

DOI: 10.2298/MUZ1416105M

UDK: 78.031.4

78.071.1:929 Бацковић Ј.

## Arhai's *Balkan Folktronica*: Serbian Ethno Music Reimagined for British Market\*

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### Abstract

This article focuses on Serbian composer Jovana Backović and her band/project Arhai, founded in Belgrade in 1998. The central argument is that Arhai made a transition from being regarded a part of the Serbian *ethno music* scene (which flourished during the 1990s and 2000s) to becoming a part of the global *world music* scene, after Jovana Backović moved from her native Serbia to the United Kingdom to pursue an international career. This move did not imply a fundamental change of her musical style, but a change of cultural context and market conditions that, in turn, affected her cultural identity.

### Keywords

Arhai, Jovana Backović, *world music*, *ethno*, *Balkan Folktronica*

Although Serbian composer, singer and multi-instrumentalist Jovana Backović is only 34 years old, the band Arhai can already be considered her lifetime project. The Greek word 'Arhai' meaning 'beginning' or 'ancient' it is aptly chosen to summarise Backović's artistic mission: rethinking tradition in contemporary context. Her interest in traditional music was sparked by her father, himself a professional musician and performer of both traditional and popular folk music (Medić 2013). Backović founded Arhai in Belgrade in 1998, while still a pupil at music school *Slavenski*, and continued to perform with the band while receiving instruction in classical composition and orchestration at the Belgrade Faculty of Music.

In its first, Belgrade 'incarnation', Arhai was a ten-piece band that developed a fusion of traditional music from the Balkans with ambient sounds and jazz-influenced improvisation, using both acoustic and electric instruments and a quartet of female vocalists. Aside from Backović (piano, keyboards and vocal), the band drew together musicians from traditional, jazz and classical backgrounds:

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\* This paper was written as a part of the project *Serbian Musical Identities within Local and Global Frameworks: Traditions, Changes, Challenges* (no. 177004 /2011–2014/) funded by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Serbia.

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Iva Nenić,<sup>2</sup> Ljubica Babec-Solunac and Sanja Kunjadić (vocals), Tamara Dragičević-Cvejić (flute), Aleksandar Pavlović (cello), Đorđe Bajić (guitar), Aleksandar Cvejić (bass guitar) and Goran Savić (drums). This line-up recorded the debut album *Mysterion*, released in 2006 on Serbian national label PGP RTS. The album comprised both Backović's original music and her arrangements of traditional songs from the Balkans. Arhai performed throughout the region, winning two first prizes at competitions (Balkan Youth Festival 2003 in Greece, and Festival Terminal 2005, Slovenia). Simultaneously, Backović pursued academic composition, as required by the curriculum of the Faculty of Music and wrote works such as *Silence* for mixed choir (2000), *Four haiku poems* for voice, flute and marimba (2002), *Crazy woman* for female choir and two pianos (2004), *Trilok Trio* for clarinet, cello and marimba (2004), *Inqualieren* for two guitars (2004), String quintet *Basic moods* (2005) and *Concertino* for piano and orchestra (2006). Moreover, she sang Latin jazz in Belgrade night clubs.

After a number of concerts and a live show aired on the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation in 2007, the original line-up of Arhai disbanded in 2008. Dissatisfied with the lack of support from her record label and with the rigid curricula of Serbian universities,<sup>3</sup> Jovana Backović moved to the United Kingdom to complete her doctoral studies in electroacoustic composition at the University of East Anglia (Vitas 2010: 5-6). There, in Norwich, she met Adrian Lever, a guitarist who had already had success with his Appalachian roots band Acaysa, with whom he released two albums, and with his folk-and-early-music duo Horses Brawl, co-writing and releasing three albums. Before teaming up with Backović, he also collaborated with the Norwich-based project Wintersongs, performed with folk singer Bella Hardy, got involved with Irish and flamenco music scenes in London, and collaborated with several Bulgarian and Macedonian artists.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ethnomusicologist Iva Nenić was the second lead singer and the only member of Arhai who was also active as a writer and lecturer; hence she served as the band's unofficial theorist. She teaches at the Department of Ethnomusicology of the Belgrade Faculty of Music and her research focuses on gender issues and popular musical practices, including world music (see Nenić 2006, 2009, 2010; Zakić and Nenić 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Jovana Backović has stated: "I was attracted to Norwich because the study programme encouraged me to experiment with sound. The academic world of classical music in Serbia is based on an ideology that regards all non-academic types of composition as less worthy" (Vitas 2010: 5–6). She has also stated that in Serbia she often felt like a 'split personality', having to constantly juggle between her diverse musical interests and the rigid academic requirements (Medić 2013).

<sup>4</sup> The band members' biographies can be found at their official website: <http://arhai.com>, accessed 01/05/2014.

The meeting of kindred spirits inspired Jovana Backović to relaunch Arhai with Adrian Lever. While they started out as an acoustic duo (with Jovana Backović singing and playing percussion, and Adrian Lever playing the twelve-string guitar, Bulgarian tambura and medieval dulcimer), their sound soon evolved into a fusion of electronic music with folk influences from both the Balkans and the broader European cultural space, delving into Celtic, Sephardic and Ottoman heritages. In 2013 Arhai self-released the album *Eastern Roads*, supported by the AHRC.

The basic premise of this text is that the band Arhai made a transition from being regarded a part of the Serbian *ethno music* scene (which flourished during the 1990s and 2000s) to becoming a part of the global *world music* scene, after Jovana Backović moved from her native Serbia to the United Kingdom to pursue an international career. This move did not imply a fundamental change of her musical style, but a change of cultural context and market conditions that, in turn, affected her cultural identity.



Picture 1. Arhai – Adrian Lever and Jovana Backović

### *Us vs. Them*

Before discussing Arhai's transition, it is necessary to overview the terms/labels *world music* and *ethno music* (*etno muzika*) in order to clarify what they mean in Serbian and, on the other hand, British and Anglophone cultural contexts.

