

MUSIC AND EMOTIONS: A FIELD STUDY AMONG TRANSYLVANIAN ROMA AND A FEW CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS*

Filippo Bonini Baraldi**

Senior Researcher, Institute of Ethnomusicology – Center for Studies in
Music and Dance, School of Social and Human Sciences of
the NOVA University of Lisbon, Portugal; Center for Research in
Ethnomusicology, Paris Nanterre University, France

МУЗИКА И ЕМОЦИЈЕ: ТЕРЕНСКО ИСТРАЖИВАЊЕ МЕЂУ ТРАНСИЛВАНИЈСКИМ РОМИМА И НЕКОЛИКО МЕЂУКУЛТУРНИХ ПОРЕЂЕЊА

Филипо Бонини Баралди

Виши научни сарадник, Институт за етномузикологију – Центар за студије
музике и плеса, Факултет друштвених и хуманистичких наука Универзитета
НОВА у Лисабону, Португал; Центар за истраживање у етномузикологији,
Универзитет Париз Нантер, Француска

Received: 6 March 2025

Accepted: 9 May 2025

Original scientific paper

ABSTRACT

In the first part of this article, I analyze the emotional life of a Roma community of Transylvania by describing several performances in which participants cry along with music. This analysis results in a model showing how the relations between musical actions and emotional behaviors change according to the performance context. In the second part, I propose some

* I would especially like to thank all the musicians from Čeušaš, without whom this research would not have been possible. Field and laboratory research on Transylvanian music was supported by French national funding (CNRS, Société française d'ethnomusicologie, Société d'ethnologie). The publication of this paper was supported by Portuguese national funds (FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., Instituto de Ethnomusicologia – Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança), under project references UIDP/00472/2020 and CEECIND/02148/2021.

**  fbaraldi@fcsh.unl.pt  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5024-3789>

theoretical questions on musical emotion by comparing my field data with those coming from other parts of the world. These revolve around notions such as “living quality of the music,” “personal tunes,” “sonic agents,” and “musical empathy.”

KEYWORDS: ethnomusicology, anthropology of the emotions, affects, crying along with music, rituals.

АПСТРАКТ

У првом делу овог чланка анализиран је емотивни живот ромске заједнице у Трансилванији, описивањем неколико извођења током којих учесници плачу уз музику. Ова анализа резултира моделом који приказује како се односи између музичких радњи и емоционалног понашања мењају у зависности од контекста извођења. У другом делу постављена су одређена теоријска питања о музичким емоцијама, до којих се дошло кроз поређење теренских налаза аутора с подацима из других делова света. Та питања односе се на појмове као што су „живи квалитет музике”, „личне мелодије”, „звучни агенси” и „музичка емпатија”.

Кључне речи: етномузикологија, антропологија емоција, афекти, плакање уз музику, ритуали.

INTRODUCTION: MUSIC, EMOTIONS, AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

Why does music move us, sometimes even to tears? Can we really understand the emotional power of music? Which scientific tools and methods are to be used? Despite the growing scope of the cognitive sciences and the development of numerous research projects on the emotions (among others, see: Damasio 1994; Ekman et al. 2003; Lewis et al. 2008), these questions remain largely unanswered.

From the point of view of ethnomusicology, a fundamental hypothesis explains the importance of this research subject: musical emotion can be studied in every cultural context. Molino and Nattiez (2007, 372) observe that “the importance of affects in music [...] does seem to be universal and for McAllester (1971) and several other ethnomusicologists, the [musical] creation of a ‘heightened experience’ is one of the few universals they will accept.” For Becker (2004), physiological arousal, strongly linked to emotional experiences,

would be a universal response to music. The “fathers” of the discipline did not hesitate to point it out: Merriam (1964), in his attempt to determine the general function of music, speaks of “emotional expression,” and Blacking (1973) joins the Venda of South Africa for whom music is essential to the survival of human sentiments.

Although ethnomusicologists do not ignore the close link between music and emotions, they have left this subject largely unexplored. Consequently, scientific research focuses almost exclusively on Western classical music, on the performance mode associated with it (the “composer–performer–listener” model, see Kendall and Carterette 1990), easily reproducible in a laboratory, and on a very ethnocentric concept of the person and the emotions (for a critique, see: Crapanzano 1994; Surrallès 2000; Solomon 2003).

