

The variabilities of a specific Gorj county song. Comparative analysis of two versions

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Abstract: *Traditional music is characterized by: oral transmission, collective specificity, syncretic substrate, anonymous source, etc. These elements generate another phenomenon specific to this music, namely: the transformations that a traditional song can undergo when it leaves an area, a region even a performer and is “replanted” in another area / region or it is reinterpreted by another person. This scientific study monitors this transformation through the comparative analysis of a song from the Oltenia region, Gorj County, sung by two of the most famous voices of traditional music and folklore in Romania: Maria Lătăreţu and Maria Tănase. Following the analysis, conclusions are specified, regarding the differences in the underlying structure, melodic structure, rhythmic structure, etc.*

Key-words: *Traditional music, transformations, folklore.*

1. Introduction

The analysed song is, according to ethno-musicologist Harry Brauner, the most widespread “Sârbă” (Serbian-inspired song) in Gorj and is entitled “Lung e drumul Gorjului” (“Long is the road to Gorj”). The first version belongs to Maria Lătăreţu. It was recorded together with the folklore band of her husband, Mihai (called Tică) Lătăreţu, in 1937 at Columbia Records, under the artistic supervision of the Folklore Archive of the Society of Romanian Composers of that period, having the catalogue no. DR 166. The recording can be accessed on the website of the Museum of Ethnography in Geneva, Brăiloiu Collection.¹ The same song was recorded in 1938, with the help of ethnomusicologists Constantin Brăiloiu and Harry Brauner, about a year later by Maria Tănase, at the same Record company (Columbia), being recorded with the catalogue no. DR 266.

Called “The Nightingale of Gorj”, Maria Lătăreţu is one of the emblematic voices of traditional Romanian music. Born in 1911 in the village of Bălceşti, Gorj

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county, in a family of poor peasants she began to sing from the early age of 12. Over the next 4 years she becomes the main voice of the taraf led by Mihai, called Tică, Lătărețu, with whom she marries in 1928. The discographic debut of Maria Lătărețu started in 1937 when, during the field research of the team coordinated by the ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu, she was discovered and invited to record her songs in Bucharest. Maria's repertoire consisted of more than 1000 songs, of which more than 100 were her own compositions. Some of her best known songs included: "Come on, come on, with longing and moon", "Why don't you get married, Gheorghiuța?", "What's the beautiful path", "Three in the world can't", "Last night at the chindie", "Moon, moon, take good", "Nun, don't give me", "Murgule, beautiful mane", and, of course, "Long is the road to Gorj". Maria's voice transcended the national borders, so that the composer Aram Hachaturian, seeing in Russia a poster with Maria Lătărețu in which it wrote "This evening Maria Lătărețu sings", said "It should have been written - Tonight sings The queen of the Romanian song".

Another important voice of Romanian folklore is Maria Tănase. Born in Bucharest in 1913, nicknamed by Nicolae Iorga, "The Master Bird" and "Edith Piaf of Romania". The artistic spirit was inherited from his father, Ion Tănase, who was a talented caval player and who liked to go to performances of popular music, operetta and opera. In May 1934 she joined the "Cărăbuș" Theatre, run by Constantin Tănase, and was cast in a vocal group in the show Cărăbuș-Express, led by N. Kirițescu, where she made her debut on June 2, the same year. Here she was discovered by the folklorist Harry Brauner, who anticipated her immense talent and carefully prepared her launch. In the autumn of 1934 she is presented to Constantin Brăiloiu, who recognizes his great talent and who suggests that he draw inspiration, for the repertoire, from the Folklore Archive that he had established. Composer Theodor Rogalski, listening to Maria Tanase's songs, commented "We are facing a phenomenon!" and Constantin Notarra said, "When she sang, it was as if a cello with the silk streaks was crying". On April 16, 1939, she represents Romania, together with the panflute player Fănică Luca and Grigoraș Dinicu's orchestra, at the "Universal Exhibition" in New York – where George Enescu, Dimitrie Gusti and Constantin Brâncuși were also present, and where she performs both at the "Romanian House" – the Romanian pavilion in the exhibition and, in private, in front of the former American president, Herbert Hoover, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as well as other personalities such as the famous Yehudi Menuhin or André Gide. Among the most well-known songs in Maria Tanase's repertoire are: "Who loves and leaves", "I have sworn a thousand times", "With no purpose I go home", "When it is my death" and "Long is the road of Gorj".