*West vs. the (rest of the) World*

According to aesthetician Miško Šuvaković, the term *world music* has three uses:

- (1) a collective name for different kinds of music incorporated into a collective field of the music production of humankind; the term is used analogously with the term *world painting* or *world literature*;
- (2) a name for the ‘world of music’, meaning the contextual framework of meaning, knowledge, understanding and identification through which a musical work appears in all its complexity; the term is used analogously with Arthur C. Danto’s term ‘artworld’;
- (3) a name for a genre or transgenre or polygenre of popular music which is based on Western interpretation of *folk* (authentic, neo- or post-folk) extra-European or extra-high artistic and extra-popular-urban-mass (rock and pop) music models and *traditions* of the West (Šuvaković 2004: 37–38).<sup>5</sup>

In contemporary practice, the term *world music* is mostly used in the third way.<sup>6</sup> At a meeting organised by British record companies’ executives, producers and marketing specialists in 1987, *world music* was voted the ‘least bad’ umbrella term that the record companies could put on the sleeves of all ‘ethnic’ (i.e. non-Western, non-Anglophone) records that had previously been difficult to pigeonhole.<sup>7</sup> The first boundary that separated *world music* from Western popular music was a linguistic one, since, initially, the term *world music* was more-or-less equated with *non-Anglophone music* (Tomić 2002: 319). In the following decades, the term *world music* would evolve to encompass both the ‘authentic’ ethnic musics (traditional, ritual, etc.), plucked from their original contexts and packaged and sold for global (read: Western) consumption, and popular music genres

<sup>5</sup> Šuvaković argues that ‘We speak of *world music* as a *genre* when it is interpreted as a branch of contemporary Western or pro-Western popular music and when the hegemony of contemporary Western popular music is emphasized as opposed to traditional or post-traditional non-Western music. We speak of *world music* as a *transgenre* when it is interpreted as a discipline of transition from traditional popular music of extra-European or marginal European cultures to Western mass media music. We speak of it as a *polygenre* when pointing out the many directions of moving from extra-Western musics to Western music, as well as from Western to extra-Western musics’ (Šuvaković 2004: 39).

<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that the first and the second use have been discarded. For example, Philip V. Bohlman still uses the term in the first way (Bohlman 2002), and so do Michael Tenzer and John Roeder, the editors of a recent volume *Analytical and Cross-Cultural Studies in World Music* (Tenzer and Roeder 2011). This collection comprises analytical studies on various traditions including Japanese court music, European medieval court music, Indian rags, South Korean village music, songs of native peoples from North America and Australia, popular music from Brazil, etc.

<sup>7</sup> On the history of this term and its usage, including its political connotations, see Stokes 2004: 47–72.

based on various ethnic musics – regardless of where this music is actually produced and whether its performers are aboriginal peoples, immigrants, other ‘minorities’ or mainstream Western pop stars who collaborate with them. The polygenre of *world music* encompasses numerous hybrid genres such as *world fusion*, *global fusion*, *ethnic fusion*, *worldbeat*, *world fusion jazz*, *ethnic jazz*, *ethnopop*, *tribal*, *new age*, *sono mondiale*, *musique métisse*, *Afrobeat*, *Afropop*, *ethno music*, etc. As ethnomusicologist Mladen Marković puts it, “practically everything falls into that category: from authentic recordings of the singing of African shepherds, to arranged Bulgarian choirs, to cheap disco productions with added folklore themes” (Marković 2004: 48). In his critical (and possibly, self-critical) account, David Byrne, who was considered one of the early protagonists of the *world music* scene, dismisses this term as “a name for a bin in the record store signifying stuff that doesn’t belong anywhere else”, “a label for anything at all that is not sung in English or anything that doesn’t fit into the Anglo-Western pop universe”, and “a none too subtle way of reasserting the hegemony of Western pop culture” (Byrne 1999). In short, the only common feature of all these diverse musics is the presence of aurally recognisable elements that are not typical of Anglo-Western musical practices, such as: the use of non-Western instruments, vocal techniques, rhythmic and melodic patterns, modal systems and musical forms.

While Philip V. Bohlman asks himself and his readers “Why does world music so often drive a wedge between the West and the rest?” (Bohlman 2002: 26),<sup>8</sup> he restrains from offering an obvious answer: because it is the West that perceives itself as different from the others! The very idea that there exist ‘the West and the rest’ is a Western concept; furthermore, all the various encounters that happen between different musical traditions are mediated and interpreted by the West.<sup>9</sup> Even today, “the space between the West and its others persists not because of the shifting geographies of global encounter but rather because of an endemic imbalance of power” (Bohlman: 39). Thus, Bohlman is right in asserting that *world music* can be perceived as “homogenized global pop, cultural imperialism made sonorous, as well as a metaphor for the hegemony of the West” (Bohlman: 147). Šuvaković argues that *world music* is “an instrument of constructing society, seeing as *this* music does not originate in the cultural atmosphere of the autonomies of music production, but in

<sup>8</sup> Aside from Bohlman’s, some core books on the world music phenomenon that set the tone for future research included: Taylor 1997; Stokes 2003; Frith 2004; etc.

<sup>9</sup> Bohlman also acknowledges that conceptual pairs such as ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, ‘oral’ and ‘literate’ culture, ‘popular’ and ‘elite’, peoples ‘with history’ and those ‘without history’, ‘premodern’, ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’, are also Western constructs (Bohlman 2002: 36–37).

the practice of performing politically determined globalising reality” (Šuvaković 2004: 39).

Discourses on *world music* revolve around the concepts of tradition and authenticity; however, what is considered authentic in the Western art world (i.e. originality, individual creation) is directly opposed to how the West perceives authenticity in other, non-Western cultures, where the ‘authentic’ is equated with natural, untainted, collective and – anonymous. The pleasure that a Western listener derives from this type of music is that it promises to enable the listener to experience certain communities in the world as sanctuaries, retreats, oases, where the unity of ethnic/national identity has remained untainted by globalisation. As confirmed by Byrne, “There is a perverse need to see foreign performers in their native dress (...) We don’t want them looking too much like us, because then we assume that their music is calculated, marketed, impure” (Byrne 1999). This yearning for authenticity is emphasised by the fact that the Westerners largely ignore rock music coming from other parts of the world because they regard it as insufficiently ‘ethnic’.

In the process of commodification and dissemination of *world music*, the products from different parts of the world have been ripped out of their original contexts and transferred into new, often incompatible settings. During this transfer, the function and position that this music had occupied in its original context is rendered unimportant, because it has to fit into Western systems of values and hierarchies. This transfer, on the other hand, impacts how this ‘exported’ music is then re-assessed in its original context<sup>10</sup>. This issue will now be analysed using the example of Serbian (poly)genre of *ethno music*.