Nevertheless, how can we study musical emotion outside the laboratory, in real performances that take place in different regions of the world? How can we gather information that would allow us to compare musical emotion cross-culturally? The aim of this article is to find an answer to these questions. First, I will analyze the relations between emotions and music in a specific cultural context, that of a Transylvanian Roma community (Romania). This analysis is based on a long-term field research, focused on the observation of several performances in which the participants cry as they listen to or play music. The second objective is to bring out, through that ethnographic description, information on musical emotion that can be compared with findings coming from other regions of the world. My purpose here is not to develop an extensive comparative analysis, but to show what new research questions can emerge. In the longer term, addressing these questions could allow us to determine some of the psychological and social processes which are recurrent, if not universal, in musical emotion.

MUSIC AND TEARS AMONG THE ROMA OF CEUAȘ

Although it is possible, even if not without numerous methodological and ethical problems, to use sophisticated technologies in the field to detect the emotions induced by music (Fritz et al. 2009; Eggermann et al. 2015), the ethnomusicologist relies above all on qualitative observations. Therefore, how can we state that a behavior reveals a particular emotion? How can we differentiate it from another that does not? To “localize” emotional experiences is, from the point of view of ethnomusicology, a major methodological problem. The solution can only be found through long-term fieldwork: learning the local expressive codes allows one to understand if a particular behavior, action, or gesture reveals a particular emotion.

If prolonged fieldwork is the *sine qua non* condition for any anthropological discourse on musical emotion, other methodological choices are necessary to delimit an object of study that may be too general. A way of circumscribing the problem is to concentrate on a type of expression which, in a given cultural context, seems recurrent and more important than others. In my research among Transylvanian Roma, I adopted the following methodological criterion: focusing attention on “musical tears.” This expression designates situations in which tears and music go together – independently of who cries and who produces sounds – thus distinguishing them from circumstances when people cry, but with no music.

This choice does not stem from a romantic view of Roma and their music, but on the contrary, from a need to approach the subject of musical emotion in a rigorous way. First, tears are an easily observable emotional sign, by no other technique than just looking. Even if that does not resolve the problem of understanding the underlying emotions (what one feels), to focus on the crying offers the advantage of circumscribing the emotion in time (when one feels), and in space (who feels). Second, among the Transylvanian Roma, crying along with music has nothing anecdotal about it. One can even say that on most occasions when people cry publicly, there is music. Finally, to concentrate on the tears brings another advantage: to be in harmony with the local point of view according to which “good music is one that moves people to tears” (*muzica bună e cea care te face să plângi*). A good musician has the power to make his public shed tears, to “break their hearts” (*să-i spargă inima*), but can also show appreciation for a good dancer, a good singer, or a good instrumentalist by crying himself. Therefore, in this sociocultural context, “musical tears” reveal something fundamental. But what exactly? This is precisely what the ethnographic analysis aims to discover.

Understanding the Roma’s “musical tears” required circumscribing field research to a small social space, in order to grasp the intimate dimension of the subjective experience and of the interpersonal relations. My research concentrated on a small rural village called Ceuaș (Csávás in Hungarian), where around 700 Hungarian farmers live side by side with 400 Roma. The latter live on an adjacent hill, in a separate neighborhood they call *țigănie* (“the Roma neighborhood,” see Figure 1). The Roma musicians from Ceuaș, the majority being professionals, play in different contexts, such as weddings, baptisms, funerals, and banquets taking place in the villages of the Tîrava Mica region, as well as in concerts or festivals in Romania or abroad (for more details, see Bonini Baraldi 2013; 2021). From the point of view of the relationship between music and tears, these performances can be organized in three major categories: 1) the professional “service”; 2) the spontaneous parties in the Roma neighborhood;

FILIPPO BONINI BARALDI
 MUSIC AND EMOTIONS: A FIELD STUDY AMONG TRANSYLVANIAN ROMA AND
 A FEW CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS



Figure 1. Roma musicians in the *figănie* (Roma neighborhood) of Ceuaș, Transylvania (Romania). Photo by the author, 2005.

and 3) funerals. The observation and comparison of several performances made it possible to determine the main features of each of these three categories.¹

