BALKAN SESSION – CZECHS PLAYING FOR THE BALKANS[1]

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Abstract: ***This paper discusses Balkan music performed in the Czech Republic, especially in Prague. Balkan music is performed by musicians not enculturated in Balkan culture. Their music production can be understood as a social practice initiated by certain stereotypes, viewed as Balkanism (Todorova 2009). In doing so, they display their attitude towards their Slavic neighbors.***

Using an ethnographic snapshot of a festival evening called Balkan Session, the main objective of this paper is to show the interaction between Balkan music as performed in Prague and the Balkans, represented by the migrants from the Balkan Peninsula in Prague. The concepts of Balkanism (Todorova 2009), Safe Enterprise (Laušević 2007) and Intimate Distance (Bigenho 2012) are used in the interpretation.

Keywords: ***Balkan music; Balkanism; ethnic stereotyping; Intimate Distance***

The festival called Balkan Session was held on 12 December 2014, and it took place in Vinohradsky brewery in Prague. The event was organized by the Prague Integration Centre, and the main idea behind the event was Balkan-Czech integration. The party was held especially for migrants from the Balkan Peninsula, but most of the musicians were Czech. The Balkan Session thus proposed a good opportunity to introduce Balkan music in an interesting milieu.

This paper is based on my research on Balkan music in the Czech Republic, with a focus on ethnic stereotypes. Whilst my previous work dealt with Czech musicians playing Balkan music and the images about the Balkans created through music (Libánská 2012; Libánská 2014), this paper deals with ethnic

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stereotypes promoted by Czechs as well as migrants from the Balkan Peninsula. At the Balkan Session, Balkan music was created not only by Czechs, but also by negotiation with the Balkan migrants. The main objective is, then, to examine in detail the interaction between Balkan music as performed in Prague and as performed in the Balkans, represented by the migrants from Balkan Peninsula in Prague. Considering the character of the Balkan Session, some questions arise: What do people, i.e. the audience and the musicians, expect from the event? How is the Balkan music soundscape[2] in Prague pervaded with and influenced by the audience that consists mostly of migrants from the Balkan Peninsula? Does the enterprise of Czech musicians remain to be "safe"?

To answer the questions we use the theoretical approaches on ethnic stereotyping and globalization, i.e. Balkanism (Todorova 2009), Safe Enterprise (Laušević 2007) and Intimate Distance (Bigenho 2012), as well as the ethnomusicological approach which states that the mere description of the musical sound is not sufficient enough to understand a musical event, because music is always created by people for other people (Merriam 2000). The term Balkan music represents the emic designation of the music style, referring to its music sources from the Balkan Peninsula; it is understood here as a transnational genre. The term thus designates the music style, only slightly associated with the music reality of the geographic Balkans.

Using the framework of **Balkanism**, Todorova (2009) explains the construction of the Balkan Peninsula as an "opposite part" of Europe. The Balkans became the object of European political, ideological and cultural frustrations, being considered a depositary of negative characteristics towards which the contours of Europe and the West were constructed. I consider the Balkan music performed outside the Balkan Peninsula as a strong medium of showing (and sharing) ethnic stereotypes towards the Balkans.

The framework of **Safe Enterprise** (Laušević 2007) is useful when thinking about the character of the concerts of Balkan music in Prague[3]: Czech musicians playing Balkan music for a Czech audience. Their performance (enterprise) is safe because of the context in which the music is performed. No one in the

[2] I use the concept of *soundcapes* as K. K. Shelemay does: *Soundscapes* refers to the world of music (-scape is a morpheme we can find in the word "landscape", for instance) in its dynamic variability (Shelemay 2006).

[3] Laušević (2007) uses the framework to describe the character of the subculture called Balkanites in USA: Americans with no further connections to Balkans, playing (and dancing to) Balkan music in a purely American environment.

audience understands the lyrics or the way the music *should* sound because of the rather exotic character of that music style. The Czech audience thus appreciates the irregular rhythm, "oriental" melodies, unusual harmonies, and exotic-sounding language, although none of these properties is performed precisely.