### *Ethno vs. World, the Balkans vs. the Orient*

Since the early 1990s, the term *etno muzika* (*ethno music*) has gained currency in Serbian musical market. Just like *world music* Serbian *etno muzika* is not so much a musical (poly)genre, but a comprehensive cultural and marketing construct that encompasses a variety of musical practices: from reconstructions and performances of the oldest layers of rural music, through various ‘modernised’ arrangements of traditional songs for vocal and instrumental ensembles, to a variety of genres of popular music (*pop, jazz, techno*) loosely based on folk music models (with or without actual citations). Mladen Marković argues that “the term *world music* has never really come into

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<sup>10</sup> In his study on the genesis of ethno jazz, Predrag Milanović discusses various stages of cultural transfer and how they are (re)assessed in different contexts. See Milanović 1995, 2009, 2010.

wide use in our country”<sup>11</sup> and adds that the political circumstances in the 1990s, the dissolution of SFR Yugoslavia and the international sanctions imposed upon Slobodan Milošević’s regime, which led to Serbia’s exclusion from the world community, contributed to this (Marković 2004: 48). At the same time, the new term *ethno music* was coined by the press.<sup>12</sup> The chief reason for the emergence of *ethno music*<sup>13</sup> in the 1990s, and its increasing media presence after the 2000 turnover (when Slobodan Milošević was overthrown by the democratic coalition) was the cultural masterminds’ desire to establish a popular music genre that would comply with the ideology of preservation and promotion of Serbian national identity and cultural heritage, and yet aspire to some artistic value and thus clearly separate itself from the two dominant genres of popular folk music, namely *novokomponovana narodna muzika* (the new folk music) and *turbo folk*. These genres were considered aesthetically worthless and heavily criticised by the democratic intellectual elite, while remaining immensely popular among the lower strata of Serbian society. As argued by Vesić, after the 2000 turnover, *ethno music* was heavily promoted as a politically correct way of addressing folklore heritage (Vesić 2009: 38–39). She argues that the creators of *ethno music* had considerable freedom in terms of employment of various formal, instrumental, vocal and other musical solutions, as long as they refrained from using typical mannerisms of the much maligned *novokomponovana muzika* and in particular *turbo folk*, a genre that was regarded by several cultural theorists a symbol of Milošević’s rule (Dragičević-Šešić 1994; Gordy 1999; Kronja 2000).<sup>14</sup> In practice, this implied the avoidance of ‘oriental’ influences, e.g. melismatic singing, the instruments such as the *zurle*, the *hijaz* tetrachord and such.

While *ethno music* aimed at a higher artistic value than *turbo-folk*, Marković shows that there were two issues that seriously undermined this aim: the first one being that the supposedly authentic tradition

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<sup>11</sup> This is not entirely true because, as I will show later, there have been various attempts to construct a distinctive Serbian *world music* scene, separate from the ethno music scene.

<sup>12</sup> In her master thesis, Ivana Vesić has discussed the production and promotion of ethno music in Serbia after Milošević’s removal from power, based on her study of the activities of two media houses, Serbian Broadcasting Corporation (RTS) and B92 (Vesić 2009).

<sup>13</sup> As to the *ethno* part of this syntagm, Saša Nedeljković stresses that “There is no group that is ethnic by itself; it becomes ethnic through its relations with other communities, through self-identification of its members and through their identity manifestations in social practice” (Nedeljković 2007: 27). Ivan Čolović offers a comprehensive analysis of the *ethno* construct in Serbian popular culture (Čolović 2006).

<sup>14</sup> This ‘satanisation’ of *turbo folk* has since been critiqued (Đurković 2001, 2005; Atanasovski 2012).

was often distorted when packaged as *ethno*,<sup>15</sup> and second, that the entire *ethno music* output actually contains little Serbian traditional music, because “there is Walachian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Greek, even Hungarian music” (Marković 2004: 50), and all these different traditions are joined together as if they were one and the same.

Not only is traditional music from the entire Balkan region integrated into this new *ethno music*, but the protagonists of the scene – bands and individual artists – often avoid the adjective ‘Serbian’ in favour of ‘Balkan’. As observed by ethnologist Ivan Čolović, “Three *ethno music* bands in Serbia feature Balkan in their names: Sanja Ilić’s *Balkanika*, Slobodan Trkulja’s *Balkanopolis* and Jovan Maljoković’s *Balkan Salsa Band*. Several compositions of *ethno music* also relate to the Balkans through their name: Ognjen i prijatelji (*Ognjen and Friends*) have *Balkan Rhumba*, Bora Dugić has *Običan balkanski dan* (*An Ordinary Balkan Day*) and Darko Macura has *Po Balkanu* (*Across the Balkans*). One of Slobodan Trkulja’s albums is titled *Let iznad Balkana* (*Flight over the Balkans*), while Sanja Ilić named his first album of *ethno music* *Balkanika 2000*” (Čolović 2004: 59). I may add the band Arhai to Čolović’s list, because their catalogue contains the songs *Balkan Under* and *Balkan Mantra*, and in recent years the band has been marketed as *Balkan Folktronica*. Thus, *ethno music* is closely related to another complex cultural construct, ‘the imaginary Balkan’. As Maria Todorova has articulated in her pioneering work, ‘The Balkans’ is not just a geographic term or a cultural region, but a sum of stereotypes and prejudices about this region, as perceived by ‘the imaginary West’ (Todorova 1999).<sup>16</sup> Marija Dumnić overviews recent publications in the field of ‘Balkan studies’ (Jordanova 2001; Golsvorti 2005; Bakić Hayden 2006; Laušević 2007; Jezernik 2010; etc.) and concludes that little attention has been paid to the issue of the appropriation of Balkan stereotypes in contemporary popular music (Dumnić 2012: 347). These authors regard the Balkans as an ‘incomplete Other’ or ‘half-Other’ as well as ‘a meeting point of the East and the West’. Thus, by having a prefix ‘Balkan’ or ‘Serbian’, music becomes a symbol of culture and identity and (re)produces a certain symbolic order, both in the local and global contexts.<sup>17</sup> Dumnić

<sup>15</sup> Marković cites the examples of the Teofilović brothers who sing traditional songs from Kosovo in parallel thirds, or Sanja Ilić whose album *Balkanika 2000* features a motley of folk instruments that had never played together in an actual rural practice (Marković 2004: 49). He also observes numerous incongruities in the self-proclaimed ‘modernisation’, ‘blending’ and ‘reshaping’ of tradition in the works by Sanja Ilić, Bilja Krstić and Slobodan Trkulja (Marković 2012: 341–343).

