure 4-1). He is depicted playing a wind instrument with many pipes, which gradually become shorter on its right-hand side. This was considered to be a shepherd's instrument. (Sokoli in Sokoli & Miso 1991:30.) Ancient legends also provide information on the early development of music and musical instruments. One legend relates that Pani

was a very strong man. The upper part of his body looked human and the lower parts were similar to an animal's body. Everyone was scared of him. This mythological personage was considered to be the defender of the shepherds and their pastures. He was very passionate about music and the legend has it that he himself invented a type of flute, called *fyell* (flute) with many pipes. This ties in with the Greek legend of Pan and the *syrix* (panpipes).

Figure 4-1 (Sokoli & Miso,1991:256):



12

As mentioned in Chapter 3, another ancient instrument used by the descendents of the Albanians was the *cyla dyjare*. (See Figure 4-2). Track 7 on the accompanying CD is an example of the sound produced by a *cyla dyjare*. According to Kruta (in Gjokutaj & Zadeja 1997:200), the first appearance of this double-sounding flute was documented in the sixth to fifth centuries B.C in Apollonia in southwestern Albania, and later on in the upper part of the Vjosa river during the fourth to third centuries B.C. This instrument was used for centuries and is still used frequently in the southern part of Albania today. Although some other folk instruments like the *fyelli* and the *glyra* (similar to a trumpet) were found throughout the whole country, some were restricted to only a few districts within their own regions. For example, the *cyla dyjare* in the south west of Albania, and the *lahuta* in northern Albania

Some of the first primitive instruments that have accompanied the Albanian people throughout different courses of life are musical instruments made of simple materials such as wood, shells, bones and horns. These instruments, as well as other primitive instruments like gongs, bells and spoons, were commonly used in urban, rural and pastoral lives. They were used to enhance the enjoyment of different occasions and celebrations, and also to give encouragement to fighters in battles and to enhance victory celebrations. They were also used to send strategic information over long distances, sounding warning signals in dangerous times.

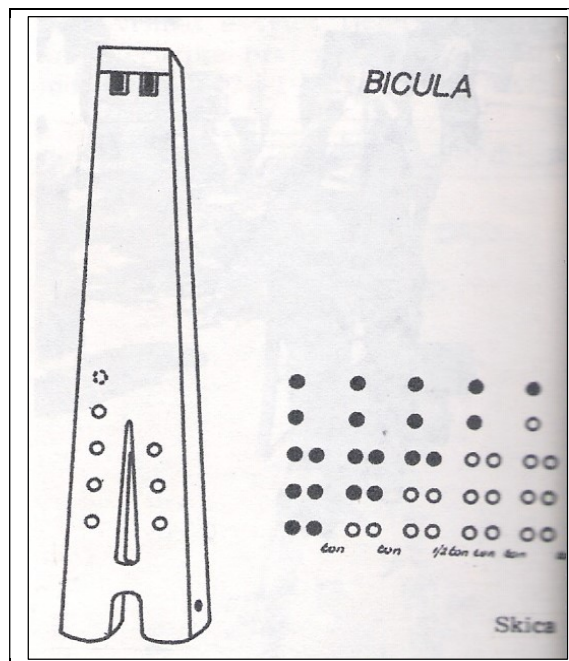


Figure 4-2 Cyla djare (Sokoli & Miso 1991:110)

In tracing folk musicians to their historical roots, it appears that originally most came from the common and lower-ranked class groups. The ancient instrumentalists were often former or current slaves who provided music in the halls of their masters.

The term “dark” is a well-known adjective associated with the middle ages for reasons commonly associated with the suppression of certain types of knowledge, including music. The phrase definitely suits that time period well in relation to folk music in the Balkans which was discouraged by the clergy of the time. This is borne out by Sokoli (in Sokoli & Miso 1991:73) who declares that:

During the first centuries, *dajre* (similar to a tambourine) was one of the folk instruments to be banned from the Church, as it was considered inappropriate for religious purposes. The clergy thought that this instrument brought satanic influences to the people and the church. For this reason *dajre* reappeared again only after many centuries with a new name, *timpan*.

Nobles who played instruments were rare but they did enjoy listening to music and thus supported singers and musicians in their courts. To be a musician (and especially a professional one) meant that you came from the poor or middle class strata; thus, most musicians needed a supplementary income derived from a separate craft.

The regional influence and the spread of various styles of music can be attributed to the associations (*tajfa*) or groups (*sazexhinj*) who would be invited to play at wedding feasts and other celebrations. These groups were not nomadic as such, but were willing to travel for various events outside of their own districts, and thus they unintentionally helped to spread their various styles and forms of music wherever they played.

Right up until the Second World War, the majority of musicians who played folk instruments were men. Prior to that, women were not allowed to use anything but a few basic instruments (castanets, tambourines or spoons for example). Only after the end of the Second World War, after liberation, were musical instruments adopted by women, and this has had a large influence on both the form and the content of Albanian folk music.

