

Producing Oriental: A Perspective on Bulgarian Popular Music

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Bulgaria has recently experienced a real boom in neo-traditional popular music. The music in question has several local names and consists of various regional and pan-Balkan styles and style mixtures (cf. Dimov 1995). In the following, for the sake of simplicity, it will be called either folkpop or ethnopop. The terms are overlapping and often used as synonyms. However, ethnopop has a special connotation: it refers primarily to the popular music of ethnic minorities like gypsies. The reason is the convention according to which majority cultures are usually not called ethnic.¹ The masses of majority citizens are usually termed folk or, in the Balkans, *narodna*, whereas minority people are ethnic. When using the same logic, folk becomes ethnic, and vice versa at the very moment when the context changes: Turks are folk in Turkey, but ethnic in Bulgaria; Bulgarians are folk in Bulgaria, but ethnic in the USA; Finns are folk in Finland, but ethnic in Sweden; there are also cultures that are ethnic everywhere, for instance Gypsies, Lapps, and Kurds.

During the last two, three years, Bulgarian folkpop has started to sound more and more 'ethnic'. Quite often a new hit song is influenced by oriental features which come typically from Gypsy tradition or Turkish folkpop called *arabesk*. Like arabesk in Turkey, Bulgarian folkpop is often regarded as nationally inauthentic and *kitsch* by local music experts and authorities. For many of them, folkpop and Gypsy ethnopop are really a symbol of cultural decay and bad taste (cf. Stokes 1992; Buchanan 1996; Kurkela forthcoming).

My point of view is, however, quite opposite. For me new folkpop is an important marker of cultural dynamics in Bulgaria. In my opinion 'the lower musical arts' have their own aesthetics, consisting of rules and conventions related to acceptable musical style, but also of ideological and mythical visions about music and the world. In Bulgarian folkpop music, so-called oriental sound and orientalism seems to be an important part of aesthetic thinking. In the following I shall analyse how the oriental sound is practically produced, what kind of mythical stereotypes lie behind oriental hits and what the reason may be for the popularity of neo-Orientalism in Bulgaria.

Of course, 'oriental sound' and 'oriental style' are inaccurate and obscure concepts, and therefore some kind of operational definition must be made. In this paper oriental means two different things. First, it refers to certain mythical images of Orient, which can be found in lyrics and videoclips of Bulgarian folkpop. Second, it refers to so-called belly-dance rhythm which can be found in many folkpop recordings. This rhythmic pattern has an exceptionally direct connotation to the East, to Turkish and pan-Arabian dance music. In this preliminary study I have excluded other musical elements from the analysis. The research material consists of 12 oriental videocassettes and some 50 audiocassettes on sale in Bulgaria during the last three years.²

¹ Maybe this holds true only in Europe; in the American multiethnic nation-states, for instance, all people are more or less minorities, thus ethnic.

² The videos and the referred audiocassettes are listed in the end of the paper.

1. Backgrounds: Monoethnic Nationalism and Yugoslav *pop-narodna*

It may actually sound absurd to speak about the appearance of oriental music and Orientalism in the Balkans. Maybe a more suitable term would be oriental revival. Due to its Ottoman past and geographical position, the Balkans itself is, in many respects, oriental. Local folk cultures are at least semi-oriental, and there have also been oriental features in dance music for hundreds of years, as students of Gypsy music very well know. But still, when speaking about recorded music and when comparing Bulgarian music media to that of former Yugoslavia or Greece, the public representation of modern oriental popmusic was postponed in Bulgaria for at least 10 years and even more. The main reason was political.

Due to strict monoethnic cultural policy stressing authentic, national Bulgarian music, orientalism had no access to Bulgarian folkpop recordings before the 1990s. In the mid-1980s, authorities banned the performance and consumption of ethnic and foreign music with oriental features. Gipsy, Turkish, Greek, and Serbian musics were publicly declared *musica non grata* in Bulgaria. Turkish music especially was proscribed, as well as the public performances of the *zurla* (Turkish oboe) and, of course, *kyuchek* belly-dance. Until the end of the Communist regime in 1989, those who were found listening to Turkish radio or music cassettes were subject to fines or imprisonment as well as confiscation of the radio or cassette players. The situation was not easy even for *svatbarski* (wedding) musicians, whose traditional repertoire typically consisted of many dances of oriental origin. They played mainly at private weddings and thus were at least partly beyond government control. Nonetheless, playing oriental was not always a trifling matter. The most famous *svatbarski* virtuoso, Ivo Papazov, told the American press how he and his entire band were arrested while playing for a wedding in 1987. They were charged with hooliganism, but the real reason for the arrest was the fact that they had played Gypsy *chalga* music by request. (Buchanan 1996:209-11.)