<sup>16</sup> For a further discussion of the Balkan stereotypes and their influence on the various manifestations and receptions of the *world music* polygenre in Serbia see: Stojanović 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Anthropologist Marija Ristivojević asserts that the music that bears the title of a certain country or region becomes an ‘ambassador’ for the country or region, and thus acquires a role in construction of ethnic identity (Ristivojević 2009: 126–127).

observes that the creators of official Serbian policies on development of tourism actually reinforce the stereotypes on the Balkans because these are identified as a major selling proposition (Dumnić 2012: 348–349). She uses the term *autobalkanism* to describe Serbian audiences' acceptance of the incorporation of Balkan clichés into their self-perceived national identity (2012: 348–349).

In his excellent analysis of the discourse on *ethno music* and its appropriation of 'The Balkans', Čolović outlines nine problem areas that will be briefly discussed below (see Čolović 2004: 59–62; the numeration and emphasis mine):

- 1) *Balkan as a metaphor of antiquity* – Čolović argues that the adjective 'Balkan' suggests that the music designated by it is very old, ancient; moreover, this antiquity is considered a comparative advantage, particularly with regard to younger nations;
- 2) *Antiquity comes alive through music* – *Ethno music* helps evoke the ancient Balkans, in particular the imaginary medieval times, when the Kingdom of Serbia was a force to be reckoned with – unlike the situation in the 1990s, when Serbia was defeated and humiliated;
- 3) *Traditional instruments used as metaphors* – The instruments made of wood, leather and other natural materials such as *rog*, *šupeljka*, *kaval*, *cevara*, *frula*, *gajde*, *dvojnice*, *duduk* and *gusle* serve as symbols of both antiquity and closeness to the nature. The listeners who attend concerts of *ethno music* are encouraged to view and touch the instruments, thus turning them into objects of fetishisation;
- 4) *Natural singing* – The human voice also evokes antiquity by imitating older types of throaty, untempered singing, without any 'unnatural', trained mannerism; at the same time, the singers emphasise that they sing this type of music effortlessly;
- 5) *Balkan temperament* – According to this discourse, the people in the Balkans exhibit the qualities of spontaneity, unrepressed emotions, the extremes of joy and sorrow, *joie de vivre*, rebelliousness, unfettered temperament, etc.
- 6) *Blending of Byzantine Orthodox and folk traditions* – *Ethno music* reflects a harmonic unity between religious (Orthodox, Byzantine) and folk cultures, the sacral and the secular;
- 7) *Reinforcing positive stereotypes on the Balkans* – While the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s have reinforced negative stereotypes on the 'barbarian' Balkans, the discourse on *ethno music* emphasises the positive stereotypes: antiquity, authenticity, naturalness, intractability, harmony of the spiritual and the secular, serene and pleasant exoticism;
- 8) *Brotherhood and unity in the Balkans* – The unproblematic merger of different national traditions in *ethno music* demonstrates that the Balkans is a multicultural region that 'transcends the boundaries of national states, languages, confessions';

9) *Denial of Oriental heritage* – One particular tradition is excluded from this harmonious Balkan multiculturalism: namely, the cultural and musical Orient, which is seen as something alien and threatening to the autochthonous Balkan cultures. Musical signifiers of the Orient (such as the hijaz tetrachord) are ascribed only to *turbo folk*, a genre that is denied any connection with the ‘authentic’ Balkan past.

### *Ethno vs. Folk vs. World Music*

In spite of international sanctions and isolation during the 1990s and the anti-Western rhetoric that dominated the state-controlled media, Serbian *ethno music* did not remain an isolated phenomenon. The main oppositional media in Serbia, B92, whose core audience consisted of younger, educated, liberal members of the society who opposed Milošević’s regime, became a locus both for political activism and resistance, and for opposition to nationalist and populist cultural models and genres such as *turbo folk* that were associated with Milošević regime. The radio (and later TV) station B92 became instrumental in importing and appropriating Western values and trends, including *world music* that was supposed to appeal to urban and educated audiences and to demonstrate their cosmopolitan interests. The foundation of a festival of alternative music *Ring Ring* in 1996 marked a moment when, for the first time, some of its performers were marketed as *world music* stars. Soon afterwards, B92 started a CD edition, which mostly comprised licensed records of *world music* stars previously released by European record companies. However, this edition went on to include some domestic performers – notably Romani singers and brass bands. As observed by Vesić, these performers (e.g. Esmā Redžepova, Šaban Bajramović, the brass orchestra of Boban Marković etc.) had never before been associated with *world music*; in Serbia, they were simply regarded as performers of *narodna muzika (folk music)* (Vesić 2009: 41). However, Bojan Đorđević, the mastermind behind this edition and the *Ring Ring* festival, cleverly decided to rebrand them as *world music* stars in order to ‘export’ them to the West. Being members of the Roma ethnic minority and performing the music that sounded sufficiently ‘exotic’ to the Western ears, they were easily accepted into the *world music* canon and some of them released albums in the West.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In the early 2000s Esmā Redžepova and Šaban Bajramović were signed to the Dutch record label World Connection and released several albums. Redžepova was marketed as „Queen of the Gypsies“ and Bajramović as „a Gypsy legend“. See the Catalogue of releases of the World Connection label: <http://www.worldconnection.nl/wclayout/>

As observed by Vesić, it was more difficult for Serbian listeners, in particular the members of the cultural elite (who constituted the core of B92 listeners) to warm to these *folk music* stars (i.e. the exponents of the genre that had long been associated with plebeian entertainment and regarded as trivial and worthless) (Vesić 2009: 41). Therefore, it was only after the Roma singers and brass bands were successfully 'exported' to the West as *world music* stars, that they became acceptable for the members of Serbian educated elite; an acquired taste if there ever was one.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Serbian cultural theorists have expressed their dissatisfaction that the West has started to equate 'Serbian' and 'Balkan' with 'Romani' i.e. 'Gypsy' (Ljubinković 2013: 110).

After the Roma musicians entered the catalogues of *world music* record companies and retailers, other folk music stars from Serbia also began to feature in specialised music stores. The Western retailers, however, never attempted to distinguish between the Serbian stars that belonged to distinctive genres of *turbo folk*, *folk rock*, *new folk music* or *ethno music*, since they all sounded sufficiently 'Other' to average Western listeners, who were largely unaware of the political, cultural and class boundaries that separated, say, *ethno music* from *turbo folk*.