2. Material and methods

For the analysis of these two variants of the same song it is necessary their fragmentation into constituents and their comparative observation from several points of view. The basic structural element in which the two variants are divided is the melodic line, the equivalent of a popular verse sung, as follows:

The first melodic lineⁱⁱ

RM = Melodic line *M.L. = Maria Lătărețu
 *M.T. = Maria Tănase
 *Λ = vibrating

Verse translation: Green leaf of the broad bean/ Green leaf of the broad bean bu - lui - i - i

Below (figure 1)ⁱⁱⁱ are specified the underlying structures of the two melodic lines above and table 1 contains the number of sounds that are asserted (s.a.), ornamented (o.) and the percentage of ornamentation (p.o.), as follows:ⁱⁱⁱ

Fig. 1

	No. s.a.	o. ^{iv}	P.o. ≅
M.L.	12	9	75%
M.T.	9	2	22%

Table 1

≅ approximately equal

The underlying structures of the two melodic lines differ significantly. Maria Lătărețu's version has a hemitonic pentatonic structure and the melodic line from Maria Tănase's interpretation has a tricordic construction. The degree of melismas (vocal runs) is another element that has differences, as shown in Table 1 above. The melodic profile of the two melodic lines highlights different interpretive approaches. Maria Lătărețu's preference for glissando vocal runs is obvious. This can be seen in measures 4 and 5 of the above mentioned melodic line. Maria Tănase's interpretation of the first verse is relatively static by comparison with Maria Lătărețu's version. The musical exposition of the latter's text denotes a significantly higher degree of interpretive flexibility, being similar to a small musical

improvisation. In the case of Maria Tănase, the musical discourse is quite poor in terms of ornamentation, ambitus and musical-literary development.

The second melodic line

M.L.
RM 2 Lung e dru - mu-u - u - ul ao-o-o - o - o - o-o - o Gor - ju - lu - i - i

M.T.
RM 2 Foa - ie ver - de-a - a - a - a bo - bu - lui - i - i

Verse translation: Long is the road to Gorj / Green leaf of the broad bean

Below is the underlying structure (figure 2) of this melodic line next to table 2 which contains the number of asserted notes, ornaments and the percentage of ornamentation.

Fig. 2

	No. s.a.	o.	P.o. ≡
M.L.	14	11	78,5%
M.T.	9	2	22%

Table 2

From the point of view of the underlying structure, the two melodic lines do not show changes. One of the differences appears in the text, which is not identical in both interpretations. Maria Lătreșu repeats the text of the first melodic line and Maria Tănase uses a new verse. As it results from table 2 above, Maria Tănase's version does not indicate any change, while Maria Lătreșu's version proves an amplification of the number of asserted sounds and ornaments. As a consequence, the percentage of ornamentation is higher. All these figures indicate, again, a certain flexibility of the discourse in the musical part, in the case of Maria Lătreșu, and a non-evolutionary path, in the interpretation of Maria Tănase, at least up to this point of the analysis.

The third melodic line, the underlying structure of it (fig. 3) and table 3 containing the information regarding the number of asserted sounds, ornaments and the percentage of ornamentation:

Fig. 3

	No. s.a.	o.	P.o. ≡
M.L.	8	3	37,5%
M.T.	9	3	33%

Table 3

This melodic line does not show significant differences in the underlying structure. In both interpretations this is a hemitonic tetratonic structure. Regarding the number of asserted sounds and ornaments, there are also no relevant differences.

The fourth melodic line:

Translated verse: *But the longing road is even longer / But the longing road is even longer /*

Below it is extracted the underlying structure and the number of stated sounds, ornaments and the percentage of ornamentation are included in table 4:



Fig. 4

	No. s.a.	o.	P.o. ≅
M.L.	9	4	44,4%
M.T.	4	4	57%

Table 4

Melodic line 4 is a slightly modified version of the previous melodic line (melodic line 3). The underlying structure is not the same as the previous melodic line. In the case of Maria Lătărețu's versions, the structure undergoes an amplification by modifying the "do" sound, which becomes a moving step. The underlying structure of the melodic line of Maria Tănase's variant is diminished. Previously (melodic line 3) it had a tetratonic structure and at the moment of repetition (melodic line 4) it becomes tritonic. This phenomenon of amplification and diminution of the underlying structure, at least in the case of melodic lines 3 and 4, indicates a musical discourse prone to a slight form of variation or even improvisation in the case of Maria Lătărețu's version and solidification in the case of Maria Tănase. These musical phenomena of amplification and diminution of the musical material are present, to a relatively lesser extent, in Table 4 by the number of asserted sounds and ornaments. The number of asserted sounds of Maria Lătărețu's melodic line increases. So is the number of ornaments and the percentage of ornamentation. Also the melodic line in the case of Maria Tănase's version contains several ornaments but the totality of the asserted sounds is diminished. The percentage of ornaments in the case of Maria Tănase's version, unlike the previous melodic lines, is superior to Maria Lătărețu's interpretation. This situation may be a singular case, an exception, which will be clarified in the conclusions at the end of this comparative analysis.