Such a heavy sanction system against music is unique, nor was it usual even in the Communist world. As most of us may know today, on the background there was a brutal campaign of ethnic assimilation started in 1984 by Todor Zhivkov's Communist government. According to the new policy, practices and symbols of Muslim and Turkish culture were banned and citizens bearing Muslim names were forced to change them to official Bulgarian alternatives. These measures led to hunger strikes, demonstrations, violent repression and finally to the mass exodus of ethnic Turks to Turkey in 1989. (Poulton 1991:105ff.)

Although there is hardly any excuse for these measures, one must still admit that Zhivkov's policy was by no means unusual in the Balkans. For instance, in the first half of this century the Greek governments applied very similar methods when assimilating ethnic minorities living in the part of Macedonia annexed to Greece after the Balkan wars. Without saying anything about recent Yugoslav experiences, one can only state that in all the Balkan nation-states in this century, a hard-core minority policy has been the rule. (Ibid.)

Music is, however, a rather insidious and peculiar ideological opponent, which can circumvent even the most effective sanction systems. Thus during the old regime, the officially banned foreign features already spread to the Bulgarian popular music scene. This all happened quite unnoticed and indirectly. This roundabout way of change was due to popular music from the western and southern Balkans, and, as already stated, due to Gypsy musicians in the service of the Bulgarian wedding tradition. Likely the most influential factor, from the perspective of the music media, was Yugoslav popular music based on local folk traditions. This music is called *novokomponovana narodna muzika* or *pop-narodna* (cf. Manuel 1988:138). By the 1980s, oriental features were a natural part of Yugoslav folkpop, especially in the Macedonian recordings. Very soon, due to effective pirate production, *pop-narodna* cassettes were also circulated to Bulgaria. According to some piracy business insiders, during the last years of the Communist order, Serbian *pop-narodna* sold many tens of times better than western rock music (cf. Dimov 1995:15-16). This fact cannot be underestimated, when finding the reasons of the present folkpop boom in Bulgaria.

It is not easy to estimate the impact of Yugoslavian *pop-narodna* on Bulgarian folkpop. However, at least the following two aspects of today's folkpop style can be traced back to its Yugoslav equivalent:

Combination of western popmusic with local folksongs and dances

Actually this kind of combination can be traced to Central Europe, where so-called *volkstümlicher Schlager* (folksy popsong) has been very popular for several decades. On the other hand, in northern and western Europe, the combination is nearly unknown — folk is folk and pop is pop, and they also have quite different audiences.

Overall orchestral sound

Due to abundant use of electronic instruments, the sound of Bulgarian folkpop orchestras differs from that of older dance bands, where the accordion, the clarinet, other winds and even the *gaida* bagpipe dominate. It was Yugoslav *pop-narodna* that most likely served as a model for this change towards a 'synthi-pop' sound.

2. Producing Oriental

New oriental folkpop reflects many mythical images of Orientalism that have dominated western thought for several centuries. At a very general level, orientalist ideology stresses the superiority of western culture and the backwardness and cultural decay of the Orient (cf. Said 1995:6-7). But there are also more positive images of the Orient, especially in popular culture. In the westerner's imagination the East refers to adventures and journeys but also to pleasant inactivity, to dangerous bandits but also to paradise-like living: marvellous foods and drinks, soft divans, friendly servants, eternal happiness. Still more visual stereotypes are, for instance, veiled harem women, turbaned sheikhs, camel caravans and minaret silhouettes. A popular image with a special mythic potency seems to be so-called oriental dance or belly dance. It has several entertaining connotations like ecstatic dance fever, dangerous half-naked women, hash smoking and other exciting vices of the sultan's palaces and their modern equivalents, oriental night-clubs.

It is by no means wonder that Orientalism has been a firm part of the transnational entertainment industry, nearly from its beginning. Most of us may know the movie “Sheikh” featuring Rudolph Valentino (1921) or “Lawrence of Arabia” by David Lean (1962), and I think that ever since harem and sheikh motifs have been widely utilised by the film industry in many western countries. (cf. Michalek 1989; Phillips 1992).