The folk instruments which are spread and used frequently across the whole of Albania today are divided into four main groups:

1. The idiophone group contains all folk instruments that produce their sound through the vibrations of a firm or a solid body when rubbed, shaken, struck or pinched. Some of the instruments included in this group are: stones, cymbals, rattles, spoons, bells, sticks, clappers and Jews harps, etc.

2. The membranophone group includes instruments that make their sound through the vibration of a stretched membrane. The sounds are produced by either banging with the hands or using sticks against the membrane under tension, or by blowing air against it. Some of these instruments are as follows:

The *Kallamzani* is made of a hollowed jointed stem of reeds and grasses similar to a bamboo cane. It is held to the side like a modern flute. One side of the cane is closed tightly with a well-dried type of paper. Although it may seem like this instrument belongs to the aerophone group, (see aerophone group) it is an exceptional case because the sound is produced by the vibration of the membrane while blowing. The *Kallamzani* is used rarely as an accompaniment to polyphonic songs, but when used it holds the *iso* part.

The *Qypi* resembles an African *djembe* (or a goblet drum) and is made of either wood or clay. The top part of the instrument is covered by a tightly-fitted animal skin while the other part, narrower than the top, remains open. The *Qypi* is only played by men. In a standing position a *qypi* is held under the left arm, while in a sitting position it is placed over the left knee. The vibration of the membrane is created when banging it either with the fingers or the palms of the hands. This instrument serves as a rhythmical accompaniment to folk songs and dances.

The *Dajre* is the most popular instrument amongst the membranophone instruments. Resembling a tambourine, the *dajre* is made of a thin piece of wood which is bent to form a circle when both ends are joined together. The wood is covered firmly by a well-worked and dried animal skin, usually a sheep skin, and is performed more often by woman than men. This is well illustrated in Figure 4-3; the woman in the picture is Fitnete Rexha, a well-known Albanian folk singer.



Figure 4-3: The *dajre* (Tole 2007a:501)

The *lodra* looks similar to a double-headed bass drum. Both sides of the drum are covered by a well-fitted kid skin. A thin rope is wound through holes on both sides of the drum, tightening the skin coverings firmly. *Lodraxhinjte* (the *lodra* players) hold the instrument in front of their body with the aid of a rope placed around their necks. The rope holds the *lodra* from both sides. With the right hand, the *lodra* players strike the right side with a thick stick usually in the centre of the membrane. The sound produced is loud and with heavy vibrations. The left side is struck by a thin stick producing lighter sounds with lighter vibrations of the membrane (see Figure 4-4). This folk instrument is used widely in the northern parts of Albania.



Figure 4-4: The *lodra* (Sokoli & Miso, 1991:292)

3. The chordophone group includes all stringed folk instruments which produce their sound through the vibration of strings when plucked or bowed. This category consists of instruments like *ciftelia*, *sharkia*, *lahuta*, *llahuta*, *lauria*, *qemania* and *jongar* (See Figure 4-5). The majority of these instruments are played in northern Albania which is known as a monodic zone of musical practices. A detailed description of the main chordophone instruments is given in Chapter 2, but the *Llahuta* is different to the other chordophone instrument and is widely used in southern Albania.

The *Llahuta* has a similar shape to a mandolin. Different types of wood are used to build it, but the main part, the body, is made of wood taken from a walnut tree. The body is half-pear shaped to which is attached a long wooden neck. There are eleven frets on the neck which help the instrument to produce a chromatic scale, and, compared to the other chordophone instruments, it has a wider range of expression. A *llahuta* has four sets of double strings tuned in fourths and, due to its developed construction and its powerful and interesting sounds, it can successfully perform polyphonic melodies accompanying itself both harmonically and rhythmically. For this reason, the *llahuta* is found in many different folk ensembles performing mostly in the towns of central and southern Albania. It should be noted that (as can be seen in Figure 4-5) the *llahuta* is a different instrument to the *lahuta* although the name is very similar. The *llahuta* is played by plucking the instrument and is performed mainly in Toskeria, whereas the *lahuta* is a bowed instrument (the bow can be seen in Figure 4-5) and is played only in Ghegeria.

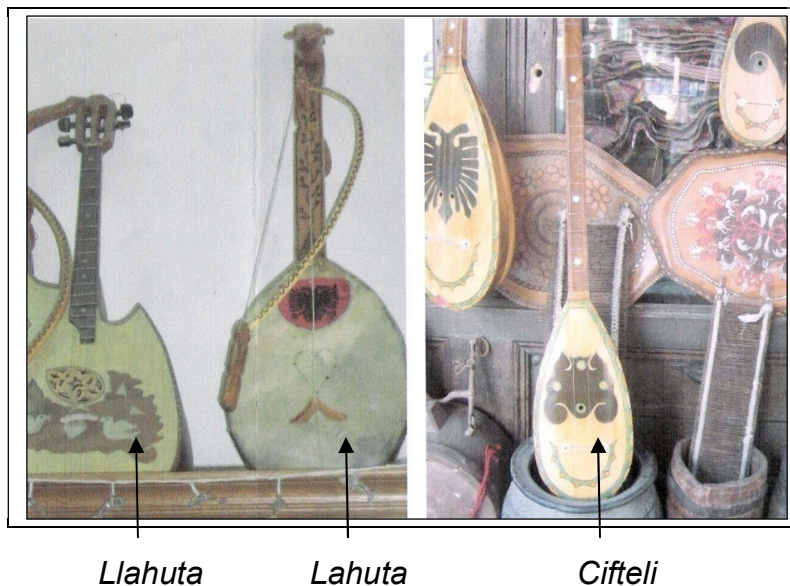


Figure 4-5 From a postcard purchased by M.Mahony, December 2007 in Tirana, Albania.