The fifth melodic line:

Translated verse: To Gorj you may go and come / To Gorj you may go and come

Below are included in figure 5 the underlying structures of the two melodic lines above and in table 5 we find the number of asserted sounds, the ornaments and the percentage of ornamentation.



Fig. 5

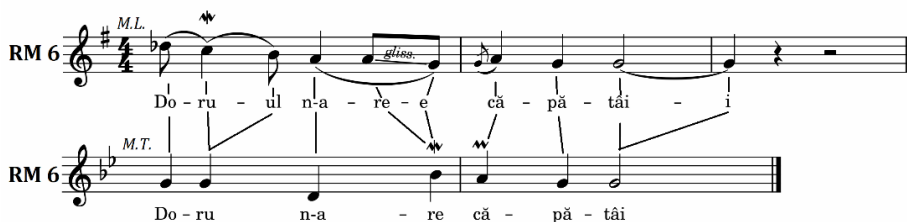
	No. s.a.	o.	P.o. ≅
M.L.	10	4	40%
M.T.	12	6	50%

Table 5

Figure 5 above shows a significant amplification of the underlying structure of the melodic line in Maria Tănase's interpretation. The structure represents a hemitonic hexachord structure in state V with a quasi-mobile step (do^2). In the case of Maria Lătărețu's variant, the underlying structure does not show any relevant change. It even has a decreasing tendency by eliminating the mobility of the do^2 sound. It becomes a stable step. From this point of view, that of the underlying structures, by comparison with the previous melodic lines, Maria Lătărețu's version has a certain structural solidification (by transforming the "do" sound from mobile to stable step) and Maria Tănase's interpretation has improvisational tendencies (by amplifying the number of component sounds of the underlying structure). From the observation of the number of asserted sounds, ornaments and the percentage of ornamentation, inserted in table 5 above, a quantitative amplification of those can be observed, especially in the case of Maria Tănase's version, and a decrease, in both interpretations, of the percentage of ornamentation.

The sixth and last melodic line:

Translated verse: *But the longing has no end. / But the longing has no end.*



Next, the underlying structure is extracted (figure 6) and the number of asserted sounds and ornaments together with the percentage of ornamentation are specified in table 6:



Fig. 6

	No. s.a	o.	P.o. ≈
M.L.	8	3	37,5%
M.T.	7	2	28,57%

Table 6

The underlying structures of the two melodic lines are different. In the case of Maria Lătărețu's version, the construction of the musical discourse is based on a hemitonic pentachord structure and in the case of Maria Tănase's variant, the structure is of the hemitonic tetratonic type. By comparison with the underlying structures of the previous melodic lines, in the case of Maria Lătărețu, it is amplified, and in the variant of Maria Tănase the structure is diminished. The same changes are found in table 6 by the percentage of ornamentation, which is increased in the interpretation of Maria Lătărețu and decreased in the version of Maria Tănase.

3. Conclusions

Following the comparative analysis of the subsections of the song "Lung e drumul Gorjului" ("Long is the road to Gorj"), exposed in the two variants of the performers Maria Lătărețu and Maria Tănase, the global conclusions are drawn. The first conclusions are about the overall structure of the analysed song. The song, in both versions, is composed of six melodic lines but many are variants of other melodic lines. In other words, the overall structure of the analysed song can be summarized in a number of two or three melodic lines.

In the figure below (figure 7) all the underlying structures of the constituent melodic lines of the song are selected and positioned, partially synoptically:



Fig. 7

It can be noticed, from the partially synoptic comparison above, in the version of Maria Tanase, a decrease of the component sounds of the underlying structures. They contain an average of 3.8 sounds and in the case of Maria Lătărețu's version the structures contain an average of 4.5 sounds. There is only one situation in which the underlying structure of Maria Tănase's interpretation is composed of several elements compared to that of Maria Lătărețu, namely melodic line 5 (RM 5). As a conclusion, the song "Lung e drumul Gorjului" ("Long is the road to Gorj") suffers in Maria Tănase's interpretation a quantitative diminution of the component sounds of the underlying structures of the melodic lines.