It is important to remember that the film industry not only utilised old oriental myths but had also a prominent role in the development of modern oriental popular music in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries. In the 1930s, in the wake of local music films, new pan-Arabic popular music was born, which also influenced Turkish and southern Balkan music cultures. During the post-war years, a similar development occurred in India, where pan-Indian film music evolved. One result of these long processes of modernisation and westernisation of oriental music was Turkish arabesk, which is today an important background factor in the development of Bulgarian oriental folkpop. (Stokes 1992:92-4; Manuel 1993:37-55).

In the western world, from the 1930s onwards, the film industry brought out several local musical styles, especially from Latin America, which soon became an important part of transnational popular music. However, it was not film music but the restaurant industry that made oriental dance famous in America. During the 1960s and 1970s, Arab-American musicians and those from other Eastern Mediterranean immigrant communities adapted the emblems and symbols of the Orient and popularised a new style rooted in their own indigenous traditions. This neo-oriental fusion style with belly-dance show became a trademark of many "Middle Eastern Nightclubs" on the American East Coast. The new style anticipated the later development of Balkan oriental popular music: traditional instruments were electrified or replaced with electric guitars, organs and synthesisers, and the rhythmic section were expanded and rhythmic elements exaggerated. Furthermore, traditional belly-dance rhythms were mixed with Latin rhythms, the jazz syncopation, the dotted accompaniment of early rock and roll, and the straight-ahead march style of military music. (Rasmussen 1992:70-1.)

3. Oriental Features in Bulgarian Folkpop Hits: Two Mainstreams

Today, oriental hits in Bulgaria — and probably throughout the Balkans — can be divided into two mainstreams or main idioms. When using Bulgarian terms, the first mainstream is so-called *chalga* played by urban Gypsy musicians, in which the most well-known genre is belly-dance, *kyuchek*. It is Gypsy dance music that has most speedily transported new eastern influences to local folkpop, and across the national borders. Accordingly, many Gypsy belly-dance hits have become well-known all over the Balkans; they are real pan-Balkan dance music, today's folklore. Due to their close contacts with and interest in the East, Gypsy musicians are real agents of change towards oriental style. Musical borrowings from Turkish *arabesk* and Indian film music — rhythms, melodies, sounds — have been imported to the Balkans mainly by the musicians of Gypsy origin. (cf. Pettan 1996:39-41; Pejceva 1996:33-5)

Gypsy ethnopop can also be defined as a carrier of traditional oriental music in the Balkans. This by no means excludes the fact that Gypsy musicians are also very skillful in utilising the oriental stereotypes and myths which will be discussed and analysed below.

As a subject for this paper, however, there is another mainstream which is at least equally interesting: new Bulgarian folkpop without Gypsy connotations. Its roots are primarily in the village and town folklore of ethnic Bulgarians. In this decade Bulgarian folkpop has been increasingly influenced by local popular styles of all the neighbouring countries and, of course, by western pop. During the last two years, however, oriental beat has also found its way to this music. Oriental rhythms can be found in the new songs of several Bulgarian pop artists, whose earlier production is exclusively a mixture of western popsounds and local and regional melodies. Even the national megastar Sashka Vaseva, famous for her Pirin-Macedonian popsongs, has released some new recordings with a mild belly-dance tinge.

Dance rhythm seems to be the most important factor which binds Balkan popular music to Orientalism. Maybe the most striking reference to the East is so-called belly dance rhythm, a quite simple rhythmic pattern in double meter, with a binary system of pitches called *düm* (lower sound) and *tek* (higher) (Ex. 1). This rhythm is well-known and widely used in all southern and eastern Mediterranean dance music. In *arabesk* tradition it is called *mefkuf*, *arap* or *çifte*, depending on the tempo (Stokes 1992:194). In Bulgaria the rhythm is known as one of the *kyuchek* rhythms, and in folkpop it is usually played more simply or mixed with western disco, rock or Latin rhythmic patterns (Ex. 2) Nevertheless, the reference to the East is still perceptible.