At the Balkan Session, the set up was rather absurd: Czech musicians who were performing for the "real insiders" – the enculturated Balkans. We would expect that by doing so, Czech musicians would adjust their performance whilst stepping out of their comfort zones of safe enterprise. As was explained to me in the interviews[4], the Balkan migrants in the audience, as well as the Czech musicians themselves, were well acquainted with the character of the event – which was primarily integration and meeting with other migrants, not only the music; the set-up was known beforehand, and the Balkans knew that the bands were Czech and knew them already from previous concerts. The enterprise was thus still safe, although the musicians adjusted the repertoire and performance to adhere to the recommendations of the main organizer.

Besides the musicians and the audience, the organizer is thus an important actor at play. It is indeed the organizers who decide what and for whom will be played. When the bands were asked to modify their repertoire with regard to the political-religious situation in the Balkan Peninsula, Laušević's idea of **Intimate Distance** (2012) and Herzfeld's **Cultural Intimacy** (2005) was shown. Both deal with the sense of attraction mixed with the sense of actual distance, connected with the "tension between official self-presentation and what goes on in the privacy of collective introspection" (Herzfeld 2005: 14). By intimate distance, we hereby designate the similarity of both (Czech, as well as Balkan) of the Slavic languages, the feeling of Slavic brotherhood, as well as the feeling of the return to the roots and the tradition (Laušević 2007). The repertoire and performance restrictions were explained by the problematic political-religious relations on the Balkan Peninsula[5], as well as the organizer's wish to show Balkan culture in a good light (Todorova 2009).

[4] Informal interviews with members of the band Džezvica, held in December 2014 (Slovakian singer Petra Majerčíková and Czech accordeonist Josef Prexl), and interviews with two students attending the event in the audience held in April 2015 (Bosnian Vanja Neretljak, living in Prague for 3 years; and Serb Vlada Perić, who came to live in Prague 6 years ago).

[5] Interview with Alen Kovačević, October 2014.

The Balkan Session

The main organizer from the Prague Integration Centre was Alen Kovačević[6], a professional coordinator of cultural events. Kovačević's motivation for choosing Czech musicians over the native Balkans was twofold. First, there is a certain 'shortage' of Balkan musicians in the Czech Republic[7] (moreover, those available were not willing to perform for such a small fee), and second, the very idea of letting Czech musicians play Balkan music for a Balkan audience seemed to be very interesting to the Integration Centre. Eventually, four bands were assembled for the evening, two of them entirely non-Balkan (Džezvica, Mijaktič Orkestar), one composed of a Czech and a Bosnian (Fes), and one entirely Balkan (Sarma Band).

The brewery is divided into three spacious rooms, with a total capacity of about 450 people. In the basement, there is a music hall with a stage (but there are neither chairs nor tables, only a couple of benches alongside the walls); the overall capacity of the music hall is about 250 persons. At the back of the stage, there was a large banner that links the event to the organizer: "Pomáháme migrantům a migrantkám. JE TO INtegrace. Multikulturní centrum Praha" ("*We're helping migrants. IT IS INtegration. The Prague Centre of Integration*"[8]). Next to the hall, there is a restaurant with 100 seats; upstairs, at street level, there is another restaurant of the same size. The stereotypes are omnipresent in this set-up, raising many questions: Why does a *typical* Balkan event take place in a *typical* Czech brewery? Why do Czechs perform (what they think is) typical Balkan music for Balkan migrants in a typical Czech brewery? Does the fact that this event took place in a brewery encourage more people to participate? In fact, a brewery is a typical Czech venue, and the main criteria for selecting this particular one was its availability and rent price[9]. Moreover, the brewery was newly reconstructed and it gave the event a certain feeling of 'cleanliness' which, incidentally, does not fit the general Balkan stereotypes. There were no posters inviting to the event placed at the entrance to the

6 Born in 1983, originally from Bosnia. Twenty years ago, he came to Czech Republic with his parents. From interview with A. K., October 2014.