However, this confusion as to which Serbian artists should be considered *world music* stars, and how this ideology relates to the *ethno music* phenomenon is not only limited to Western audiences. It has affected the only two Serbian monographs on *world music* that have been published thus far (Milojević 2004; Jakovljević 2011), as well as the numerous studies on the pages of the magazine *Etnoumlje*,<sup>20</sup> founded by the *World Music Association of Serbia*.<sup>21</sup> This organisation, established by Oliver Đorđević, registers all (supposed) *world music* performers in Serbia. Đorđević has coined problematic oxymoron 'Serbian world music' to lump together all exponents of the *ethno music* polygenre, thus entirely ignoring the aforementioned genre divide along the socio/cultural and political lines. Iva Nenić perceives *world music* as an important subcultural musical node in Serbia (Medić 2014); she distinguished between, on the one hand, the *world music* performers

[discografy.php?site\\_id=6](#), accessed 1 December 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Vesić observes that this, in turn, affected how these Romani musicians were marketed to domestic audiences, since various record companies in Serbia branded their releases differently: see Vesić 2009: 41.

<sup>20</sup> All issues of *Etnoumlje* are available at [http://www.worldmusic.org.rs/magazin\\_etnoumlje.html](http://www.worldmusic.org.rs/magazin_etnoumlje.html), accessed 01/05/2014.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.worldmusic.org.rs>, accessed 01/05/2014.

and bands who rely on various traditions that coexist in Serbia, i.e. not just Serbian (as exemplified by Moba, Paganke or Svetlana Spajić), but also Jewish (e.g. the band Shira U'tfila), Romani (group Kal), Hungarian (Félix Lajkó) etc., and, on the other hand, the more commercial *ethno* genre, as exemplified by Bilja Krstić and Bistrik or Sanja Ilić and Balkanika (Nenić 2010: 907–909). Dragana Stojanović argues that both these ‘camps’ belong to *world music*, although she divides them into two groups: the *localising world music* that aims towards preservation of tradition (e.g. Vasilisa, Pavle Aksentijević, Braća Teofilovići etc.) and the *globalising world music* (e.g. Goran Bregović, Bistrik, Balkanika etc.) (Stojanović 2012: 47–50). In stark contrast to Iva Nenić, Oliver Đorđević believes that the artists and bands such as Bilja Krstić and Bistrik, Sanja Ilić and Balkanika etc. belong to *world music* because they feature ‘a synthesis of contemporary musical trends and traditional music’, while the label *ethno* should only be attached to ‘revivalist’ musical groups such as Paganke and Moba, whose artistic mission is to preserve authentic traditional singing (Jocić S.A.)! However, an average music buyer in Serbia would never regard Bilja Krstić or Sanja Ilić as *world music* performers, because in Serbia they have been heavily marketed as keepers of Serbian and Balkan tradition and identity. The musicians themselves are also well aware of this difference; for example, Bilja Krstić has stated: “When performing in Serbia, we are considered *ethno*, but when we perform outside the country, at an international festival, we are featured as *world* musicians” (Marković 2012: 334). This is not the case only in Serbia: for example, the Irish in Ireland do not regard their traditional music as *world music*; their concept/construct of ‘Celtic music’ is more-or-less equivalent to Serbian ‘Balkan music’.<sup>22</sup> When attempting to sell their music worldwide, the exponents of ‘Celtic music’ or Serbian *ethno music* allow to be marketed as *world music* stars; however, in their own countries, the very same music serves as a symbol of national pride, of something ‘authentically our own’!

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<sup>22</sup> In his discussion of ‘Celtic music’, Philip V. Bohlman argues that “texts in Celtic languages obviously provide one of the ways in which music draws upon the store of unifying factors. The crucial issue is not understanding Irish or Scottish Gaelic, or Welsh or Cornish, but rather finding assurance that these languages provide narrative contexts for the myths underlying Celtic music” (Bohlman 2002: 79–80).

## Arhai: from Serbia to the United Kingdom, from *ethno* to *world music*

*First incarnation (Belgrade, 1998–2008)*

In her own words, Jovana Backović never envisioned Arhai as part of the Serbian *ethno music* scene (Medić 2013). She founded the band because she was interested in Serbian traditional music, but did not want to approach it as a petrified remnant of past times: “Music is a living thing, it changes constantly. Traditional music had its place in everyday life of people in the past centuries, but nowadays it has been fossilised. For example, if you perform an old harvest song at a concert hall in an authentic way, it is still placed in an unnatural context. I prefer to keep the tradition alive by interpreting it in my own way. (...) It is important for people to know their traditional music, but I also know that it would be difficult for someone who has listened to contemporary pop all their life to switch to traditional music in its undistilled form” (Vitas 2010: 6–7). Hence, Backović has taken up the task of mediating between the traditional music and contemporary audiences: by rearranging traditional music, or using samples of recorded traditional songs and dances for her original compositions, she aims to ‘translate’ tradition into contemporary musical styles and make it more accessible to general audiences. She has admitted a personal preference for the musical folklore of Southern Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Eastern Serbia (including the Vlach tradition), then, Bulgarian, Greek and Turkish music, while she is not particularly interested in the music of Central Serbia, i.e. the Šumadija region: “I do respect this tradition, but it does not suit my temperament” (Vitas 2010: 7). On the other hand, the influences from Western pop music range from the English-Australian ‘medieval dark wave’ duo Dead Can Dance (who have referenced the Gregorian chant, medieval popular dances, Gaelic folk, Middle Eastern mantras, African rhythms, mixed and merged with art-rock) to Deep Forest, the French *electronica* duo; the basis of their sound is electronic pop (*dance, chillout, ambient*) music onto which they layer samples of already commodified folk music from all over the world. It should be stressed that Deep Forest approach these different traditions as alien observers; whether they sample the Pygmy tribes or the Hungarian folk singer Márta Sebestyén, the basic procedure remains the same – the samples are only used for their sonic qualities, while the original context of that music is dismissed. Jovana Backović, on the other hand, does not approach traditional music superficially; she wants to mediate between the Western pop and Balkan traditional music because of her experience with both these idioms, but also because she wishes to stay true to her roots (Medić 2013).