4. The aerophone group consists of all folk instruments which make their sounds by the vibration of a column of air enclosed within the body of the instrument. These instruments are used frequently all over Albania and territories influenced by Albanian culture. Some of the most commonly used instruments are as follows:

The *Bobla* is a simple aerophone instrument made of a cow's horn or of a large seashell. It has only one small hole open on the narrower part of the horn, and the sound is produced by blowing through it. *Bobla's* sound is very loud and this simple folk instrument is used mainly in the rural areas of south west Albania.

The *fyell* resembles a pennywhistle and is one of the most well-loved folk instruments amongst Albanian farmers. It is used throughout Albania. Track 8 on the accompanying CD is an example of a melody with a *fyell*. The *fyell* is made of different materials like wood, metal, cane or a bird's bones, usually an eagle. The most popular one, the *fyell*, is made of wood and its sound is soft and sweet. The *fyell* is mainly used by males in the rural areas and is known as 'the shepherd's best friend'. Normally, it is performed alone, playing sweet and simple melodies, but sometimes two *fyelltare* (*fyell* players) also play together. In the case of a duet performance, in Ghegeria, both players perform the melody in unison whereas in Toskeria, one plays the melody and the other player plays a long drone sound, similar to *iso*. According to Sokoli (1991:99), another way of playing the *fyell* is by blowing and singing at the same time. The melody obtained in this way was considered polyphonic, because of the vocal *iso* which is sung together with the sounds produced on the *fyell*.

It has been documented by Sokoli (in Sokoli & Miso 1991:98-99) that the breathing technique used by some *fyelltare* in Ghegeria is different to the players from Toskeria. In Ghegeria, the *fyelltare* inhales at the beginning of the melody, and is able to continue to play long phrases without the need to interrupt the exhaled airstream. To achieve this he breathes in through his nose while blowing air into the *fyell* at the same time without creating an interruption of the sounds. This form of circular breathing is practiced for a long time before achieving any success as this is not an easy task to accomplish. In order to help master this technique, in Ghegeria

one of the documented practices is to hold a small glowing coal with a thin wire on the tip of one's lips. The musician would attempt to keep the small coal at bay by blowing a continuous air stream directed towards the burning ember.

The *cyla dyjare* (see picture 4.2) is a double *fyell* or, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, a double-sounding flute. It is made of a single piece of wood which separates into two pieces from the middle down to the lowest part of its body. Described simply, it looks like an elongated capital letter "A". The left side has three open holes and a very small hole sideways at the foot of the instrument, while the right part consists of four holes. A *cyla dyjare* also has two fipple mouthpieces which are attached to each other, measured and built exactly the same. Close to the mouthpieces there are two little windows on the outside part of the surface in line with the holes. This folk instrument, similar to a *fyell*, was usually practiced and played alone, in the farms and the valleys surrounding different villages, but in recent decades the *cyla dyjare* has also served as an accompaniment for polyphonic songs and folk dances.

The *gajde* is a similar-looking instrument to a Scottish bagpipe. It forms a separate family in the aerophone category of folk instruments. There are different types of *gajde* defined according to their construction, each having a different name. Despite their differences, they are all recognized as "*gajde*" from the north to the south of Albania. The *gajde* described below is the most popular one and is mainly used in the Toskeria region. It is made of two cylindrical tubes which are connected to a type of bag (*kacek*) made of animal skin, usually a goat's or a sheep's skin. Based on Sokoli's description (in Sokoli & Miso 1991:122), the tubes are made of wood. The one on which the melody is played is called the *pipke* measuring approximately 20-25 cm long, and is similar to the chanter of a Scottish bagpipe. The other, which sounds the drone, is called the *bucall* and measures around 70 cm long. These two parts are constructed very carefully because the quality of the sound depends heavily on them. Eight holes are opened on the *pipka* surface, and the range of the instrument reaches a ninth.

The *Klarineta* is the same instrument as the modern-day clarinet. Together with the violin, these two instruments were adopted from western cultures around the eighteenth century. Soon after its introduction to folk music, the clarinet in B flat (the one used in Albania) became one of the most popular and important folk instruments. Its sound blends naturally with the other Albanian folk instruments and it is not surprising therefore that its usage rapidly spread throughout the country. The clarinet has become an integral part of folk instrumental ensembles.