Actually, it would be good to analyse more closely what a belly-dance rhythm is about. What are the main elements of oriental swing, which sets our hips swing? I have found the following four basic preconditions:

Simple rolling rhythm in double meter

- A simple rhythmic pattern guarantees that *kyuchek* can be danced by anyone. Unlike *svatbarski* music and older Bulgarian folk music, in folkpop hits no additive rhythms are normally played. There is, however, one exception: some 9/8 rhythms (e.g. 2+2+2+3) are used quite frequently.

Syncopated second beat

- This very rhythmic feature is a clue to belly-dance rhythm. Since deviating from the basic pulse, it is this accent that makes the hips swing.

Stress on the fourth beat

- The accent on the fourth is typical of modern versions of the *kyuchek* rhythm (Ex. 2). It is also a factor which makes the belly-dance rhythm akin to many Afro-Latin rhythmic patterns. This compatibility explains the ease of combining *kyuchek* with several popular rhythms typical of western dance music. (Ex. 3.)

High-pitched hand-drum sound, ad.lib.

- Unlike Turkish *arabesk* or pan-Arabic dance music, the *darabuka* goblet drum is usually not used in Bulgarian folkpop and ethnopop. However, the *darabuka* sound belongs to the style, and it is produced with the aid of a synthesiser or (electric) *timbales* or other high-pitched drums typical of Afro-Latin

music. The hand drum sound is usually used for rhythmic embellishment, not for basic accompaniment, which is produced by a western drum set.

Abundant, even irritatingly excessive use of electronic instruments in Bulgarian folkpop is no doubt a marker of modernisation. But there are also some economic reasons for the synthesiser boom. When asking Bulgarian musicians about the absence of the *darbuka*, a typical answer is that today, because of bad economic conditions, dance musicians have no money to buy original instruments needed for producing oriental sound. I think, however, there is another economic reason that is even more important: With the aid of synthesisers one or two musicians can manage to produce a whole orchestral sound. As a result, several one-man or two-men bands can be found in Bulgarian folkpop at the moment.

There are, of course, many other eastern features in new folkpop. The most important elements are instrumental and vocal sound and certain modalities as well as melodic formulas. For instance, when playing oriental, Bulgarian clarinet players usually prefer nasal and harsh intonation, which makes their playing imitating the *zurla*, oboe-like wind instrument with abundant connotations of eastern music. The modalities used contain typically added seconds and semitones, which are, from the viewpoint of the western tonal thinking, “in the wrong place” and which can often be traced back to the Turkish *makam* system.

All this refers to the fact that in the Balkans belly-dance rhythm and some other oriental features related to it have risen to a level of transnational superstyles. Other superstyles are, just to name the most common, disco, techno, medium beat, rock and Latin. These styles are, indeed, “the lowest common denominators for the biggest possible market”, as Krister Malm somewhat critically puts it (1993:343). The transcultural styles can usually be discerned and defined according to general sound ideals and a rhythmic pattern. Today they are one of the most important means in global popular music production. They help to recycle old hits, or to put it more precisely, to produce several cover versions. In western Europe this method was very popular in the 1970s and 1980s, when many swing, tango, and folk evergreens were reproduced as so-called rock or pop versions, which usually referred to replacing the original accompaniment with medium beat rhythm and modern disco-rock sound. Not only covers, but large also numbers of new hits, akin to new cover versions, were simultaneously released. Needless to say, many Bulgarian folkpop and, of course, Serbian *pop-narodna* hits are stylistically near to this international light music.

Unlike Gypsy *chalga*, Bulgarian folkpop Orientalism is not directly based on a certain tradition. As in transnational popmusic in general, only some elements referring to oriental music are borrowed by the folkpop arrangers, in order to bring some exotic colour to the mainstream style. Simultaneously, oriental features are mixed effectively with other stereotyped elements and images popular in local dance music.

Furthermore, due to this total fusion, even oriental rhythms are no more original but reinterpreted and changed in various ways. This is not unique in the history of popular music, actually, it is rather a rule than an exception. For instance, a diffusion of Afro-Latin music to Europe followed along the same lines. During the post-war years, Brazilian samba, Cuban cha-cha and many other dances were introduced to European musicians and audiences, who, nevertheless, were not able to understand the original Afro-

Latin rhythms behind the novelty dances. As a result, several local versions were born, the Brazilian samba march became the Finnish march-samba, the Cuban cha-cha became the German beguine, and so on. (cf. Kurkela & Pennanen 1996.)