In spite of Backović's disapproval of the *ethno music* moniker, the band Arhai jumped on the bandwagon in the mid-2000s and signed a contract with the national music label PGP RTS (part of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation), whose *ethno music* catalogue mostly contained veteran artists who had previously already released albums for PGP RTS (including the aforementioned Bilja Krstić and Sanja Ilić).<sup>23</sup> However, the music editors in PGP RTS were willing to give a chance to upcoming bands such as *Vrelo* (meaning 'spring' or 'source') and *Arhai*, as well as the more experimental projects such as the band *Marsya*, led by Aleksandra Anja Đorđević, another classically trained composer who had turned her back on academic styles. As observed by Vesić, the artists and bands signed by the PGP RTS were given considerable time on national television: their performances were broadcast during state and Christian holidays and in prime-time slots. Vesić concludes that the music editors at RTS had high opinions on their *ethno music* releases and promoted them "as culturally and artistically valuable products" (Vesić 2009: 48). Thus, Arhai were invited to perform live in the studio; the concert was broadcast live on Channel 1 of Serbian Broadcasting Corporation in 2007, to promote their first album *Mysterion*.

The album itself comprised both Backović's original music and her arrangements of traditional songs from the Balkans. The ten tracks covered a wide range of available instrumental and vocal combinations and showcased the specific performance style of each musician, but also the breadth of Backović's interests and her multiple identities of a classical composer, *bossanova* singer and folk music enthusiast. As to the rest of her band, the flute and cello players were classically trained musicians who were often required to simulate folk instruments, with the flute taking up the role of *kaval* or *frula*, and the amplified cello turning into the *gusle*. The electric guitars and the drums added an element of *fusion jazz* to the equation. The guitar player also had to be versatile enough to imitate both *šargija* (the fretted long-necked lute) and *mandolin*, while the rhythm section contributed complex asymmetrical *aksak* ('limping') rhythms, typical of the rhythmic structure of folk and vernacular traditional music of the Middle East and of the Balkans. However, the players were not simulating the particular folk instruments in the manner that is often present in the Serbian *ethno* scene, where the composers sometimes directly ask the performers to do so; in the case of Arhai these alterations of the instruments' 'mainstream' sound were the result of the musicians' spontaneous inclination towards some 'non-classical', 'exoticised' and 'ethnicised' sound colors and manners of playing

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<sup>23</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the ethno music releases by the PGP RTS and B92, see Vesić 2009: 57-62.

(Medić 2014). As a keyboard player, Jovana Backović enriched the arrangements with lush ambient textures. Her high, ethereal, child-like soprano contrasted the voices of the other three singers (Iva Nenić, Ljubica Solunac and Sanja Kunjadić), who often performed in a manner that emulated the coarse, ‘open throat’, untempered singing of traditional female vocalists. However, the singers also experimented with different vocal colours, which separated Arhai from a bulk of Serbian *ethno* performers who merely imitated traditional singers.

The songs on the album *Mysterion* fall into three distinctive groups. The first group comprises tracks Nos 3 and 10, *Sunce se sl'ga da zajde*<sup>24</sup> and *Smilj Smiljana*, namely Bulgarian and South Serbian folk songs arranged for female voices *a capella*, simulating the village practice, but within a decidedly tonal setting, more akin to the tradition stemming from Stevan Mokranjac's *Rukoveti* (*Garlands*). The second group also contains traditional songs (Nos 6 and 8, *Da sam izvor voda ladna* and *Žanjem žito*), but the melody is treated freely and added instrumental accompaniment. The remaining tracks, *Shanama Deus*, *Arhai*, *Tinuviel*, *Chameleon*, *Balkan Mantra* and *Kinezis* are Backović's original compositions, often based on *aksak* rhythms such as 7/8 (*Kinezis*) or 10/8 (*Tinuviel*) and featuring syntheses of various influences, from simulations of ancient Balkan rituals, via European medieval tradition (as mediated by the bands such as Dead Can Dance), to contemporary Latin jazz (most obvious in tracks *Da sam izvor voda ladna* and *Chameleon*). The voices are often used as instrumental colours and sing on neutral syllables, thus reinforcing the ritualistic character of the music.

The live performance broadcast on RTS in early 2007 showcased the band on top form; the flawlessly performed set included both the songs from the album *Mysterion* and some new songs, probably intended for the sophomore album (*Balkan Under*, *Zasp'o mi je dragi*, *Tudora*, *Šiz kolo*, *Din Ta* and *Kiša*). However, the follow-up to *Mysterion* was never released in Serbia because Jovana Backović moved to Norwich. Of all these new songs, only *Tudora* would end up on the album *Eastern Roads*, but in a different arrangement.

### *Second incarnation (Norwich/London, 2008–present)*

After moving to the United Kingdom in 2006, Backović discovered that the British audiences knew very little (if anything) about Serbian and/or Balkan music; only occasionally she would run into someone who had heard of Goran Bregović, the Romani brass bands or the Guča festival. It is likely that the chief reason why Serbian music had remained obscure was the war in Yugoslavia and

<sup>24</sup> In Bulgarian: *Слънце се слеза да зајде*.

the international sanctions imposed upon the country, which meant that the musicians were unable to travel and participate in European ‘roots’ music festivals. Due to these unfavourable circumstances, they failed to make an impact when the interest in *world music* was at its peak (i.e. during the 1990s). In Backović’s own admission, Adrian Lever was the only person in Norwich who knew Bulgarian music and who was eager to get acquainted with the musics of the entire Balkan region (Medić 2013). While Backović and Lever realised that there was a market gap that they could fill, they also knew that, in order to present Balkan music to the British audiences, they would have to make it more accessible. Backović has stated: “I tend to mix Balkan folk music with other genres, such as *ambient*, *drum’n’bass* and *dubstep* (...) I give the British audiences enough of what they are familiar with, mixed with something that they find new and very interesting” (Vitas 2010: 6–7).

