Exotic Anthropological Perspectives and Yugoslav Popular Music

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INTRODUCTION: ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE EXOTIC OTHER

Ethnographically informed social/cultural anthropology or ethnology is in many respects one of the fundamental disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. It started with studies of exotic "tribes", "primitives" and "savages", living their lives as naturally as possible, or "backward" but "pristine" preindustrial peasants. In recent decades, anthropologists have turned their ethnographic focus from exotic places and people to any situation human beings can face. However, despite its dramatic transformation, anthropology is in many respects still seen in its "savage slot" (Trouillot 2003), even if some anthropologists are trying to defend radical alterity (Hage 2012) or "poietic dimensions in the exotic" (Kapferer 2013: 818). The main tropes were shaped through its continental and "Atlantic" development: variety and differences, ways of life of the exotic others or domestic "brothers", thick descriptions of otherness, understanding of the roots and evolution of civilizations, bridging the gaps between the ancient past and the present, or simply observing people from their point of view. These were obviously attractive starting points for the growth of the discipline, well known for its internal variety and the impossibility of its single international denomination and simple definition. Since its very beginning, anthropology has addressed modernity and the global changes provoked by the unbridled rise of capitalism, but these very processes were very rarely described in ethnographic monographs on the authentic geographic other. Long into the twentieth century, popular culture, as perhaps the most characteristic expression of high modernity, was mostly ignored not only by anthropologists and ethnologists, but also within academia in general.

Ethnographic method, the pillar of anthropological investigation and the fundamental source of anthropological knowledge, was mostly employed to ignore the dramatic changes in the world and to freeze the picture of an eternal ancient "now" in the ethnographic present. Ethnographically observed people were confined to other times (Fabian 1983) and other places (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). As academic disciplines, both continental or "European" ethnology and non-European anthropology were formed in modernity, yet for quite some time ethnologists and anthropologists pretended that modernity had never touched the people they described. With heavily charged ideological statements formulated in the seemingly objective language of the ethnographic present, they did not ethnographically describe the actually-existing world but their own inventive reconstruction of the past, mostly totally cleansed of any kind of modernity.

Ethnographic practice in colonial and imperial environments shaped specific epistemological lenses, not only to observe and perceive the world from a specific "native" point of view, or the view from afar on "the Other", but to build specific image of the researcher as a cultural hero (cf. Hayes and Hayes 1970). Even if the experience of the ethnographer is the primary source for understanding different ways of living, the basic phenomenology of everyday life in the field, with respect to modernisation, was only rarely described in ethnographic writing. There is a paradox that "engaged learning" (Carrithers 2005), stemming from engaging in experiencing radically different ways of life, may result in very biased narratives. The synchronicity of the ethnographic experience was too often transferred into ahistorical epistemological synchronicity. Contrary to expectations, historical processes of modernisation became important topic of anthropological research only in the second part of the twentieth century (e.g., Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz), together with popular culture (Powdermaker 1950).

Even current ethnographic monographs often present the world as if modernisation had not occurred at all, or at least did not substantially affect the studied phenomena. Despite the growing amount of literature, many anthropologists are still, despite their cosmopolitan rhetoric, romantic rebels against modernity, believers in "authentic" ways of life or the inherited "culture" of the people observed.

From an overall perspective, the Balkans, and the area of former Yugoslavia, are populated with people who are thought to have preserved various authentic and archaic characteristics, and their main cultural export has become music and popular culture. But music is never just music. As an exotic trademark of the Balkans, it may effectively reveal otherwise not so apparent processes of identification.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC GAZE AND THE PERMANENCE OF EVERYDAY TRIVIA

Continental ethnologies and imperial anthropologies emerged with the Enlightenment, and were the direct results of previous "discoveries" of "the new worlds". The fascination with exotic tribes was parallel to the search for authentic peasant roots in emerging European nations. The enlightenment project turned

against the old society and with its constraints according to status promoted the idea of a natural authenticity. The slow was connected with nature, and herdsmen or farmers were seen in harmony with the rhythms of nature – not unlike today's perspective on foreign, exotic or utopian world-views. (Köstlin 2001: 167)

Since the beginning of the discipline, many ethnographers controversially romanticized staying "among isolated, exotic people", and doubted the "limitations of a methodology that at times has sought to answer all the essential questions regarding the human condition" (Nader 2011: 212). Until the late twentieth century, anthropologists did not consider colonialism in the field relevant, "focusing instead on exotic others in a global vacuum" (Bourgois 2002: 417).