4. Oriental Myths and Stereotypes

The observations concerning belly-dance rhythm are no doubt interesting from the viewpoint of music analysis, and I hope I can continue presenting them in more detail some other time. Nevertheless, they tell little about the actual way of using and receiving the music media in today's Bulgaria. When speaking about reception, it is primarily important to analyse different images of Orientalism in Bulgarian folkpop. A firm point of departure is an argument according to which the narrations and myths behind today's popular culture are fragmentary (cf. Barthes 1985:110-5). They are places to visit, to fall into a short-time ecstasy and then return to everyday life. In global entertainment, Orientalism and oriental culture are likewise no more real, they do not form any narrative entity. On the contrary, the Orient refers to mythical fragments with exotic moments and excitement. Oriental style is thus like remote corners of the world, where well-to-do tourists travel, usually not to get acquainted with local habits and conditions but, above all, to take a rest, experience oblivion, adventure, or ecstasy.

It is interesting to note that the above mentioned boom in oriental music on the American East Coast was based on the very same need: The multicultural urban audiences did not come to the night-clubs to seek original music from the Levant. The main reason for the visit was seeing an exotic show, "an evening in the Orient" with pulsating rhythms and erotic dancing, to remember the last tourist trip to the Middle East or simply to have fun. (Rasmussen 1992:66-7).

Similarly, it is likely that, for Bulgarian folkpop and ethnopop audiences, oriental style does not primarily signify Turkishness or Gypsiness nor does it refer to any other defined cultural entity. Above all oriental style is experienced as exotic, as a foreign Other, which sounds, however, familiar and safe. It is a new exciting musical style, a novelty, which includes enough of the old and previously experienced — popular music may never be too strange and difficult. Oriental style may also act as an effective therapeutic means: A protest channel for counterbalancing the political economic development, which is getting worse and worse.

Oriental hits consist of at least two kinds of mythical images, continuously intermingling. In the following they will be called (1) *classical oriental images* and (2) *modern exoticism*. The former are part of global Orientalism, old and entertaining. Furthermore, they form an interesting mixture of stereotypes recalling Gypsy culture, the Middle East, the Far East and miraculous Sangri-La, the Never-Never-Land of the Orient. The latter reflect the political and cultural situation of today and recent past, thus being more topical, local and often full of references to political stupidities and economic decay. Nevertheless, the images are connected to each other, and it is not difficult to find a modern equivalent for every classic oriental stereotype (Table 1.).

Furthermore, it is not difficult to invent some potential stereotypes that could well match Bulgarian Orientalism, but cannot be found in research material. I call them (3) *cancelled oriental images*. Their absence can be explained by Bulgarian cultural history and especially the problematic relation to the Ottoman past.

In oriental folkpop, the myths related to the Ottoman past seem to be quite exceptional. This music is mainly entertainment, and references to Ottoman culture, Muslim religion and even to modern Turkey are probably too sensitive topics for Bulgarian show business. However, this does not mean that Orientalism connected to the Ottomans is unknown in Bulgarian culture. According to Maria Todorova (cited in Buchanan 1996:216-7), during the Communist regime, the Ottoman past was a very common way of explaining the backwardness of Bulgarian culture. Today, I suppose, Ottomanism is used to explain many cultural and economic characteristics, which could be much better seen as a result of the Communist system: ineffectiveness, regionalism, parochialism, mental indifference, resistance to economic change, lack of western rationalism, etc.

Table 1. Oriental myths and stereotypes in Bulgarian folkpop

<i>Classic oriental images:</i>	<i>Modern exoticism:</i>
1. Erotic belly-dance	Sexist soft-porn
2. Harem women, sheikhs, and sultans	Mafia, macho, <i>menteta</i>
3. Arabian and Indian wonderlands	Western opportunities, money-making
4. Handreaders, miracle workers, snake charmers	Atavism, the sovereign Big Brother
5. Nomadic Gypsies	Sailing, wind surfing, costly hobbies
6. Old cabaret properties	Western fashion clothes
7. Old Bulgarian townscapes	Seascapes, waterfalls
8. Wine drinking and feasting	Whisky drinking
<i>Cancelled oriental images (Ottomanism):</i>	
Landscapes with mosques and minarets	
Praying muslims and veiled pilgrims	
Ottoman culture, fez	
Modern Turk, crescent flag	

1.