7 In Prague, there are several professional musicians – migrants from the Balkan Peninsula. Most of them perform different music genres, accepted by wider range of listeners – rock, pop-music (we can name, for example, Petar Veljiković or Boro Prelić). Interview with A. K., October 2014.

8 Written in Czech language. Transl. by author.

9 Interview with A. K., October 2014.

Figure 1: Balkan Session Poster.[11]

brewery; the Balkan Session was advertised mainly on Facebook[10], which lured the audience with a colorful poster, the profiles of and musical videos of the performing bands.

As seen in the Fig. 1, the poster shows a combination of cartoon pictures and photos. The range of pictures on the poster is rather wide: musical instruments such as brass instruments, accordions, and tambourines – arranged into a heap, a rooster standing on a crocheted mat, a sheep lurking in the background, wood logs, and firs. The symbolism of the poster images is certainly not accidental, as Alen Kovačević, the main organizer, explained in an interview[12]. A graphic designer, originally from Bosnia, used the different figures to indicate a mixture of stereotypical symbols of the Balkans: the sheep symbolizes the countryside, and lamb as a prototypical meal is consumed in

10 https://www.facebook.com/events/1500076820279397/?ref_dashboard_filter=past [accessed 2015–01–08].

11 The poster was posted on Facebook site. Also, paper flyers were distributed.

12 An informal interview with A. K., February 2015.

the Balkans across all nations and religions (unlike pork). Musical instruments (accordion, tambourine, brass instruments) symbolize the musical folklore of the region. Wooden logs, trees, and a haystack in the back symbolize the Balkan country and countryside typically associated with the Balkans (rather than the metropolitan areas). The glasses in the foreground are *čokančiči* – glasses for the brandy *rakia* brewed in Serbia and Bosnia. In the background, there is another symbol: knitted *priglavke* – warm woolen socks (particularly popular in Bosnia and Serbia). The last symbol is a crocheted mat, used in the countryside to decorate tables and other flat surfaces. Under the picture, there is a table listing the four performing bands in the order in which they appeared at the event. Underneath we find the date, the time, the address and the purpose of the festival – all written in Czech and in a rather small font[13]. At the very bottom, there are logos of sponsors and media partners[14]. In the upper right corner, there is a noticeable sign "VSTUP ZDARMA/FREE ENTRY", in Czech and in English. This sign is highlighted in red color and written in capital letters, to attract people. On the other side of the poster, there are short profiles of the performing bands, written in Czech. Next to each of the profiles, there is a picture symbolizing the band's name: Džezvica – *cezva*[15]: a cup used to boil coffee; Fes – the red Muslim hat *fez*; Mijaktič Orkestar – accordion; Sarma Band – a picture of the fried meet roll *sarma*.

According to the event's organizer[16], around 3,000 people were invited. In fact, the event was well-attended; around 500 people arrived (which is more than the capacity of the brewery). This meant that many of the potential listeners were discouraged by the crowded space and thus left, while others came later. The attendees were mostly young people – the vast majority of which were between 20 and 35 years old. There was no special dress code; the clothing was casual. The majority of the audience was comprised of foreigners who spoke Balkan languages, English and Russian. Czech-speaking people represented one third of the audience, according to the estimates of the organizer[17]. Despite the international make-up of the audience, all communication (the organizer's

13 „Tato akce je pořádána na podporu integrace migrantů z třetích zemí žijících na území hl.m. Prahy" ("This event is organized to support the integration of migrants from Third World countries who live in Prague.")

14 Centre of Integration in Prague; Prague; Vinohradsky brewery; Radio 1; etc.

15 In Bosnian, Serbian, and Czech; the actual spelling is *džezva*.

16 An informal interview with A. K., February 2015.

17 Interview with A. K., February 2015.

welcoming speech, introductions of bands, and the audience competition) was in Czech. This poses a question: wouldn't it be more suitable to provide an interpreter for at least one of the Balkan languages or to speak English, to make a compromise?