The Professional Service

To refer to the situations in which they are hired to play, Roma musicians use the term “service” (*serviciu*). This term translates the fact that everything must be done to satisfy the audience: make them dance, make them sing, or make them cry. When they are in “service,” musicians follow a golden rule, which is relevant both at a moral and a behavioral level: “to keep their place” (*a sta la locul său*). This is about honoring their commitments and behaving

¹ The analysis presented in this article is based on the observation of several wedding ceremonies, spontaneous parties in the Roma neighborhood, and funerary rituals. These performances are described with greater detail in Bonini Baraldi (2021). Audiovisual field recordings are available online (Bonini Baraldi 2016). Throughout this article, the vernacular Romanian terms are indicated in *italic* and the terms in Romani language are preceded by the abbreviation [ro].

appropriately, that is, fulfilling the contract without becoming involved in the party's excesses. Indeed, whether it is a Roma wedding, a Hungarian banquet, or a Romanian ball, the position of the professional Roma musician is globally the same: he "handles a party which is not his own" (Lortat-Jacob 1994, 107).

The implication of this professional ethic is clear and explicit: the music must "work" (*merge*). The choice of repertoire and the way of interpreting are made pragmatically: to play such and such a tune comes to the same thing, as long as it "works" – that is to say, as long as it has an effect on the public. But what is sought is not a global and abstract musical functioning of the music; the effect of a tune is anchored in the present, according to what is required in every moment. During a banquet in a community center (*cămin cultural*), when the public is seated at tables, the music "works" if it is discreet, to allow the guests to sing and chat. At the heart of wedding ceremonies or during a ball in the Roma neighborhood, if no one dances it is because the music does not "work." Finally, at the end of Transylvanian feasts, the aim is to bring tears, clearly visible or more intimate, to the guests' eyes. At that moment, which generally coincides with dawn, "bitter-sweet" emotions (Demeuldre 2004) take over. The "sorrowful" (*de jale*) tunes, slow and in a non-measured rhythm, predominate during that early morning hours which anticipate the imminent return to work and to a daily life of hardship, recalling memories of youth, the pain of a love lost, the nostalgia of a relative who has died or has gone abroad. Simultaneously, the possibility of sharing subjective feelings in a collective framework represents a reassuring awareness: we live among similar beings, our neighbors are like us, together we form a "community of affects" (Pasqualino 2005).

Towards the end of the party, Roma musicians use subtle strategies to arouse their clients' emotions, often even making them cry. Whereas during the whole "service" they occupied a separate space, at that moment they "step into the midst of the tables" (*a merge între mese*) to play closer to the ears of the guests, seated in small groups.² In this more intimate setting, when women had already left the party and men prefer drinking and singing rather than dancing, musicians play each client's "personal tune" (*melodia lui*), which can be associated to a song or not. The "personal tune" is something more than a favorite one: it is a musical synthesis of a set of aesthetic preferences, conscious memories, implicit reminiscences, the one that makes a specific person "vibrate," rendering him/her emotionally vulnerable. By the proximity created between musicians and guests and thanks to the knowledge that the first have about the latter, it is a "resonance"³ effect between the music and

² See Bonini Baraldi 2016 – V2, 42:45.

³ I use the concept of resonance here in its literary meaning: "Effect of what resonates in the

the clients' souls that is sought during the final phase of the Transylvanian weddings or banquets.

A good professional musician is the one who knows how to activate (profitability for the present) and to memorize (investment for the future) these resonances, these affinities among tunes and persons. Indeed, to make a client sing and eventually cry while playing his personal tune, implies to receive in exchange some tips (*baçşiş*). "As soon as I see him, I know what his song is!" – guarantees Csángáló, one of the village's oldest musicians, revealing that the professional "service" is based on a particular knowledge of the habits and tastes of the guests, including those living in other villages of the region, reaching very individualized levels. Indeed, when people in Ceuaş say that "a Gypsy is like the devil" (*Țiganu'e ca dracu*), they point to this skill that the professional musician has to "read" in his clients' souls, to understand how they feel or, in other words, to establish an empathetic relationship with them.