The first topic on the list, dance and eroticism, is one of the most popular and, similarly, the most natural type of oriental images. As mentioned before, the common denominator of oriental hits is the so-called *kyuchek* rhythm. This rhythmic pattern is closely related to oriental belly-dance. No wonder if a female dancer can be seen in almost every oriental video. Thanks to scanty costumes and a seductive choreography, belly-dance has nearly always an erotic undertone, which may also be the secret of its success, at least in the Balkans. Nevertheless, it seems to be quite typical of the recent cultural climate in Bulgaria that local cassette producers replace a politically correct eroticism with a sexist soft-porn.³ The trend is well pronounced in cassette covers. A typical cover picture consists of the photo of a singer or an orchestra. From time to time, however, musicians have been replaced with an almost naked girl, dressed in a traditional courtesan costume or otherwise seductively. Mitko Dimitrov, the director of the Payner company, Bulgaria's biggest cassette publisher, explained this convention as follows:

— The question of what the musicians look like is no problem to us. If an artist is not good-looking enough, we use these pin-up girls for our cassette covers (interview 10.9.1996).

2.

Harem women, sheikhs and sultans are an obligatory part of classic Orientalism, nor does it take a long time to find them in Bulgarian oriental hits. In popular narratives, however, these mythical personalities are usually placed to the present time. So, for instance, the sultan in Valentin Valdes' hit song "Harema" is by no means an Ottoman Sultan, but a modern Sultan of Brunei, who tries to seduce a pretty Macedonian girl called 'Sexy-Madonna'. After the girl says 'no' by explaining she is too young and already has a boy-friend, the Sultan promises to pay millions of dollars and a huge amount of oil, if only this "most beautiful lady of Macedonia" consents to his proposal.

The classic heroes of Orientalism have also their modern equivalents, and in Bulgarian folkpop they are the Mafia, macho, and *menteta*. Though most Bulgarians obviously dislike Mafia culture and ever increasing underground economy, the logic of popular culture very easily makes criminal anti-heroes into famous heroes. Accordingly, there are several new popsongs that tell in flattering terms about macho-type businessmen, to whom everything in the world is possible. For instance, one of the 1996 hit songs was "Tigre, tigre" (Tiger, tiger) by the group 'Velite Shisharki', which is a story of illegal business making and the generosity of a Mafia boss. Last autumn the song was alleged to be especially popular among the young macho gentlemen with sun glasses and well-tailored suits hanging around in the bars of Sofia's nuclear centre.

The *menteta* motif is also associated with criminality, but in a more ambiguous way. The word *mente(ta)* means literally a mint, but it has also a more topical connotation: 'a fake' or 'a substitute'. In Bulgaria and elsewhere in the eastern post-Communist countries, one of the side effects of the economic crisis is the money-making with the aid of inferior and fake goods. In market places and kiosks, home-made spirits with original-looking labels are sold; at worst, drinking of the brew may cause a sudden death or

³ This phenomenon is also common in Romanian ethnopop; the concerts of Gypsy oriental music are usually combined with beauty contests, cabaret evenings or strip-tease presentations. Peter Manuel (1993:215-21) has also found in North-Indian popular music a commercial *rasiya* genre, which is full of oozing eroticism. However, the *rasiya* cassette covers introduced by Manuel (p. 231-3) seem to be more politically correct than my own Bulgarian examples.

at least destroy the drinker's sight. Nevertheless, *menteta* can be similarly found when buying canned food, clothes, watches, or recorded music. The *menteta* motif has been presented from many angles in a Gypsy oriental song "Mente, mente" by Kiril Lambov (1995), where the problem of fake arises from a street-vendor level to a political satire: *Menteta* refers not only to *rakiya* (local spirits), but also to policemen and politicians. Eventually the whole Bulgarian political system of today is explained to belong to the same *menteta* category. (Ex. 4.)

3.

As already mentioned, the Orientalism of folkpop seems to neglect the images connected to Ottoman culture and modern Turkey. Instead of these, eastern exoticism in general, from Arabia to India and even to the Far East, is abundantly presented. By the side of these classic images, oriental folkpop favours several modern symbols, especially everything which refers to a western welfare-state: luxury cars and foreign currency. American banknotes are a quite popular topic in cassette covers. A very nice example is the cassette cover of the band "Melodija" (1996). The main idea of the picture is a banknote of one hundred US\$. However, the note has been manipulated, and its right half has been changed to one hundred Bulgarian leva. Could the Bulgarian dream of wealth and welfare be better represented!