However, as the main organizer, Alen Kovačević pointed out that speaking Czech was required[18] by the sponsoring Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic, given the purpose of the Session, namely, **Integration**. The integrational role was imposed on the music in order to connect the Czech and Balkan representations of the Balkans. Despite the intentions of the Prague Integration Centre, it is apparent that this ideal was not completely fulfilled. Firstly, when the moderators and bands were talking, the foreigners didn't understand. Secondly, it seems that most of people didn't come to listen to the music at all; their intention was to meet their friends, drink Czech beer, or eat Balkan food. Furthermore, the restrictions posed by the organizer (and the sponsors) made it impossible to play Muslim or Bulgarian songs, and no band presented the origins of any of their songs, despite the well-established practice at Czech Balkan concerts (Libánská 2012).

We identified Kovačević as the steering agent not only of the event's composition and of the invited musical groups, but also of their repertoire. He specified *what* and *for whom* the musicians should play. He discouraged Muslim or Bulgarian songs for political and religious reasons; he recommended that the bands do not introduce the origins of their songs. The bands were more or less strictly assigned what to play: musicians from Džezvica were required to play quieter folk songs, Fes was to play specific songs known as *sevdalinka*, Mijaktič Orkestar was asked to make the audience dance with fast and rhythmic songs, and Sarma Band – as the final band of the official part of the evening – was asked to please the Balkans with *starogradska muzika* songs, based strongly on the Balkan lyrics. The last two bands, Rooombaaa and Cirkus Problem were the "after-bands". The Balkan bands played repertoire designed especially for the Balkan part of the audience (they placed an emphasis on the lyrics rather than on the stereotypical elements mentioned below). Only one of them (Rooombaaa) had adjusted its performance to the non-Balkan audience: they played rhythmic songs and songs of the Central European Roma.

Having introduced the organizational details of the event, in the next section, we will discuss the actual music produced at the Balkan Session.

[18] Interview with A. K., February 2015.

Balkan Music

In total, six bands played at the event, each for approximately one hour (with the exception of the Czech band Mijaktič Orkestar that played for two hours). Five of them played onstage with amplified sound; the last band (Cirkus Problem) played off-stage, in the restaurant room, without amplified sound. The repertoire was coordinated by the organizer, with two concerns in mind. The first was to 'avoid politically and/or religiously problematic songs', and the second was to not repeat songs, since the bands all have nearly the same playlist of songs which are popular outside of the Balkan Peninsula[19]. During intermissions, Pavel Trojan, writer, musician, coordinator of the Polish Cultural Centre in Prague, and organizer of Balkan events and festivals in Prague, was given the stage. In contrast to the 'usual' Balkan events that have raffles, the Balkan Session used the intermissions for quizzes for the audience, and the questions concerned the Balkan Peninsula (the winner was rewarded with Slovenian wines).

At 7:30 pm, when the event was supposed to start, the hall was full of people. At 7:50 pm, the first band **Džezvica**[20] started their performance. The band Džezvica consists solely of non-Balkans: six Czechs, one Slovak, and one Russian (five women – two vocalists, one vocalist/flautist, one violist, and one percussionist; and three men – an accordionist, a violoncellist/vocalist, and a guitarist/vocalist). The arrangements of the songs are based upon female three-voice harmony, with the accompaniment of the guitar and the accordion. The importance of voices is evident: all three vocalists stand in front of the other musicians leading the group on stage. In addition, there is a cello playing the bass line, and the flute, the viola and the accordion alternate leading the melody in the interludes. Some songs are sung by men, some by everybody (i.e. the *a cappella* arrangement of the Macedonian song *Macedonian devojče*). The rhythm is maintained by the Cajun and darbuka drums. Only two of those instruments are heard in Balkan Peninsula, the darbuka and the accordion. The Cajun is often associated with Balkan music in the Czech environment (although the instrument originated in Latin America). The voice register is diverse; the chest as well the classic register is included.

[19] Interview with A. K., October 2014.