The only shared features between the albums *Mysterion* and *Eastern Roads* are Backović’s distinctive soprano and the references to Balkan traditional music; however, the folklore samples on *Eastern Roads* encompass a much wider geographical space than before – from the Middle East, via the entire Mediterranean, to the Celtic fringe. The sleeve notes to the CD do not contain information on the cited songs, probably in order to preserve a certain mystique, or maybe to encourage the listeners to explore and discover the sources on their own. The downsizing of the band has inevitably affected the sound; although both Backović and Lever play multiple instruments, the computer and sampler now replace the rhythm section, and the overall sound has drifted from *fusion jazz* towards *techno* and *ambient*.<sup>25</sup> Aside from practical reasons, the band’s turn to *electronica* was also affected by Jovana Backović’s doctoral project. She has stated: “The basis of my doctoral study is a course of electro-acoustic music. I work with various sound materials, including field recordings of traditional music (...) Since I have already been involved with traditional music for many years through Arhai, I have simply transferred that experience to the world of electro-acoustic music” (Vitas 2006: 5). On the other hand, the band has introduced traditional instruments such as the Bulgarian *tambura*, *dulcimer* and Indian *tabla* that had not been heard on Arhai’s first album. Another major difference between the first and the second albums is that, after moving to the United Kingdom, Jovana Backović no longer had to shy away from the (imaginary) Orient. As I have already mentioned, there was no room for Middle Eastern influences within

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<sup>25</sup> There are four additional musicians on the album *Eastern Roads*: Jesse Barrett – tabla (tracks 2,6,8), Nick Van Gelder – percussion, Matteo Grassi – electric bass (tracks 1-3, 5-8, 10) and Ismail Hakki Ates – vocals (track 10).

the *ethno music* aesthetics in Serbia, because these were associated with *novokomponovana muzika* and *turbo folk*; but with the British audiences largely unaware of the ideological divide that separated these genres, the addition of Oriental influences actually reinforced the 'exoticism' of Arhai and became their major selling proposition.

The very first track on the second album, the eponymous *Eastern Roads*, introduces the new aesthetics. Instead of the vivid asymmetrical rhythms that characterised the album *Mysterion*, here the electronic rhythm machine produces the dance rhythms typical of Western pop and techno. Adrian Lever's *tambura* dominates the instrumental background, while Jovana Backović sings neutral syllables, simulating both ancient rituals and scat singing. The second track, titled *Beneath the Tree*, contains a traditional Serbian song from Kosovo, *Gusta mi magla padnala*, in 7/8 rhythm, considered typical of this region. The third track, *Peregrinus*, begins with a sample of Bulgarian traditional song *Kaval sviri* recorded by the female choir *Le Mystere des voix Bulgaires*, whom Backović has acknowledged as a major influence (Vitas 2004: 6). This sample combines with techno rhythms and Lever's virtuoso playing. The next track, *Morena*, is a Sephardic traditional song from Andalusia, *Morena me llaman*, sung in Ladino language. The only English-language song, *Speaking Clock*, with its slow ambient music recalls the *dark rock* bands from the 1980s such as the Cockteau Twins, but also the 1990s *trip hop*, embodied by the likes of Portishead and Massive Attack.

The next two tracks on this musical journey, *Tino* and *Tudora*, take the listeners back to the Balkans by quoting a traditional song from Northern Macedonia, *Gugu Tino*, and a song from the Dobrudja region in Bulgaria, *Tudora kupai misiri*.<sup>26</sup> While the latter song had originally been recorded by the acclaimed Bulgarian folk singer Verka Siderova, it entered Arhai's repertoire (while the band was still based in Belgrade) via its reinterpretation by the aforementioned French duo Deep Forest and the singer Márta Sebestyén (in their version, the song is called *Bulgarian melody*). This is important because Backović and the rest of Arhai opted not to use a 'pure' (though commodified) folk source, but, instead, reached for the international network of free-floating sound signifiers (Medić 2014).

The ensuing track *The dance of the Bacchants* evokes the imaginary Orient by its vivid ornamentation in the tambura, complex rhythms and Backović's melismatic singing. The same Oriental-techno idiom is found in the track No 10, *Ismail*, named after Ismail Hakki Ates, who performs the Turkish traditional *Sari Yazma*. On the other hand, the remaining two tracks, No 9 *Simbil Flowers* – an arrangement of the popular ballad from Southern Serbia, *Simbil*

<sup>26</sup> In Bulgarian: *Тудора куйай мисури*.

*cveće*, and No 11, *Jasmine* – a cover of the Greek traditional *To yasemi*, feature a more pared down arrangement, with Jovana's ethereal soprano and Adrian's tambura complementing each other.

Arhai's *Eastern Roads* take the listeners from Andalusia to Turkey; the fact that Jovana Backović and Ismail sing in seven different languages (Serbian, Macedonian, Bulgarian, Sephardic Ladino, Greek, Turkish and English) fulfills the first, linguistic criteria for *world music*, and the use of traditional melodies from the entire South European–Balkan–Mediterranean geographic and cultural space makes this music sound sufficiently exotic to British ears, in spite of the extensive use of rhythms and textures typical of Western pop and techno. The reviews for *Eastern Roads* published on specialised *world music* blogs have been overwhelmingly positive, confirming Jovana's observation that the British audiences (not limited to *world music* enthusiasts) find Arhai's mixture of the familiar and the unknown exceptionally interesting.<sup>27</sup>

### *Balkan Folktronica as a result of paradigmatic transformations*

Whilst in Serbia, Jovana Backović aimed to bring Serbian traditional music closer to the contemporary domestic audience unfamiliar with it, by fusing it with elements of other genres, but also by writing her own songs inspired by Serbian and regional folklore heritage. Due to their incorporation and simulation of the Serbian and Balkan musical idioms, the first 'incarnation' of Arhai willy-nilly became the exponent of *autobalkanism*, typical of the Serbian popular culture of the Noughties, and their local reception was mostly in line with the already defined and discursively codified *ethno music* construct. In spite of Backović's and Nenić's reluctance to be associated with the *ethno* scene (due to its overwhelmingly commercial character) and the band members' self-identification with the subcultural *world music* hub in Serbia (Medić 2013; 2014), Arhai does stand as one of the best representatives of the Serbian *ethno* polygenre, by cleverly avoiding the trappings of the claims to 'authenticity' and, instead, confidently reinterpreting tradition in their own way.