The dream of western properties has been ironically interpreted in a song "to Berlin) by Valentin Valdes (1996). The singer is totally fed up with poor economic conditions in Bulgaria and plans to travel to Berlin as a *gigolo*. He knows some elderly ladies in the town, with whom he is able to live a jetset life. At the end of the song our hero finishes his playboy career and marries an aged *Berliner Frau* — for money.

4.

The fourth oriental images on the list, various fortune messengers, recall the strong position of Gypsy exoticism in Bulgarian folkpop. Accordingly, a very typical personality in oriental videos is a Gypsy woman, who reads palms. Snake charmers can also be found, as well as miracle-mongers, who can heal a sick woman with the aid of a melancholy oriental tune, played with the clarinet directly into the patient's ear. All these examples prove that ancient magic rites are continuously powerful, also in modern video culture.

The modern form of miracle making is the myth of the Big Brother that helps weaker citizens in their everyday problems. The Big Brother may be a Mafia boss, as it was the case in the above mentioned hit "Tigre, tigre", but he may also be a party leader, as in the song "Djado Mraz" (Santa Claus) by the same orchestra (1995). The song tells of a benefactor who comes on Christmas Eve with his black Mercedes from the well-known residence of the Bulgarian government on the Vitousha mountain. The singer is sitting at home and eagerly waits for this political Santa Claus hoping to get roasted ham, lots of wine and a new car for Christmas. The message of the song is clear: one has only to sit and wait, the Big Brother will certainly help. My critical friends in Sofia pointed out that this kind of paternalist mentality was very typical of communist times. The citizens were somewhat apathetically used to wait for the Party decisions. As Katherine Verdery (1996:25) put it, the Communist Party "acted like a father who gives handouts to the children as he sees fit. The Benevolent Father Party educated people to express needs it would then fill, and discouraged them from taking the initiative that would enable them to fill

these needs on their own". Similarly, the Bulgarian state had the Big Brother or Father in Moscow, who, in the name of socialist fraternity, helped its smaller and weaker vassal.

5.-6.

The abundant Gypsy exoticism also means an abundant utilisation of Eastern European cabaret tradition on oriental videos. When a recording stage is needed, the video producers seem to favour cabaret restaurants of the huge tourist hotels; dancing girls and 'variété ballets' working in the hotels are hired to play belly-dancers, nomadic Gypsies, or dancing courtesans, according to the need of any given time. The output is often tragicomic as a group of young girls with a little aerobic training tries to perform belly-dance, or as classically trained ballet dancers romp about in a staged Gypsy camp. The artistic quality of Bulgarian oriental videos, however, is clearly improving, and in some newest videos very skilful belly-dancers with a knowledge of tradition can also be found.

As a counterbalance to cabaret views various images of modern jetset and touristic life are also favoured by the videos. Expensive hobbies, like sailing and windsurfing, are presented on several clips. Fashion clothes seem to be an extraordinarily important part of these modern images. Actually, it is not easy to find a video where a singer would not simultaneously serve as a model. The rule is that, in each video song, an artist is dressed at least in three different costumes, and these clips are frequently mixed with each other.

7.

In addition to cabaret properties and restaurant milieu, Bulgarian oriental videos have actually two basic visual backgrounds only, an old picturesque townscape and a touristic view from the Black Sea coast. These views can be used one after another several times during a video clip; the former strengthens classic oriental images, the latter is a symbol of a desired modernity and welfare. Nevertheless, old town views, usually from Plovdiv or Veliko Tàrnovo, refer not only to Orientalism, but undoubtedly they also have a strong national symbolic value. Old buildings are important evidence of Bulgaria's long history, a unique civilisation before the Ottoman times: Veliko Tàrnovo was Bulgaria's capital in the Middle Ages.

Furthermore, nearly all Bulgarian music videos — not only oriental ones — continuously use one and the same symbol, flowing water. It is very likely that water means happiness and even in two different ways. Flowing water is a symbol of mountainous Bulgaria, a guarantee of life and continuity. On the other hand, water has a very positive meaning in oriental mythology. The Arabian nomads and other heroes of mythology can find water in the oases, the paradise-like places in the middle of hot and dry deserts. Accordingly, water is an fundamental part of the oriental paradise.