Nevertheless, ethnography proved to be an invaluable source of situated knowledge. It paved the way to experiencing, observing, and comprehending social reality in different ways: [S]ome of our most basic sensibilities of temporality, individuality, and identity can indeed be suspended in favour of other people's intuitions of reality. By the same move our own categories are relativized. And by this dialogue of exotopy and endotopy is created a cosmopolitan anthropological consciousness of species being. (Sahlins 1997: 276)

These ambiguities are perhaps a constant source for the revitalization of anthropological methods and practices:

With James Mooney (1896), we had the nineteenth-century beginnings of a critically engaged ethnography and ethnography as critique of Western thought. With W. H. R. Rivers (1906) and to a lesser extent Bronislaw Malinowski ([1922] 1984), the ethnographer proceeded as if conducting a laboratory-bounded natural-science experiment. With Gregory Bateson ([1936] 1958), and to some extent Sir Edmund Leach ([1954] 1965), the ethnographer proceeded much more like an ecologist. (Nader 2011: 212)

With postcolonial critique, Marxist anthropology, critique of gender blindness and the epistemological questioning of ethnographic poetics and politics from the 1960s to the 1980s, anthropologists turned away from searching for the most distant Other as the source of authenticity and human origins. But despite claims that Otherness was, supposedly, "no longer a synonym for exoticism, nor the exclusive property of foreign individuals or groups" (Rabinow 1986: 241), the rational core of the ethnographic challenge survived: "...We actually agree that the exotic is the domain of ethnography, but that's because good ethnography makes everything exotic" (Da Col and Graeber 2011: vii).

Anthropologists are nowadays often reluctant to search for exotic people. Nevertheless, from time to time, everybody becomes excited when the opportunity comes to meet the exotic Others. Such is the candid description of an Austrian historical anthropologist who finally discovered Balkan Serbs in Central Europe (Slovenia):

The image of 'the Balkans in Central Europe' as a periphrasis for the Orthodox people in Bela krajina and their friends from Karlovac is only an unconscious reflection of the flair of exoticism and authenticity, the Western researcher – in this case me – wants to find in the Balkans. It therefore adds only a tiny ideological element to the broader pattern of Balkan Orientalisms. And the latter – even if it may sound blunt, this does not change its trueness – is only a small part of the general hegemonic ideology of the 'West and the Rest' (Stuart Hall) present since Capitalism asserted itself on the global scale and after 1989–91 anew. (Promitzer 2007: 97–98)

The introduction of urban anthropology in the mid-twentieth century only confirmed the "savage slot" perspective. The initial ethnographic studies in cities were oriented towards studies of the exotic and the marginalized (Jacobs after Low 1996: 386):

Most members of the dominant society rarely acknowledge themselves as cultural beings. They have no reason to. Culture is that exotic element possessed by 'minorities'. (Ladson-Billings 2006: 107)

Anthropologists were only sporadically interested in processes of cultural creativity (e.g. Wagner 1977; Liep 2001; Hallam and Ingold 2007). Doing research "at home", no matter how different their research field is from their experience "at home", may bring very interesting twists and shifts to the perception of the "exotic other". Anthropologists themselves may become exoticized. Philippe Bourgois, studying drug users in and around Los Angeles, reports that "sometimes they coddled us as exotic, high status outsiders and invited us on visits to estranged family members, scavenging expeditions, burglaries, and outings to the beach" (Bourgois 2011: 4).