[20] Music video from Balkan Session: Džezvica, song *Nane Cocha*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDrN3mczCug [accessed 2015–03–04] Video: Alena Libánská.

Figure 2: Džezvica: from front to back Petra Majerčíková, Kateřina Sequensová, Alena Libánská, Adéla Bryan. In this picture, the other group members (Alina Schupikova, Vojtěch Nejedlý, Josef Prexl, Jan Václ) are missing. Photo: Kamila Ostružinová.

At the Balkan Session, the repertoire was rather calm, consisting of folk songs from various regions, in band arrangements. Mostly, the group's popular songs were played, such as the Serbian *Ajde Jano*, the Macedonian *Jovano, Jovanke*, the Bosnian *Ramo, druže moj*. The audience standing in the first rows sang these songs along with the band. Džezvica also included non-Balkan gypsy songs, such as the Russian *Nane Cocha*, the Hungarian *Tuke Bahh* or the Slovenian *Pašo Paňori*. These songs were received with most enthusiasm – the audience danced and sang along with the refrains of unspecified lyrics ("lailail", "nainai"). These songs do not have anything in common with Balkan gypsies, nor do they fit the characteristics of the repertoire of the Czech Balkan groups. However, they are still played because of the positive reception they receive[21].

21 This assessment is according to an informal interview with the band members and according to my own [A.L.] experience. These songs, especially the first one "*Nane cocha"* is well-known in the Czech environment due to the famous Soviet musical movie "Queen of the Gypsies" (orig. Табор уходит в небо). See http://romove.radio.cz/cz/clanek/19773 [accessed 2015–03–13].

Figure 3: Fes: from left to right: René Starhon, Aida Mujačič. Photo: Alena Libánská.

The band **Fes**[22] started the concert of Bosnian *sevdah* at 9:00 pm. The main person in the group is the lead female singer Aida Mujačić, originally from Bosnia. She devoted her professional life to the research of the Bosnian song style *sevdalinka*, living and studying in Prague. The repertoire of the band originates mainly from Bosnia. The singer was accompanied by a skillful Czech guitarist, René Starhon, by double bassist Filip Kinecký, and by trumpeter Milan Mikšíček. The band thus consisted of one woman – vocalist, and three instrumentalists. None of the instruments originally came from the Balkans. The band played elaborate arrangements with *authentic* sound and melodies, rather unfamiliar to the Western ear. Aida's voice was sharp; she sang in a chest voice, richly ornamenting the melody lines. Most of their songs were slow, emotional, and strongly linked to the meaning of the lyrics (as is typical for the song style

[22] Music video from Balkan Session: Fes playing the song *Jablani se povijaju*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2OK2Pn1P4w [accessed 2015–03–04]. Video: Alena Libánská.

Figure 4: Mijaktič Orkestar: Jan Klíma, Ondřej Koblížek, Dalibor Bzirský, Marek Vojtěch, Bety Josefy, Karel Zich. Photo: Alena Libánská.

sevdalinka; the emphasis is put on the story the song tells). The audience stayed rather calm, listening to the songs, or talking.

Mijaktič Orkestar[23] was the third band that played; it consists only of Czech musicians. Most of the songs were sung by front man Jan Klíma in a loud, strong voice. The band is formed of six musicians, five men – a vocalist/guitarist/bagpiper, a double bassist, a clarinetist/vocalist, a violist, an accordionist; and one woman – drummer/vocalist. The microphones were placed in front of all of the musicians who joined Klíma in the chorus or, occasionally, as a second voice. For some songs, the guitarist Klíma switched instruments to the cittern or gajda (bagpipes). Apart from the guitar and the gajda, their instrumentation included the double bass, the Cajun, and the darbuka (similarly to the other Czech band Džezvica). The gajda and darbouka are typical for the Balkans. The

[23] Music video from Balkan Session: Mijaktič Orkestrar playing the song *Niška Banja* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Bcy_xaxNkk [accessed 2015–03–04]. Video: Alena Libánská.