8.

Only the fact that delicious and spicy food can be found everywhere in the country proves that Bulgaria belongs to the Orient. Although the Ottoman past is commonly rejected, the tradition of Turkish kitchen has not disappeared. The Bulgarians are also proud of their marvellous wines that are a subject of several hit songs stressing national and regional spirit. No wonder that in every second oriental video the actors are drinking and feasting on all kinds of delicacies. Delicious food and wine are a firm part of Bulgarian happiness, a foundation of social life.

Whisky drinking, so typical of many oriental videos, is more difficult to explain. However, the suffering and absent-minded singer-heroes nearly always drink whisky — not *rakiya*, *mastika*, or other Balkan spirits, but whisky. Maybe whisky drinking refers only to one of the global luxury symbols exoticized by the videos. On the other hand, I have recognised that whisky drinking is also a fundamental part of night life in Athens and Istanbul. Who knows that whisky was the only trace that the British Empire left behind in the Balkans — and in the Orient — as a memory of its previous influence. I wonder whether Lawrence of Arabia drank whisky.

5. Conclusion: Popularity of Oriental Style

The reasons for popularity are one of the most difficult and unsure topics to define in popular music production. In Bulgarian culture of today, however, there are some background factors that explain at least partly the recent oriental boom in local popular music.

Rebellion of the common people:

Even today, the musical style previously forbidden carries some rebellious connotations. Oriental pop is a kind of protest against old cultural elites and *nomenklatura* power. The fact that *chalga* music is not highly valued and looked down by the cultural establishment, musical experts, and the media, increases its revolutionary power.

Virtuosity vs. dance music:

With the roots deep in *svatbarski* tradition, new oriental hits often consist of virtuoso solo improvisations, which seem to be an almost obligatory part of highly-esteemed Balkan popular music. However, contrary to typical wedding style, new oriental hits are not played very fast: *tempo moderato* makes this music very suitable for dancing. If *svatbarski* style is music for listening⁴ only, then oriental hits are music for both listening and dancing.

Lyrics:

Contrary to traditional *kyuchek*, new wave oriental hits are usually songs. In addition, the lyrics are often vulgar, silly and provocative, which guarantees the final popularity among Bulgarian folkpop audiences who like to hear off-colour jokes and political satire. Bulgarian popular culture of today seems to be quite a "macho" environment, where politically incorrect expressions are hard currency.

Charm of novelty:

Oriental dance music is often rhythmically more sophisticated than normal folkdisco style. Maybe its popularity is quite a similar phenomenon as so-called world music boom in the western countries ten years ago. The success of world music was often explained by referring to older rock audiences being tired of mainstream rock and finding something new and exciting in non-western popular music.

⁴ This side of *svatbarski* music is stressed, for instance, in Ivo Papazov's comment to the American press: "my wedding music is *balkanski dzhaz*" (Buchanan 1996:223).

Power of oriental myths:

Last but not least, the old oriental myths with modern references to everyday problems and desires of common people are a very effective combination. Because of extremely difficult times in their everyday lives, many Bulgarians no doubt like to listen to daydreams of money making and exotic trips, so typical of oriental hits.

(final version 11.3.97)

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Example 4. *Menteta, menteta (Fake, fake)*

composed: Kiril Lambov

lyrics: Mimi Talarkova

1.

Today, every second drink at the marketplace,
my brother, is a fake.
Original labels and caps,
and the bundles of banknotes will increase.

Fake, fake,
it brings thick coins,
foreign and our own.
It goes straight to the businessman's heart.

2.

Fake is in fashion,
though the distilleries would be closed,
in garages, cellars, and basements
a nice substitute will be made.

Fake, fake ...

3.

The day before yesterday, my neighbour Ilija
bought a bottle of *rakija*.
Though he drank it with *meze* and salad,
he still landed in the Orlandovci graveyard.

Fake, fake ...

4.

There is fake whisky and fake gin.
First your purse is lightened
and then, if you sip it enough,
in the morning you may find yourself in a hospital.

Fake, fake ...

5.

Now you can also find policemen
one hundred percent fake.
They stop tourists on the highway
and pick up foreign currencies.

Fake, fake ...

6.

All of life, brother, is a fake.
If you look at those in the Parliament,
they are disputing, quarrelling, debating,
and still the laws are failing.