FROM THE NATIVE PERSPECTIVE: YUGOSLAV/BALKAN MUSIC BETWEEN ORIENTALISM AND OCCIDENTALISM

Perhaps the most unnoticed form of Orientalism is its twisted reflection in the Occidentalism expressed by "the Others" themselves, especially if other people's occidentalisms "serve to support or to criticize their own existing social and political practices" (Carrier 1995: 9). Below I will discuss examples of mirrored Occidentalism in Yugoslav popular music. Despite the well-developed variety of Ottoman urban music, and the quite robust culture of traditional music played in the area throughout the nineteenth century, we can trace the processes of the introduction of Western music into the area. The introduction of Western classical music was an integral part of the "national awakening". And a twisted Orientalism in the form of unnoticed or takenfor-granted Occidentalism accompanied the acceptance of Western music genres in all Yugoslav lands throughout their recent history. The process began with the introduction of Western classical music in the nineteenth century by the emerging local elites; the enthusiasm of the educated townspeople for jazz in the 1920s and 1930s; the introduction of popular songs (canzonas, Schlagers, chansons) in the first part of the twentieth century; the introduction of rock and roll in the 1960s; and the later domestication of other current genres (e.g. disco, rap, electronic dance music). These processes were an integral

part of the "Occidentalisation" of all Yugoslav regions before its establishment (from the beginning of the nineteenth century to WWI), throughout the whole historical period of existence of the South Slav state (1918-1991), and after the establishment of independent countries in the 1990s. The domestication of "Western" high and popular culture was an integral part of a long "self-civilizing" process, which in its final phase showed that the West itself would recognise only, or predominantly, the "Orientalised" or symbolically self-exoticized products of Yugoslav popular culture: Kusturica's films, Bregović's music, Laibach's totalitarian presence. These disturbed reflections of blended secondary Orientalisms/Occidentalisms are an integral part of more general historical processes of modernization, including the expansion of Western militaries, Western markets, Western legislation, Western art, and Western science.

This wider historical perspective confirms the need to understand local situations. Furthermore, not only do popular culture and popular music deserve ethnographic attention – scholars should study their impact both in the West and in the rest. We should ask ourselves how much ethnography can tell us about the Oriental/Occidental conundrum, if ethnographers observe only one end of exoticization.

When anthropologists finally began studying Western institutions, this extremely dramatic shift in anthropology remained almost unnoticed. Studies of Western institutions, especially scientific laboratories, state apparatuses, politicians and executives, investment banks, the military, media, art and popular culture resulted in ethnographies of "civilized" people as if they were "ethnos, this people, this culture whose study is supposed to be the actual subject of the discipline" (Latour 2010: 245).

Yet once the jokes are over and the derisive smiles have been wiped off people's faces, this type of attitude may lead to nothing but the despicable form of exoticism that is called Occidentalism. By combining his inquiry with a distancing, the ethnographer of contemporary societies simply reproduces the sins of former anthropology which studied other peoples only because of their distance. Even if the Palais-Royal seems strange to us, we must refuse this cheap foreignness, like the mirages of Orientalism and the intricacies of unfathomable Asia. To do his work, the ethnographer cannot be content to treat his contemporaries, his closest neighbours, as badly as distant. (Latour 2010: 245)

Latour warns us against simplifications in self-positioning. It was surely not appropriate "to portray the peoples who were civilized as irrational or as archaic survivors on their way towards a single world", and it was even more problematic "to describe the civilizing peoples as rational and modern" (Latour 2002: 42). This is a trap of inverted exoticism. In unprecedented dialectics of modernization and its parochial rearrangements, "'Modernism' or 'Occidentalism' in this context may be understood in the sense of 'Orientalism': it is equivalent to seeing the Europeans or the Americans with the perspective—all tropical palms, secluded harems and painted savages—that they themselves adopt towards other cultures" (Latour 2002: 42).

Anthropologists are constantly surrounded by the widest open field for studying human living – anywhere, at any time; they could even use their own daily life as a permanent and self-perpetuating natural laboratory to study the continuous emergence of human practices and symbolic forms, their transformations and disappearance. The late Croatian ethnologist Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin viewed her life in her hometown as her permanent ethnography (Rihtman-Auguštin 2000).

No matter where we find ourselves, Western and domestic popular culture is everywhere nowadays, especially popular music, "with its obvious links to culture, its shared concern with the world political economy, as well as its unavoidable involvement with the problem of the Other" (Grenier and Guilbault 1990: 390). Popular music might become a main field of such permanent studies of one's own, and others', daily life. An ethnographically unpredictable field, popular music seems "an ideal area of study" (Grenier and Guilbault 1990: 390) of the human condition in the present.