4.2 Folk instruments as part of different ensembles

Although Albania is a small country, the number and the variety of folk instruments is very rich. Folk practices have been kept alive (especially until 1990) in every single village or town with their different types of instruments, folk dances, styles of singing and different folk rituals, all varying from place to place. In 1990, the political situation in Albania changed and it has since progressed from being a communist country to a democratic state. This transition did not occur very smoothly and initially it did not have a good influence on the practices of folk music. Many people left the country for a better life outside Albania and because of political struggles the social and cultural life did suffer the consequences. In the last decade, the government together with many organisations, folk musicians, musicologists and ethnomusicologists have tried successfully to revive the folk music throughout Albania.

It is important to mention that not all instruments described above have Albanian origins. The *llahuta* and the *lodra* have been adopted from oriental musical cultures. The violin and the clarinet were also taken from outside cultures, while the origins of the *gajde* are still unknown to this present day. Amongst other instruments the *lahuta* and different types of *fyelli* are documented as native folk instruments. Despite their various roots, the Albanian people (*populli*) have embraced all these instruments and have used them continuously throughout the decades.

As Sokoli (1991:311) states:

“Folk music has always been and still is closely linked with the life of the particular society and has developed together with that society: it has accompanied people at work and at rest, in war and in peace, in joys and sorrows, from the cradle to the grave. The Albanian people have always felt the need for musical instruments and have not used them merely for pleasure, but have also had a wide appreciation of their multiple roles”.

The first attempts to combine various instruments and to perform together arose out of the need of folk musicians to imbue their music with a deeper significance. They initially started playing only in familiar places or amongst family members, usually at wedding celebrations. The first dual combinations were of *fyell* and *dajre*, *curle* (another type of *fyell*) and *lodra*, *gajde* and *lodra* or two *cifteli* together.

In the nineteenth century, in the Ghegeria's towns, the folk ensembles had developed to consist of *saze*¹³, violin, *fyell*, *dajre* and *luge* (an ordinary spoon, either a metal or a wooden one) with the only change occurring in the middle of the century when the clarinet replaced the *fyell*. This happened in Toskeria as well, but here the ensemble consisted of violin, *llahute* and clarinet, with a later addition being that of the *dajre*. This ensemble was called “*Saze*” and became very popular in the south, accompanying different groups of folk dancers and singers, as well as performing instrumental pieces written especially for them. An example of a polyphonic song accompanied by a *saze* is presented on the accompanying CD (Track 9). The musical relationship between the instruments is similar to that between the vocal parts in the polyphonic music of the south; the clarinet is the leading part (*marresi*), followed by the violin as *kthyesi* and supported by the *llahuta* and the *dajre* which both play the *iso* part.

As opposed to the above ‘urban’ ensembles, in the rural areas the form of the ensembles varied from place to place. Sometimes, four *ciftelia* performed together,

¹³ The *saze* is a chordophone instrument with ten strings, similar looking to the *sharkia*.

especially in the weddings of northern Albania. Also, the combination of one *ciftelia* with three or four *sharkia* was often seen in Gjakova, a town in Kosova, north of Albania. In the villages of Kosova, the *sharkia* was the leading instrument in ensembles that consisted of one *sharkia*, one *ciftelia*, a violin and a *qypi*.

The folk musicians were eager to expand their interpretations by experimenting and improvising more on their instruments, but the abilities of the instruments were limited. Usually, the instrumentalists built their own instruments, but the villages were economically poor, restraining the villagers from owning expensive working tools or sophisticated working studios and workshops. Therefore, in the middle of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in the times when Albanian and European traders were buying and selling from each other, the first instruments were imported. The partnerships formed between Albanian merchants and the ones from the Balkans and Europe had a big influence, not only on the economic life of the Albanians, but also on the social and cultural aspects of their lives. With regards to the interpretation of folk music, besides attempting to improve the instruments technically, they also tried to achieve a better sound quality and raise the standard of their performances.

During a personal interview¹⁴ with the members of the National Folk Song and Dance Ensemble, it was highlighted that the introduction and the acceptance of the well developed instruments like the clarinet and the violin, and also the flute and the accordion, were crucial steps in the development of Albanian folk music. With great support from the Albanian government, the National Folk Song and Dance Ensemble was established in Tirana, in 1957. This was an important movement for the preservation of Albanian folk traditions. This ensemble originally consisted of six *ciftelia*, one *llahuta*, a contrabass, a *dajre* and a *lodra*. In the following years, the flute and the oboe were added. These two instruments showed close similarities with the Albanian *fyell* with regards to the sound, and were embraced easily by both the musicians and the audiences. The clarinet, the violin and the accordion were also added. With the addition of these instruments, some of the Albanian

¹⁴ The interview took place in the studios of the National Folk Song and Dance Ensemble, in Tirana, Albania, in December 2007.

composers tried successfully to transpose the folk music repertoire and adjust it accordingly to the new needs of the ensemble. These happenings enabled the musicians to express themselves more freely especially in regards to polyphonic performances. Later on, the modern instruments became a central part of the ensemble. The *llahuta* and the *dajre* are some of the few folk instruments that remained in the band and are still performed to this day. Occasionally, some of the other traditional folk instruments join the band and make an appearance in different events or folk festivals.