Spontaneous Parties in the Roma Neighborhood of Ceuaş

The second context in which tears and music "go together" occurs in a set of more intimate and spontaneous performances which take place in the Roma neighborhood of Ceuaş. It is the case of the "parties" ([ro] *chefuri*) that musicians organize among themselves just after having played at weddings, or small family celebrations (baptisms, birthdays, etc.). In the first case, the women of the house are busy cooking for the musicians, while in the second case, they drink with the men and take a more active part in the party. In both cases, the musicians are neither paid nor hired; they have therefore no professional duties to their audience and now play for themselves, in a circle, facing each other. As opposed to professional situations, in which the lead violinist has the responsibility to conduct the group and choose the repertoire according to the tastes of the guests, here the relationship among the musicians is free from any hierarchy. Each one can play whatever and whenever he wants, ties come undone, postures relax, and alcohol flows freely.

During these parties, it is not uncommon to see the musicians cry, while the audience remains on the fringe of that emotional expression. The Roma use the word *supărare* to explain their emotional state when they cry while playing music. This term indicates a mixture of sadness, sorrow, bitterness, as well as irritation, annoyance, anger. The experience of *supărare* is always temporary,

soul, echo, repercussion," which is in turn based on a physical phenomenon "by which a vibrating physical system can reach a very great amplitude, when the exciting vibration approaches the 'natural frequency' of that system" (Robert 2007).

with a well-defined beginning and end, and can repeat itself several times, unexpectedly. If it must be brief and end rapidly, it is because it is perceived as potentially dangerous – it is an emotional crisis that can “break the heart” (*sparge inimă*). At the same time, *supărare* is also conceived as a liberating, cathartic experience. “It is done!” (*Gata!*), Roma musicians say, adding that the “pain” (*dor*) has passed, that something “came out” (*s-a dus*).

The cathartic crisis of *supărare* is accompanied by a precise musical sequence. It is always initiated by *de jale* repertoire, comprised of *doine* (slow instrumental tunes or songs in a non-measured rhythm) or *de masă* tunes (slow instrumental tunes or songs in *aksak* rhythm).⁴ Tears stop systematically when musicians follow up with fast tunes in a binary rhythm (*de csingherit*), which eventually mark the transition to dancing. The involvement of the body thus offers a possible deliverance from thoughts that “come to the head” (*vin în cap, vin în minte*) and from the pain that “makes the heart ache” (*doare înima*).

During the *supărare* crisis, the musician is entirely turned towards his own personal experiences, his own memories, his own sphere of emotional relationships. His loved ones come to mind, always under the guise of painful characters: a deceased father, a sick child, a lonely daughter away from home, a brother who is in jail. It is the music that evokes these dear ones, chiefly belonging to the family circle: the musician cries while playing “his mother’s,” “his father’s,” or “his brother’s” tunes, those that they loved to sing or dance to. Music, therefore, contributes to opening up an affective sphere which is neither personal nor belonging to others, but which drifts into a wider network of close relations. The musician is overtaken by his own pain and that of his loved ones, he “sways” between sorrow and pity. That is what the accordionist Béla seems to suggest when he states, crying while playing a *doină*: “It is my family who is crying, not me...”⁵

When musicians play among and for themselves, it is no longer a question of understanding their clients’ feelings to take advantage of them, but rather to build up an exacerbated sentiment of unity, a necessary condition for *supărare* to express itself. In these moments, the Roma address each other with the expression “my brother” ([ro] *mîro phral*), which indicates an affectionate closeness, a desire to surmount conflicts, to reach a relationship of equals.⁶ The proximity is also physical, often including hugging and embracing. The tears

⁴ The lyrics of one of these *doină* are presented in Bonini Baraldi (2021, 76). Other examples are available online (Bonini Baraldi 2016 – A3 and A5).

⁵ See Bonini Baraldi 2016 – V5, 11:30.

⁶ The importance of the feeling of brotherhood for the Roma has been attested in other communities, such as the Hungarian Vlach (Stewart 1997) and the Andalusian Gitanos (Pasqualino 1998).

of *supărare* that are shed while playing one's "personal tune" in these intimate performances can therefore be explained by a co-existence of these two existential conditions: living emotional relations with unapproachable beings (the deceased father, the daughter who is far away, the son who is in prison, etc.) and, simultaneously, the exacerbated closeness with one's "brothers" (the other musicians attending the party). In this perspective, the *supărare* is associated with the feeling of being psychologically torn apart between two contradictory experiences – between a heightened sense of togetherness (*hic et nunc*) and a sharp awareness of the gulf separating the self from his or her loved ones.

Funerals

In Ceuaș, when a Roma dies, the funerary wake at the home of the deceased must be quickly organized, two nights running, before the burial in the cemetery on the third day. Apart from some *Gaje* (non-Roma), who are only present in their institutional roles (the priest, the doctor, etc.), the entire Roma community participates.