After moving to the United Kingdom, Jovana Backović teamed up with Adrian Lever, an Englishman, who became one half of the 'resurrected' Arhai. The duo went on to incorporate many European

<sup>27</sup> Here are just a few excerpts from reviews published on various *world music* blogs: "If contemporary folk music is what you are after, then Arhai serves it up deliciously" (Forss 2013); "a finely-crafted work of great sophistication" (Millet 2013); "ethereal, almost otherworldly attraction (...) simply irresistible (...) Jovana Backović's vocals are superb, and both her and Adrian Lever's musicianship are outstanding" (Rainlore 2013).

and Middle Eastern folklore traditions that sounded sufficiently 'different' to British ears, by featuring rhythms, modes, harmonies and instruments untypical of British music, not to mention the lyrics in a variety of 'intelligible' languages. At the same time, the band preserved the already established (imaginary) 'Balkan' identity, as confirmed by their self-coined marketing tag line *Balkan Folktronica*. This *autobalkanisation* in a different context was not merely an artificial marketing strategy, but an outcome of Jovana Backović's desire to constantly expand her knowledge of various traditions and cultural idioms and, on the other hand, to share Serbian and Balkan music with contemporary British listeners in a way that would be accessible to them. In this way she has created an idiosyncratic hybrid style that fits effortlessly into the *world music* catalogues. The various styles that have become building blocks for Arhai's heterogeneous sound are often cultural hybrids themselves, i.e. results of *paradigmatic transformations* at different levels. Aesthetician Radoslav Đokić has defined four steps in the process of paradigmatic transformation (Đokić 1992), and Predrag Milanović has used them to reconstruct the genesis of Serbian *ethno jazz* (Milanović 1995):

1. *cultural encounter* happens when the elements of a foreign cultural idiom enter the new context for the first time;
2. *cultural rapprochement* is the first attempt at combining the domestic and the foreign idiom;
3. *cultural merger* is the next step, where the two idioms fully interact and intertwine;
4. *cultural unity* is the final step in the process of paradigmatic transformation, and its result is a *cultural hybrid*, i.e. a new idiom or style.

Many genres typical of Serbian and broader Yugoslav cultural space have emerged as results of paradigmatic transformations of initially alien idioms at various historical moments. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Arhai's *Balkan Folktronica* represents a new hybrid of 'authentic' but commodified folk music from 'the imaginary Balkan' (and beyond) with several already hybrid styles, such as Serbian *ethno jazz*, *Latin jazz*, *fusion jazz (jazz rock)*, *worldbeat*, *art rock*, *synth pop*, *trance*, *trip hop*, etc. In order to achieve a seamless fusion, Jovana Backović had to find some common denominators for all these, on the surface very different styles. Her compositional procedure thus involves: constant variation as the main form-building principle; ostinato figures and melodic/rhythmic models – 'riffs'; pedal harmonies and textures – 'drones'; pentatonic and other pre-tonal modes; avoidance of classical authentic cadences, leading notes and chromatic alterations. By focusing on these common features, Arhai achieves the desired level of paradigmatic

transformation, thus clearly distancing itself from the Frankenstein-like products where the stitches are all too obvious. In the process of reimagining traditional songs and other musical artifacts from the entire *catalogue of contemporary civilisation* (Oraić Tolić 1996: 101–102), Jovana Backović erases historical, geographical, cultural and political boundaries and achieves new syntheses; these artifacts act as *signifiers* of their earlier contexts. By using the remnants of the distant times and places, she creates a new musical land, *Mysterion*, that awaits the listener somewhere down the imaginary *Eastern Road*.

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**BALKAN FOLKTRONICA БЕНДА АРХАИ:  
СРПСКА ЕТНО МУЗИКА  
ПРЕОСМИШЉЕНА ЗА БРИТАНСКО ТРЖИШТЕ**

(Резиме)

Архаи је *живојини њројекати* српске композиторке Јоване Бацковић (рођене 1980. године). Истоимени бенд је основала 1998. године у Београду, вођена жељом да изводи традиционалну музику у савременим аранжманима. У својој првој, београдској 'инкарнацији', бенд је окупио десет музичара, претходно активних у доменима традиционалне, класичне, џез и рок музике. Године 2008. Јована Бацковић је уписала докторске студије из електронске музике на Универзитету Источне Енглеске (University of East Anglia) у граду Норвичу (Norwich) и преселила се у Велику Британију. У Норвичу је упознала гитаристу Адријана Ливера (Adrian Lever), са којим је реактивирала Архаи; ова друга, *британска* инкарнација бенда је ускоро наставила делатност у престоници Уједињеног Краљевства, Лондону.

Централна теза мог текста јесте да је бенд Архаи, у Србији посматран као део локалне етно сцене, веома популарне од краја деведесетих година XX века до данас, преласком у Велику Британију постао део глобалне *world music* сцене и своју делатност прилагодио новим тржишним условима, као и новој публици.

У тексту најпре разматрам бројне недоумице око одређења појмова *етно музика* и *world music*, како у српским тако и у глобалним оквирима. Указујем

на проблематичност ових термина (који су првенствено настали као комерцијално-маркетиншке одреднице, а затим прерасли у сложене културолошке конструкте) и на бројне тачке преклапања између њих. Увидом у опсежну литературу закључујем да српски етномузиколози и теоретичари културе имају различита и често опречна мишљења о саодносу ових феномена, те да не постоји консензус око критеријума за жанровско разграничавање, као ни око тога који се извођачи могу сврстати у један или други табор. Заступам тезу да при покушају разграничења не смемо узети у обзир само музичке карактеристике ових жанрова, већ да се мора сагледати целокупан културни контекст, као и функција коју поједини музички жанрови задобијају у њему.

Након теоријских разматрања, анализирам два досад објављена албума групе Архаи, *Mysterion* (2006, ПГП РТС, Београд) и *Eastern Roads* (2013, Лондон). Разматрам бројне разлике између ових издања, које се огледају у инструментаријуму, аранжманима, географској ширини захвата у фолклорни материјал, односу према *имагинарном Оријенту* и, уопште, начинима на које је традиција посредована и реинтерпретирана у другачијим тржишним условима. Ипак, уочавам и изванредан континуитет између два издања, оличен како у препознатљивом гласу Јоване Бацковић, тако и у чињеници да је, у обе своје *инкарнације*, српској и британској, бенд Архаи представио хибрид „ауентичних” (мада комодификованих) фолклорних музичких пракси са простора *имагинарног Балкана* (и изван њега) и других, већ по себи хибридних стилова, као што су *Latin jazz*, *fusion jazz (jazz rock)*, *worldbeat*, *art rock*, *synth pop*, *trip hop* и други. Јована Бацковић проналази извесне заједничке деноминаторе за све ове, наизглед разнородне музичке правце (на пример: константно варирање као основни обликоворни принцип; примену остинатних фигура и мелодичких модела – *рифова*; педалне, *бордунске* хармоније и текстуре; пентатонске и друге модалне системе; избегавање решења типичних за западноевропску класичну хармонију и сл.) и на тај начин остварује убедљиву и кохерентну синтезу.

Submitted May 7, 2014.

Accepted for publication June 20, 2014.

Original scientific paper