It is important to stress that the traditional folk instruments are widely performed these days in the rural areas of Albania, either alone or as part of small bands, while ensembles that are similar to the National Folk Song and Dance Ensemble perform the so-called “*muzike qytetare*” (urban folk music), mainly in the urban areas.

The difference between the two types of ensembles is that the traditional bands perform folk music as it was decades ago, whereas the urban folk ensembles perform the same folk music transposed and adjusted for the modern instruments without losing the ethnic and original flavors, thus maintaining the core folk music style.

4.3 The style of polyphony with the *cyla dyjare*

The sounds of the *cyla dyjare* have accompanied the rural Albanian folk from their early days in the valleys, where their cattle would find food and rest, to the present entertainment places and folk festival venues all across Toskeria. Initially an instrument that was usually played alone by farmers, shepherds and villagers, today the *cyla dyjare* is performed together with other instruments, accompanying polyphonic folk songs and dances in many different musical events.

A *cyla dyjare* was originally a single melody wind instrument, and should not be mistaken as being the same as the *fyell*. In fact, the *cyla dyjare* is a descendent of the *fyell* and it was constructed with the purpose of performing two sounds at once. As an instrument which was and still is performed strictly in southern Albania, this instrument was born out of the strong influences of the polyphonic practices in the area. The second part of its body was added in order to enrich the leading melody harmonically. Due to the strong influence of folk polyphony and *iso* this improvement was inevitable and occurred very naturally.

The *cyla dyjare*'s tone is sweet, light and airy in the low register. By overblowing, a second octave is obtained, thus affecting the tone to become stronger and resonate more than in the low octave. When playing it, two different melodies can be produced at the same time. They resemble the melodies of the first two voices of the vocal polyphony in Laberia, where the first melody that is produced from the body part with five holes is "*marres*", the leading part, while the second melody from the part with three holes is "*kthyes*", the one to "return it". The leading melody usually expresses a theme that is repeated with variations, followed sometimes by a second theme. The second part creates a contrapuntal melody to the first. A third part is also created when the instrumentalist blows and sings simultaneously¹⁵ (though this form of blowing is not practiced at all times). The resonance of the singing voice intones the third part, the *iso* part.

The melodies performed on the *cyla dyjare* are based on the pentatonic system. Because of the way the instrument is constructed, the progressions of the melodies follow in two ways. According to Shupo (2002:472)

... the progressions of the two melodies have tendencies towards unhemitonic scales which are produced from one part of the cyla dyjare, the one with three holes, and hemitonic scales produced from the other part of the instrument. The occurrences of hemitonic scales are very rare in the pentatonic melodies and are only performed in the first melody of cyla dyjare. This phenomenon shows a tendency of moving away from polyphonic structures towards a monody with accompaniment, and this

¹⁵ This technique is also used by some *fyelltare*.

happens in the first voice only, while the presence of hemitonic scales agree with the polyphonic progression which occurs in the second voice. Seconds and fourths are noticed generally on the main beats, while thirds and fifths are more noticeable on the weak beats.

This type of contrapuntal progression sounds harmonically strange to ears accustomed to western harmonies.

Although, the instrumental voices show similarities with the first two voices of the vocal polyphonic music in Laberia, the melodies are not as developed due to the limited ability of the instrument. The repertoire of the *cyla dyjare* includes melodies with simple lyrical themes and uncomplicated rhythmical patterns. The instrument often accompanies well-known women's songs and folk dances.

4.4 Kaba with Saze

As mentioned in Chapter 4.3, a Saze is the folk ensemble consisting of violin, clarinet, *llahuta* and *dajre*, and a *kaba* is performed mostly by this kind of ensemble.

Shupo (2002:475) provides the following description:

Kaba with Saze which is performed in the Toskeria region is the most established form of instrumental folk music in Albania. It is also the most well developed form of instrumental polyphony with Saze. It is important to notice that the progression of this form, from the past to its present structure and design, occurred due to the influences of the modern instruments (violin and clarinet) and their technique, and also due to the contribution of the ensemble in performing the folk music.

Tole (2007a:127-28) expands on this when he writes that:

It is documented that Saze started to establish itself around the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The replacement of the traditional folk instruments with the modern ones launched the beginning of the era of urbanization. Before the consolidation of this type of band, there was a coexistence phase between folk and modern instruments. This was a period when the adoption of the traditional folk repertoire

happened. This was driven by the musicians in the urban areas, as in those times the social and cultural life in the Albanians towns was closely related to that in the villages. The cultural life-style of the villages had a big influence in the lives of the people in the towns, therefore adopting and adjusting the traditional music repertoire happened very naturally.

The creation of the *Saze* and the presence of these new instruments were well accepted by audiences. The *Saze* soon become very popular in almost all towns of the south, and *Saze* ensembles started to be invited to perform at weddings and celebrations everywhere.