Figure 5: Sarma band: Aco, Robin Finsilver, Zoran Dukič, Petar Jakšič. Photo: Alena Libánská.

band's repertoire covered folk songs from the Balkans (the Serbian Niška Banja, the Bulgarian Mitro, le Mitro, etc.), as well as gypsy songs (Opa tsupa), all in their own arrangements. Their songs sounded brisk and loud. The audience danced during the whole set, and after the applause, the band continued for another 30 minutes.

Sarma Band[24], which started playing at midnight, differed from all of the other bands, since mostly Balkan migrants form the group. Only one of the musicians is English, the others originate from Bosnia and Serbia; only men form the group, and all five of them are in their 50's. The musicians sit on chairs while playing. Besides the accordion and the guitar, they have a tambourine, a riq, and a keyboard. A single voice leads the melody, while others join in unison. The voice sounds in a chest register, with slight ornamentation. The drums

[24] Music video from Balkan Session: Sarma Band playing the song *Nema ljepše djevojke*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-FfOZxsB0Y [accessed 2015–03–04]. Video: Alena Libánská.

Figure 6: Roooombaaaa: Vojtěch Pošmourný, Vojtěch Nejedlý, Saša Vidovič, Zoran Dukić, Petar Jakšič. Photo: Alena Libánská.

are from the Balkans. The band played so-called *starogradska muzika*: songs performed in the cities of Serbia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Croatia, especially at restaurants. The tempo of these pieces is slower; the emphasis is placed on the lyrics, with themes such as love and relationships. The aim is not to energize the audience, but to move them gently and play on their emotions[25]. The music was aimed mainly at the Balkan audience, who stayed in front of the stage, dancing and singing with the group. For the Czechs, the music was not particularly appealing: they did not understand the lyrics and, in addition, they did not find the rhythm suitable for dance[26]. Usually, this type of music is played around a table, and not performed on stage.

25 Interview with A. K., February 2015. See also http://secanja.com/2012/starogradske-2/ [accessed 2015–03–13].

26 Informal interview at Balkan Session night, December 2014.

With the beginning of the after-party, another band came to play. Most of the musicians from the previous group remained onstage, and three more joined them: one Bosnian and two Czechs, thus creating the band **Rooombaaa**[27]. They played gypsy and lively folk songs (the Serbian *Moja mala nema mane*, the gypsy *Čaje Šukarije*...) in simple arrangements that were often created on the spot[28]. Most of the songs were performed by a solo voice, sung in Saša's charismatic baritone; sometimes there were two voices, with harmonic and rhythmic guitar accompaniment. The bass line was played by a cello, while the violin and the cello alternated leading the melody in the interludes. The band consisted of five men: two Czechs and three Balkans. The band also featured Slovenian gypsy and folk songs (such as *Číže sú to koně* or *Načo pôjdem domov*). Similarly to their predecessors, Rooombaaa chose songs popular with diverse audiences. At that point, there were still about 80 people dancing and singing with the band, or talking in the hall.

The band concluded their performance at about 1:40 am, giving the stage to the MC Alen Kovačević for the last time. He thanked the audience and musicians for coming and announced that the last band – quite unexpectedly – has arrived at the Session – the Czech band **Cirkus Problem**[29], which consisted of six men: five Czechs and one Ukrainian. They started playing in the restaurant room, standing on the tables and chairs. Their repertoire featured the most well-known songs, often those that are stereotypically connected with the Balkans: songs from the movies 'Underground', 'Black Cat, White Cat', and others composed by Goran Bregović, Boban Marković, or Emir Kusturica. Their instrumentation was different from the previous bands: drums and brass (bass horn, trombone, euphonium, trumpet and clarinet) appeared for the first time, with accordion and violin. Such instrumentation is the closest to contemporary Balkan bands as they are known outside the Balkans: brass bands. Only the violin makes the sound different from the Balkan stereotype. The whole performance was characterized by less-than-perfect order, bordering on chaos, which was to be expected, given the spontaneity of their gig. Most of the songs were instrumental. Only some were sung by the accordionist and the leader of the group, Jiří

[27] Music video from Balkan Session: Rooombaaa playing the song *Čaje šukarije*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8MGQG9IcRU [accessed 2015–03–13].