Death renews not just the cleavage between the deceased and the living, but it also redefines social relations among the latter, according to a clear and yet fragile opposition between those who are "relatives" (*neamuri*), and those who are "outsiders" (*străini*, literally "strangers") to the deceased. *Neamuri* and *străini* are not fixed categories, determined by family relationships which are precise and unchanging. In such a small village, the network of relations is so dense and intricate that for certain people it is a question of deciding if, in that specific situation, they would rather be on the side of the "relatives" or the "outsiders."

Only the women of the *neamuri* approach the coffin to publicly manifest their grief, proffering ritual laments ([ro] *rovare! din ando bari mui*, literally "crying with your mouth wide open").⁷ Such behavior would be considered inappropriate or even offensive if acted out by the *străini*, since it could be perceived as a sign of unjustified affective proximity. On the contrary, the crying of the *străini* is more intimate and expressed only by tears, not words ([ro] *rovav an mande*, literally "I cry within myself, intimately"). All the social dynamism associated with death is structured on the interaction of these two different emotional attitudes, for if the *neamuri* are expected to show their grief publicly, the *străini* are expected to observe and take part in it. In other words, a wake is successful when the *neamuri* can engage the *străini* in an

⁷ For a full analysis of the textual, acoustical, and musical features of a funeral lament, see Interactive Animation available online (Bonini Baraldi 2016 – AI1).

emotional dimension, to act so that they may feel *milă* (“pity, compassion”) and are able to cry for a deceased person who is not “their own.”

The analysis of the funerary ritual clarified the techniques that are at work to create *milă* relationships among those who are present (Bonini Baraldi 2021). It is mainly about sonic actions: the laments proffered by women and the instrumental music played by men.⁸ The voices of the weepers arouse compassion in the audience in a more immediate and direct way: the sobs, the hiccups, and the voice breaking recall ordinary crying, and those sound features are among the most powerful vectors of emotional contagion, beyond all cultural frontiers (Urban 1988, Meyer et al. 1998). On the other hand, the texts of the laments awaken the *milă* of the audience in a more elaborate manner, for they require a knowledge of local kinship relations. Indeed, to pronounce a lament is a means of building a network of kinship where all *neamuri* are summoned, both dead and alive.

Music also acts as a powerful means to establish and propagate relationships of pity and compassion. Roma musicians, who attend the funeral wake even if they are not relatives of the deceased, play instrumental suites composed by *de jale* and *de joc* (“dancing”) tunes near the coffin. This repertoire is not specific to funerals and one can hear the same melodies on other occasions, specifically at weddings (Bonini Baraldi 2009).⁹ To understand how the music helps to induce tears, one must not stop at the equation “sorrowful music = feeling of sorrow” and “dance music = release of the feeling of sorrow.” Instead, everyone in Ceuaș seems to agree that during the wakes people cry because the musicians play “the melodies of the deceased” ([ro] *mulheskre zilyi*), or those of other departed persons. Whether they are *de jale* or *de joc*, the tunes are “imbued” with images of the deceased, of their daily habits, of the loving relationships with those who were close to them. Therefore, the music provides sonic images that help the weepers find the words for their laments and allow the *străini* to give a reference to their *jale* (“sorrow”) so that it can be lived out in the intersubjective mode of *milă* (“pity, compassion”).¹⁰

⁸ The film *Crying for the Dead* (Bonini Baraldi 2015 [2005]) shows how the laments and instrumental music act together to create an emotional intensity typical of Roma funerary wakes. See also Bonini Baraldi 2016 – V8, 1:15.

⁹ See Bonini Baraldi 2016 – V8.

¹⁰ The importance of “personal tunes” tunes in the context of bereavement is striking in the celebration of the 1 November (All Saints’ Day), when musicians go through the cemetery playing the melodies of each one of the deceased. See Bonini Baraldi 2016 – V7.

A FEW CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS

The second aim of this article is to come up with more general questions on the subject of musical emotion by comparing the findings of my own fieldwork with those obtained in other regions of the world. But what can we compare exactly? Indeed, when we move from an ethnographic study to a transcultural perspective, it is necessary to find data that are best adapted to comparison. My way of finding these data consists in bringing out the similarities and differences among the three above-described situations of “musical tears.”