The next item to be compared is the number of asserted sounds, ornaments and ornamentation percentages of the song. All this information is inserted in the following table 7.

	RM 1 ^v	RM 2	RM 3	RM 4	RM 5	RM 6	TOTAL
M.L	12, 9, 75%	14, 11, 78,5%	8, 3, 37,5%	9, 4, 44,4%	10, 4, 40%	8, 3, 37,5%	61, 34, 55,74 %
M.T.	9, 2, 22%	9, 2, 22%	9, 3, 33%	7, 4, 57%	12, 6, 50%	7, 2, 28,57%	53, 19, 35,85 %

Table 7

According to the numerical information in the table above, it can be noticed that Maria Tănase's interpretation uses a reduced number of melismas compared to Maria Lătărețu's version. Another significant difference is the part where most ornaments are used. In the case of Maria Lătărețu, they are found in the first two melodic lines. In Maria Tănase's version, the first two melodic lines are the poorest parts in terms of the content of ornaments. From these percentages it can be observed Maria Lătărețu's preference for the abundant melismas use at the beginning of the song and a diminution towards the end. Instead, Maria Tănase's version suggests a beginning of the song with a poor content in ornaments but it is gradually enriched towards its middle area and afterwards it is diminished again.

At the end of this comparative analysis I can conclude that the Gorj Serbian-inspired song, "Lung e drumul Gorjului" ("Long is the road to Gorj"), recorded in 1937 by the singer Maria Lătărețu and afterwards in 1938 by Maria Tănase, suffered in the second version a decrease in musical content manifested at the level the underlying structures, the number of asserted sounds and ornaments. Such changes / diminutions may also be present at the rhythmic, aesthetic-stylistic, poetic level, etc. but this is a future topic for another possible comparative analysis.

Below are partially inserted synoptically the melodic lines of the two versions of the song "Lung e drumul Gorjului" ("Long is the road to Gorj"):

*** RM – melodic line**

*RM = Rând melodic *M.L. = Maria Lătărețu
 *M.T. = Maria Tănase
 *Λ = sunet vibrat

RM 1 (M.L.) $\text{♩} \approx 192$
 Foa - ie ver - de - a - a - a - a a - o - o - o - o - o - o - o bo - bu - lui - i - i - i

RM 1 (M.T.) $\text{♩} \approx 208$
 Foa - ie ver - de - a - a - a - a bo - bu - lui - i - i - i

RM 2 (M.L.)
 Lung e dru - mu - u - ul a - o - o - o - o - o - o - o Gor - ju - lu - i - i - i

RM 2 (M.T.)
 Foa - ie ver - de - a - a - a - a bo - bu - lui - i - i - i

RM 3 (M.L.)
 Lung e dru - mu - ul Gor - ju - lui - i

RM 3 (M.T.)
 Lung îi dru - mu - ul Ger - ju - u - lui

RM 4 (M.L.)
 Dă - i măi lung a - a - a - i do - ru - lui

RM 4 (M.T.)
 Dar mai lung e - al do - ru - lui

RM 5 (M.L.)
 Do - lu Gorj te duci și vi - i - i - i - i - i

RM 5 (M.T.)
 Că - la - a Gori te duci și vi - i - i - i - i - i

RM 6 (M.L.)
 Do - ru - ul n - a - re - c i - i - i - i - i - i

RM 6 (M.T.)
 Do - ru n - a - re că - pă - tăi

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[ⁱ] https://www.ville-ge.ch/meg/musinfo_public_ph.php?id=HR22-1/1, "Lung e drumul Gorjului" ("Long is the road to Gorj"), the version of Maria Lătărețu together with the folklore band of her husband, Mihai (called Tică) Lătărețu .

[ⁱⁱ] I mention that on the record, Maria Tănase's song is structured in a popular way with the tonic on the fa sound. For an efficient comparative analysis, we transposed in notation the song with the tonic of the mode on the so sound, the same as Maria Lătărețu's version.

[ⁱⁱⁱ] The sound in the frame is the tonic of the mode.

[^{iv}] Appoggiaturas, mordants, trills are considered ornaments. Even the glissando technique is considered an ornament.

[^v] The first digit is the number of asserted sounds of the concerned melodic line, the second digit is the number of ornaments and the last digit is the approximate percentage of ornamentation.