The clarinet plays a crucial role in the *Saze* ensemble, while, because of its technical advantages, the violin is also very important, although to a lesser degree. The *dajre*, together with the *llahuta* emphasizes the rhythmic aspects. However, the *llahuta* also serves as a harmonic accompaniment, utilizing one chord from the beginning to the end of the performance.

The repertoire of music performed by this type of ensemble has preserved the pastoral colours and lyrical nuances that once were expressed through the traditional folk instruments. Their music often draws the audiences to imagine nature, for instance, and to listen to the songs of the birds, as the musicians try to imitate their sounds with the violin or the clarinet using different techniques like trills, tremolos and glissandos. When a *kaba* is performed, the instrumentalists often play with a “crying” feeling, expressing their deep emotions through their instruments.

The form of a *kaba* consists of two sections; the first one is slow paced, almost like a lament, and the second one comes alive rhythmically, and is melodically more lucid and joyful. The first section is performed with free rhythm, where the lead instrumentalist is free to improvise and create different variations around the main theme, adding contrasts in regards to the dynamics of the music. A good technique is required from the performer in order to deliver in style the deepest emotions and the musical challenges that emerge when playing a *kaba*. These abilities of the musician are required not only in the first section but also in the second. The second

section is characterized by happier, dance-like themes, interspersed with fast, intricate passages and unexpected turns of phrase. The music is very expressive, progressing towards the peak of the melody with enthusiasm and excitement.

The clarinet is usually the instrument that performs the 'solo' voice of a *kaba*, taking a leading role musically and a central position in the band, although this leading voice can be performed by the violin as well. The rest of the band follows attentively and accompanies according to the performance of the clarinet, supporting the main melody harmonically, rhythmically and emotionally. An example of *kaba* with *saze* can be heard on the accompanying CD (Track 10); the leading part in this recording is performed by the violin from the *Saze* ensemble of the town of Permet.

With regards to the musical structure, a *kaba* is built based on the pentatonic system. The relation between the parts is polyphonic and very similar to the voices in the vocal polyphonic music of southern Albania. The first part, generally the clarinet, is "*marresi*" and, as mentioned above, takes the leading role. This is followed by the violin, the second part "*kthyesi*", accompanying the first one contrapuntally. It is joined by the third part, *iso*, which is played by the *llahuta*, performing one chord continually. The *llahuta* can also play the *iso* part *arpeggiato*.

The rhythmical patterns that are noticed during the performance of a *kaba* consist of both 'irrational' groupings as well as groups with equal values which expand gradually; these create rhythmic contrasts throughout the piece. 'These irrational' groupings appear to be similar with the ones noticed in the vocal Toske polyphony, especially in the men's songs. The pentatonic structure of the *kaba* is enhanced with ornamentations, trills, tremolos and glissandos, expressing powerful emotions throughout the performance of this type of instrumental polyphony.

According to Shupo (2002:478), the similarities between a *kaba* and vocal polyphonic music with many parts show clearly their mutual interdependence and parallel development. Due to the brilliant technical abilities of the modern instruments that have been absorbed into the *Saze* ensembles, the *kaba* is the most well established and utilized form in the instrumental music of Albania today.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and conclusions

5.1 Summary

Geographically Albania is divided into two main regions: the northern part known as Ghegeria and the southern part referred to as Toskeria. The southern territory consists of two main sub-regions, namely Toske and Laberia. Although the people of each region may show well-defined differences with regards to their language dialects and their music, from the earliest times these territories have shared the same customs, interests, language, styles of living, social and political concerns and above all, nationality (being a homogeneous race). The Shkumbini River which runs across the country is not only a boundary separating these two regions, but also serves as a virtual cultural divide distinguishing the varying musical performances and styles. Although Albania is a small country, the music performed in each region is quite distinct. Monodic music (explained in Chapter 2) is widely performed in Ghegeria, and it is different to the polyphonic music performed in Toskeria (explained in detail in Chapter 3).

5.1.1 Ghegeria

The instrumental and vocal monadic music of the north (Ghegeria) is based on the modal system, with Dorian, Aeolian, Mixolydian, Phrygian, Lydian, Ionian and Hypolydian modes being used. The modes that are used most commonly in the folk music of the north are Aeolian and Phrygian. In general, intervals are often intentionally sung smaller than in Western music (a practice that further emphasizes the unique melodic style of the Albanian monodic music). Normally, the melodies have simple forms, with little progression and a narrow range.

Monodic performances are found in wedding songs, women's songs, old men's songs, children's songs, lullabies and mourning songs. Usually, the songs are sung loudly – especially those sung by men – complementing their mostly outdoor performances. The songs can be sung solo or together as a group ensemble. They may or may not be accompanied by one or more folk instruments.

Many of these songs were dedicated to national heroes, fighters and men of '*besa*'. The concept of *besa* or honour inspired the formation of a large part of Albania's musical tradition. The songs are sung with pride, expressing the bravery and the courage of the native people amidst difficult situations. They are categorized as epic songs, legendary songs, ballads, historical songs, highland songs and funeral laments.