Music as a social practice, the intentional production of meaningful social shared sounds, which are not speech, is very efficient in marking social groups. On various mythical or historically reported occasions only music proved to be able to transform the horrible Other (even Death itself, e.g., in the story of Orpheus, which is in one or another form present in the folklore in the entire region) into a gentle fellow. The seductiveness of singing, whispering sounds, noises, and rhythmical repetition is widely known. However, it is not only the gentleness of music that matters. In the economy of desire, it constantly turns out that only the Other is capable of true enjoyment, as a Lacanian approach would indicate, especially in music.

Music is a symbolic practice, but not the same kind as language. It is not propositional and can express only the most indefinite expressions we usually mistake for emotions. What is at stake in music, as much as it is a symbolic, perhaps partly pre-symbolic and essentially bodily activity, is its socialness. Music is related to never-ending processes of identification: After the soothing of the main curiosities towards the discovered and studied 'savages', after the fading of the typical nineteenth century speculations more related to physical anthropology than to what is anthropology today, ethnographers began to take an interest also in recording cultural aspects of exotic peoples, one of which was, of course, music. The debut of musical anthropology can be successfully placed at that moment, at the beginning of an interest for preserving and studying the music of the so-called savages. (Cihodariu 2011: 184)

Any music we can imagine generates essentially unintended consequences: it stimulates the imagination of the exotic Other and the "exotic fellow". The exotic fellow is necessarily an ambiguous creature: a double-faced immature *bon sauvage* may at the same time be a threatening outlaw. In the USA, such an exotic fellow might have been a racialized black slave/servant. Nowadays such fellows are typically residents of inner city ghettos, threatening and dangerous, with the potential to challenge the existing order (Lipsitz 1994). In Europe, and especially at the Balkans, it used to be a Gypsy traveller. This is the source of the enormous success of Emir Kusturica's characters: the natural "Gypsy" actors are in the closest proximity to praise racism with impunity, even if it might be affirmative to the Roma.

Throughout its history, western popular music is related to the economy of desire. In the nineteenth century, "blackface" minstrels paved the way for its further development (Palmer 1976). In the first part of the twentieth century, "race records" were a continuous source of inspiration for the popular music mainstream. In the racialized social stratification of the USA, whites controlled the production of and the market for popular music. On the other side of racial segregation was a moralistic fear of black sexuality, which contributed a great deal to institutionalized racism:

This treatment of black sexuality plays an integral role in the racist power hierarchy in America. By portraying African Americans as exotic, erotic, or oversexed, one decontextualizes their experience, marginalizes them, and removes the possibility of a self-defined sexuality. (Rebollo-Gil and Moras 2012: 121)

Similar racialized perspectives, predominantly in the form of ethnicized social stratification, were developing in Europe, where Romani musicians were treated similarly to blacks in the USA, especially in the Balkans (cf. Barbarič 1996). In any case, Yugoslavia was a culturally very diverse country, and its minorities (officially called nationalities), and even mountain pastoralists or just plain peasants, were also considered exotic neighbours. There are a plenty of reasons to study contemporary popular music. Being a very important part of contemporary life, it is never just music. Various facets of popular music production, distribution and reproduction can effectively reveal otherwise hidden processes of regional and local processes of identification.

As a scholar from former Yugoslavia, and thus an insider, I'll present a couple of examples dealing with the perception of the Balkans, primarily in Slovenia, and its construction, reconstruction and deconstruction through popular music. I'll try to do it while stressing the need to study everyday life in the area – and not necessarily ethnographically.

Music from the former Yugoslavia is a perfect example for providing views on how present-day societies invent and reproduce their myths. It is a very efficient interweaving of homeliness and alterity. For Western and Central Europeans, Yugoslavia and the Balkans, the polysemic region of "wild Europe" (Jezernik 2004), are the nearest nest of alterity. "Discoveries" of epic singers and their oral practices paved the way to intellectual fascination with the Balkans, followed by ethnographic studies of the "meeting ground of cultures" (Halpern 1958: xi). Furthermore, in American society, "the concept of international folk dance, ideas of peasantry, and ultimately 'Balkan music and dance' surface over the course of a hundred years" (Laušević 2007: 13). During that time, with the domestication of Western popular music and the introduction of Western musical instruments, musicians in the Balkans developed new genres, rhythmically just exotic enough to strike back. Balkan ethno-pop became an attraction in the West.