[28] Informal interview with Saša who explained to me that they consider concerts as "public rehearsals". December 2014.

[29] Music video from the Balkan Session: Cirkus Problem playing the song *Misirlou*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Em-px_JQL-E [accessed 2015–04–06]. Video: Alen Kovačević.

Figure 7: Cirkus Problem: Martin Sedlák, Jiří Čevela, Bohdan Skibinsky, Martin Zavodňan, Tomáš Mašek, Tomáš Knotek. Photo: Stanislav Bakalár.

Čevela. The Czech as well as the Balkan audiences stayed until the very end, dancing to all of the songs.

In summary, the most *authentic* Balkan music at the Balkan Session was the *sevdah* and the *starogradska muzika*; however, the response of the audience gave the impression that what was conceived as (and asked for as) typical Balkan music was the music known from Bregović and Kusturica[30]. This was common to both the Czech and Balkan audiences. All Czech bands (Džezvica, Mijaktič Orkestar and Cirkus Problem) were better received than the Balkan ones, despite the fact that the audience was mostly non-Czech. The reason might be that the Czech bands had adapted their repertoire and performance to certain

30 Goran Bregović (and his brass band) is considered as the most important exporter of Balkan music outside of the Balkan Peninsula. See more in Marković 2013.

stereotypes connected to audience's expectation of the music labeled as Balkan: temperament, emotions, external attributes such as colorful clothing and noticeable accessories, improvisation, fusion, use of close harmonies, irregular rhythm, and high volume (Libánská 2012). In addition, these groups also followed the perceived stereotype in that the songs were originally from the Balkan Peninsula and inspired by Goran Bregović. The stereotypes of the Balkan music pointed towards the stereotypical images connected with the Balkans: chaos, temperament, roughness, and opulence (Moravcová et al. 2006).

On the contrary, the Balkan bands played more *authentic* Balkan repertoire that puts emphasis on the lyrics; they played in a slower tempo. In their arrangements, the keyboard emerged, which contradicts the stereotypical image of Balkan music in the Czech Republic: considering the instrumentation, the guitar or accordions were present in all bands. The non-Balkan drum Cajun was included in two Czech bands (Džezvica, Mijaktič), and is very often seen to be associated with Balkan music in the Czech environment. Very often the violin/viola is heard, less often the cello or the flute. In all of the bands, the solo voice is very dominant, often performed by the leader of the group. Only two bands used more typical Balkan instruments, such as the gajda or the riq (Mijaktič, Sarma Band). Only Cirkus Problem played brass instrumental music, extensively associated with modern Balkan music outside of the Balkans. When considering stereotypes in gender roles connected to the instrumentation, there is no significant distribution. Men as well women sing and play different instruments. Only the Balkan group consisted of only men, as well as in the brass band Cirkus Problem. But these observations do no allow making generalizations, and the soundscape of Balkan music does not seem to be gender imbalanced.

Conclusion

Balkan music in the Czech Republic is an emic construct, whose shape is negotiated by all of the actors of this soundscape: the musicians, the audience, and the organizer. Music is distancing the participants of the soundscape from the actual Balkans (the *distance* evoked in Bigenho's concept). Based on the Balkan Session musical event and the three Czech groups that participated in it, it is evident that the Czech musicians are not interested in the form of music as performed on the Balkan Peninsula; rather, they (and their audience) follow the stereotypical image of the Balkan music.

The fact that the Czech musicians played at the Balkan Session for the Balkan audience raised the question of to what extent do musicians adjust their performances depending on the specific audience, and how does their interpretation influence the audience? Czech musicians, being forced to lightly step out of "the zone of safe enterprise" (Laušević 2007) characteristic of their usual performances, adjusted their repertoire and performance to adhere to the recommendations of the main organizer, who appeared to be a steering agent not only of the event's composition and of the invited musical groups, but also of their repertoire.

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