5.1.2 Toskeria

The style of singing performed in Toskeria is polyphonic. Albanian polyphonic music has been transmitted orally and has been passed down from generation to generation. One of the events that encouraged both vocal and instrumental polyphonic performances (as well as monodic music) is the National Folklore Festival which was first held in Tirana in 1959 and which still takes place to the present day. It is one of the most significant national folk music events, approved and well-supported by the Albanian government.

The polyphonic songs of Toskeria are based on the pentatonic scale. The pentatonic scale is the most influential scale used in both sub-regions of the south, Toske and Laberia. The tetratonic scale, the tritonic scale and the bitonic scale are all part of the pentatonic system and, together with the pentatonic scale, play an important role in the structure of vocal and instrumental music of the south.

The folk songs of Toskeria are mainly sung *a capella*, only seldom with accompaniment. In the Toske sub-region some songs are performed with only two parts, namely *marres* and *kthyes*. Other songs consist of three parts, with the third,

or drone, being called *iso*. Vocal polyphony with three parts is widely spread throughout the south of Albania and is the most popular form of singing in the region. Four-part singing takes place only in the Laberia region and it is always performed *a capella*. In Laberia the naming of the parts is the same as in Toskeria, except for one more song type which takes place only in this sub-region: the one with four parts. Here the added part is named *hedhes* (the third part and which means “the thrower”) with *iso* becoming the fourth part.

As discussed in Chapter 3 *iso* assumes a significant role in the structure of the polyphonic songs. It serves as a reference note and a tonal centre for the other voices to sound against. *iso* can be either rhythmical or held continuously from the beginning to the end of the song. The most common vowels forming the base on which *iso* is sung are ‘a’ (as in the word *car*) and ‘e’ (as in the word *there*).

Songs performed with two parts are extensively sung in the Toskeria region, but also in a few neighboring countries inhabited by Albanians, such as Kosova, Macedonia and the south of Italy. Here the two-part songs are usually performed by two groups of singers and in general they are performed more often by women than by men.

The polyphonic songs are usually grouped as either “the polyphonic songs of Toske” or “the polyphonic songs of Laberia”. The songs of Toske include in their repertoire wedding songs, love songs, sweet lullabies, village songs, work songs, old men’s songs, young men’s songs, women’s songs and other less frequently heard song types. In general, all these songs are classified as women’s or men’s songs. They are very expressive, melodious, sometimes gentle and sweet and sung with much vibrato and beautiful ornaments.

The songs of Laberia are characterized by an epic-lyrical feel and are normally performed slowly. Their chief repertoire consists of love songs and lyrical-epic songs. They are sung in a declamatory way most of the time, with a more melodious section included only in the middle of the song.

5.1.3 Instruments used in folk music

The music traditions of Albania cannot be complete without the use of many folk instruments ranging from the most ancient ones to the latest instruments that have been added to the different folk ensembles throughout the country.

Albanian folk instruments are divided into four main groups: the idiophone group, the membranophone group, the chordophone group and the aerophone group. The instruments belonging to each of these groups are varied and are used frequently throughout the entire country, performing both dance music and instrumental polyphonic folk music. The *cyla dyjare* is one of the earliest folk instruments to have been played by the Albanians and it was constructed deliberately as a polyphonic instrument. Whilst no instruments are limited to only a single area of Albania (and the other areas of the Balkans where Albanians live), the instruments mostly used in the northern territories are the *lahuta*, *ciftelia* and *sharkia*, while in the southern territories the *fyell*, the *dajre*, the *lodra* and the *cyla dyjare* dominate. Despite the fact that a *capella* singing forms the basis of the Albanian folk tradition, instruments are often used to accompany polyphonic folk songs

The most common form of a folk ensemble in the northern Ghegeria consists of *saze*, violin, *fyell* (which was replaced by the clarinet around the middle of the 19th century) *dajre* and *luge*. In the southern Toskeria, the ensemble named “*Saze*” contains violin, *llahute*, clarinet and *dajre*.

The clarinet and the violin were amongst the most popular western instruments that have become part of Albanian folk practices and are now well-loved by both the musicians and audiences alike. The acceptance of these well developed instruments (and a few others like flute and oboe) were crucial steps in the development of Albanian folk music. As mentioned in chapter 4, a national folk ensemble was established in Tirana in 1957, which further encouraged the preservation of Albanian folk traditions. Originally, the ensemble included six *ciftelia*, one contrabass, a *dajre* and a *lodra*. The western instruments mentioned above

were amongst some of the modern instruments that have been added to this ensemble.