The Slovenian audience accepted Balkan ethno-pop similarly to Western audiences. In this regard, Slovenia was not only the westernmost part of former Yugoslavia, but, at least musically, the most attached to Central-European traditions. In Slovenia, the fascination with Balkan (i.e. Yugoslav) music grew with the dissolution of the state. The first Balkan parties for locals were held in 1990. These parties were held in a dance and relaxed party atmosphere at alternative or commercial music venues or disco clubs, with DJs who predominantly played Yugo-rock and other pop music from former Yugoslavia. The dissolution of the state was a turning point in the perception of Yugoslav music in Slovenia: what used to be an integral part of the domestic music scene, though musically quite different in the various Yugoslav republics, now became officially "foreign" and thus sort of underground or rebellious (Ceglar 1999). The so-called "trubači" (Serbian and Roma brass bands) initially played at the Other Music (Druga godba) Festival, but were also incorporated into DJ-ing at Balkan parties. In the late 1980s, the Slovenian audience mostly considered this music to be a part of the emerging world music scene. Musically speaking, Slovenia can be described as "accordion-dominated Central European folk music tinged on occasion with Balkan tones" (Gow and Carmichael 2001: 5). Serbian turbo-folk entered those parties only later, in the mid-1990s.

While Slovenia and Croatia were never considered to be a part of the Balkans, the former Yugoslavia was without any doubt considered a characteristic Balkan country. Perhaps this self-identification is the reason why Slovenes and Croats make a very simple equation between former Yugoslavia and the Balkans. Balkan parties became a synonym for Yugo-pop parties and Balkan rock is in some occasions still used as a synonym for Yugoslav rock (cf. Velikonja 2013).

At least in Slovenia, anything related to the Balkans or the South may still become a matter of dispute and may stimulate highly ambivalent sentiments. Notions of corruption, hatred, blood revenge, wars and poverty are usually attached to the Balkans, especially in stereotypic presentations in popular culture, mostly in films. At the same time, various kinds of "Balkan music", in its various genres, forms and styles, especially ethno-pop, and revived traditional music, have become more and more popular, not only for the already-exposed Slovenian audience, but for the Western audience as well. Kusturica's films incorporated both aspects, primitivism and exoticism. Why were they so attractive to the international audience?

Goran Bregović's entire career rests on the premise that "primitive" Balkan shepherds and urban little people (in Sarajevan jargon, *raja*) are capable of unrestrained joy. He was the founder of the most popular and successful Yugoslav rock band, Bijelo dugme. The group from Sarajevo was tremendously successful in the mid-1970s, when they released their first records. One of their first mega-hits was 'Tako ti je mala moja, kad ljubi Bosanac' ('That's How It Feels Baby, When a Bosnian Loves [i.e. Makes Love]'). "Shepherd rock", as the journalists called it, played on pure and simple emotions with some hints of fulfilled sexual desire.

Not all bands and singers openly expressed such sentiments, but the expression of specifically "southern" sentiments, at least from the perspective of audiences in Slovenia and Croatia, remained popular. After Bijelo dugme, many rock groups and performers became popular across former Yugoslavia, e.g. Partibrejkers, Idoli, Azra, Zabranjeno pušenje, Riblja čorba, Disciplina kičme, Električni orgazam, Plavi orkestar, Rambo Amadeus, etc. They survived the collapse of the state and its market. Rambo Amadeus (Antonije Pušić), the Montenegrin singer who lives in Serbia, remained perhaps one of the typical Yugoslav parody acts. New bands from the region were still considered "Yugo-rock" bands. The Croatian group Majke – far from sounding in any way "Balkan" – became a cult rock group in the 1990s. In Slovenia, at least, it was initially considered to be the most typical advanced Yugorock band, although it was later much more related to the specific local scene in Vinkovci, Croatia.

Although the term Yugo-rock is now more associated with albums released from the 1960s up to the 1980s, we can still consider the production of rock music in the region to a great extent as Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Macedonian, and to some extent Kosovar variants of the initial "Yugo-rock" sound. The Slovenian band Zaklonišče prepeva is a fairly typical example.

Similarly, Yugoslav pop survived throughout the region, not only regarding its continuous media presence. In Skopje, e.g., some radio stations would only play old Yugoslav pop music and pop produced after 1991 in former Yugoslav republics, especially in Croatia. This was perhaps a reason why the late Macedonian singer Toše Proeski attracted a fairly large audience in all of the countries of former Yugoslavia in the early 2000s.

With some exceptions to the rule, especially in Poland, Yugorock and pop are still limited to a specific transnational market, a network of online enthusiasts in the regions of former Yugoslavia, and their expatriates. The situation with Balkan-sounding music, which is more attractive to an international audience, is quite different. Balkan ethno-pop, an integral part of so-called world music, has reached a rather small but enthusiastic world-wide audience. It is popular in New York, Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Poland, Hungary, and even in Japan. It is, naturally, also popular in Slovenia. For Slovenes, rhythm is the basic fascination of Balkan music. Only sometimes it may be its "melos", its "rough" or close intervals, oriental melismas and virtuosity.

This kind of music has been incorporated into streams of socalled world music, and it still depends on specific Western-controlled distribution channels, starting with the Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares LP released by 4AD in 1986.

Balkan traditional music, especially Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbian, and even more so if its performers are Gypsies (e.g., the late Esma Redžepova, Ferus Mustafov or Ivo Papasov) has everything Westerners striving for exoticism could wish for: complex but exaggerated rhythms (the famous 7/8 and other asymmetric meters in Macedonia, the *čoček*, etc.), apparently oriental characteristics, virtuosity and emotionalism. It is primitive but at the same time difficult to play, unique and direct, exotic but also familiar, emotive and also danceable – in its peculiar way.

For Westerners seeking authenticity, rural and urban traditional music provides a great deal of inspiration with its whiff of the exotic, especially when it is performed with new electrified instruments, for example the Greek *rebetika*; the so-called "newly-composed folk music" in former Yugoslavia; *lakodalmas* rock in Hungary; "national music" and *čalga* in Bulgaria; *čalgija* in Macedonia; *laika* in Greece, etc. (cf. e.g. Vidić-Rasmussen 1996; Rose Lange 1996; Rice 1996; Kurkela 1997; Pennanen 1999; Levy 2005; Čolović 2006).

It is not necessary for the musician himself or herself to become considered as the Other. In popular music, anyway, he or she are more commonly placed on the pedestal of celebrity. No matter whether they are considered celebrities or local masters of ceremonies, musicians are typically marginal people. Nevertheless, Balkan musicians are still more predictable than the otherwise unpredictable, dangerous and dreadful inhabitants of the Balkans.

Music is treated many different ways. If it changes, as Plato would denounce, it becomes a threat to society. Preserving tradition, it can be used as a tool of education and sociality. Aspects of "othering" are usually covered up by the spurious notion of authenticity. Tracing popular music in former Yugoslavia, its admirers are inclined to preconceive its supposed exotic essence in accordance with various considerations of other characteristics, products and experiences related to this peculiar country as either nostalgic or bizarre. Nevertheless, the general production of music in the area in the past century was more or less just a reflection of the predominant streams of music at "the centre". It was a notably specific, and in various ways domesticated reflection, and this is perhaps the reason why it is so difficult to define and describe the essence of Yugo-rock. For the Slovenian audience, at least, Yugo-rock offered what Western music could provide only occasionally: passion and authenticity. For musicians in the region, the creative Occidentalist exploitation of Western rock proved productive. However, if the periphery occasionally strikes back, this does not necessarily imply that it becomes less peripheral. In the continuous appeal of postmodern nostalgia for a never-experienced past, strategies of self-exoticization may not appear to be the worst possible scenario.

CONCLUSION: OLD TUNES WITH NEW SOUNDS

The times of the anthropological fascination with the exotic might be over already for quite some time. Beating the dead wolf is perhaps still meaningful only from the perspectives where exoticisms are still alive and well. The story of observing exoticisms in the production of Yugoslav popular music, dialectically stretched between the Occidental and the domestic, has some commonalities with criticism of colonialism. No matter how severely anthropologists reject colonialism, and how much colonialism itself is obsolete, there are new ways in which old hierarchies are still preserved.

Popular music is preserving an illusion of the continuation of Yugoslavia. But if the musicians were to abandon the domesticated ways of making their music, what would they play?

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