5.1.4 Instrumental folk music

Amongst Albanian instrumental folk music, the form of a *Kaba* is the most well developed and established form. It is regularly performed by the *Saze* ensemble. Owing to its technical advantages, the clarinet plays a significant role in performing the *Kaba*. It is closely followed by the violin which either assumes the leading or the secondary role. The *cyla dyjare* is also renowned for performances of polyphonic instrumental music. As a polyphonic instrument, the melodies produced by a *cyla dyjare* bring a different flavour to Albanian instrumental polyphony. These melodies often resemble the melodies of the first two voices of the Laberien vocal polyphony, although the melodies are not as developed. Performances by the *cyla dyjare* are simple and lyrical, with uncomplicated rhythmic patterns.

5.2 Conclusions

- How does the folk music of the northern region and that of the southern region of Albania differ, and why?

As the study has revealed, it is clear that the folk music of northern Albania differs from that of southern Albania in a number of respects.

The main difference between the folk music of the north and south is the type of music performed. Monodic music is found to be practiced mainly in the north whilst polyphonic music forms the majority of music performed in the south. The two diverse systems impact on the folk songs of the two regions making them sound significantly different and unique. For many decades (well into the late 1980's) there had been little access to the northern territories of Albania, not only due to its harsh and mountainous terrain, but also due to economic and infrastructural issues which made it difficult for Albanians to travel there. This prevented the traditions and customs of the north mixing easily with those of the south (a legacy that continued to reinforce their distinctive differences in culture, traditions, dialect and music). The

regional differences are also highlighted in the folk traditional instruments used in the north versus those utilised in the south. The repertoire of the songs and the themes revealed also differ. The proudly sung songs of the north are recognized as part of the Albanian epos and typically portray important historical events or heroic deeds. The southern songs are not as nationalistic and cover various social themes like work, love and the family, and are in general a lot softer and more melodic in character.

- What are the differences and the similarities between the polyphonic music of Toske and that of Laberia?

Significant differences are also noticed within the sub-regions of southern Toskeria. The polyphonic music of Toske is characterized by imitative elements utilized in the melodies and rhythms of the songs, providing a sense of thematic unity, whereas in Laberia contrasting elements are more dominant throughout the songs. In Toske the second part imitates the first melodically and rhythmically, whilst in Laberia the second part provides a contrasting role with the first. The Toske melodies and parts progress horizontally whereas the Laberian melodies and parts are more vertically aligned. The core of both sub-regional musical styles is the pentatonic system. But whereas the Toske songs use the same pentatonic scale in the first two parts, the first two parts in Laberian polyphony are based on two different pentatonic scales. Rhythmically the Laberian polyphony is more strictly constructed than its Toske counterpart, where free rhythmical patterns are often noticed. In general the Toske songs are known for being melodious and the type of singing is characterised by expressive, lyrical and melodic nuances. On the other hand the songs in Laberia are more declamatory, with a type of singing that is similar to a way of talking.

Despite the differences, *iso* is performed similarly in both sub-regions and is another important element in the polyphonic music of the south. The four-part polyphony performed in Laberia is constructed in the same way as the three-part polyphony performed in Toske, except that an extra part (*hedhes*) is added, providing richness and complexity. The naming of the initial three parts is the same (*marres*, *kthyes* and *iso*)

- What are the folk instruments native to Albania? And which Western instruments have been included during the twentieth-century?

Some of the most well-known and often-used instruments native to Albania are the *fyelli*, the *kallamzani*, the *lahuta*, the *ciftelia* and the *cyla dyjare*. The violin, the clarinet, the flute and the oboe were all introduced and adopted from the Western cultures and these instruments were accepted with ease by the Albanian people. Today they provide an enriching and almost essential role in Albanian folk music. The violin and the clarinet assumed a particularly important role in the *Saze* ensemble. *Saze* ensembles perform regularly in various folk concerts and events throughout Albania. They are known for the beautiful interpretation of the *kaba*.

- What are the elements that provide the polyphonic folk music of Albania with its distinctive character?

Distinguishing characteristics of the folk music itself are:

- the combination of polyphonic parts within a folk song (two, three and four parts);
- polyphony with the *cyla dyjare* (a unique instrument from Albanian antiquity);
- the style of a *kaba*;
- the inseparable role of *iso*; and,
- the variety of regional music styles that adhere to localised rules according to the area in which they are performed.

Four part vocal polyphony sung *a capella* stands out not only as a rare and uniquely Albanian form of polyphony, but is also a style that has been preserved from generation to generation and remains fanatically unchanged to this modern day, unlike the two- and three-part vocal polyphony which sometimes have compromised their origins and accepted accompanying instruments.

What distinguishes Albanian polyphonic folk music from its counterparts in other areas of the world is firstly that this ancient practice not only survived the passage of time, but is found flourishing in modern times. Whereas in many cultures, polyphonic music finds itself excluded from the mainstream of society (and in some cases existing only in theory), Albanian polyphonic music falls within the general knowledge of most Albanian citizens and it is rare to find a genre of music so well practiced and enjoyed throughout all age groups and regardless of their degree of formal musical training. This rich musical tradition that has been kept alive from earliest times is a genuine treasure and a precious gem in the culture of the Albanian nation.

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Appendix: Map of Albania



Map: Albania, showing the two regions and two sub-regions of the south