The model presented in Figure 2 illustrates the main differences between the professional service, the spontaneous parties in the Roma neighborhood, and the funerals. The concentric form of this model aims to emphasize the contrast, from the point of view of the musician, between an internal and an external “emotional regime” (Reddy 2001). The first, symbolized by the heart, is ruled by the expression of personal feelings in the fraternal relationships circle, whereas the second, symbolized by the dollar, is determined by a practice oriented outwardly, the “sale” of emotions to clients, a practice based on power relations and money. Numerous factors stand right in the middle of this axis which sets professional services off against the parties in the Roma neighborhood and allows placing the funerary ritual in the intermediary circle.

This model offers an initial base of comparison with other cultural contexts. For instance, in Arabic countries, professional musicians experience moments of great emotional intensity when they play in small groups, spontaneously, just after having honored their contract in bars or clubs (Racy 2003). The type of feelings involved and the type of performance closely resemble those encountered in the spontaneous parties among the Roma musicians of Ceuaș. We can find the same strategies to elicit emotions in the clients in the professional “service” of Moldavian musicians (Stoichiță 2008), as well as among the Roma musicians in Kosovo and Metohija (Pettan 2002). Moreover, the same desire to satisfy the clients’ preferences and to elicit their emotions are at stake among Yemenite musicians (Lambert 1997) and certainly elsewhere. Yet, these three modes differ radically from the model of “emotional communication” typical of Western classical performance, according to which an emotional message is coded by a composer in a score, transmitted by way of an interpreter, and decoded by a listener who shall, possibly, experience an emotion (Kendall and Carterette 1990). In Ceuaș, it is never a question of communicating emotions through the music, but rather of producing them in the client (professional service), of expressing them in an intimate performance (spontaneous parties), and of sharing them publicly (funerals).

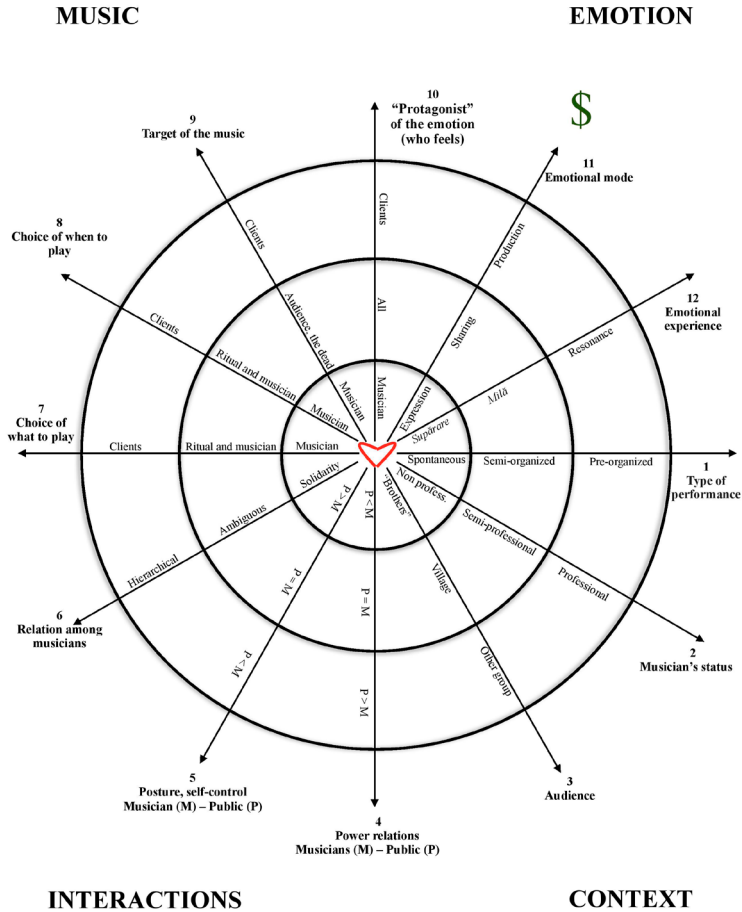


Figure 2. Synthesis of the three emotional modes prevailing in the musical life of the Roma of Ceuaș:

1) the production of emotion during professional service (exterior circle), when musicians seek a resonance effect between the music and the guests' souls in order to increase their economic benefit; 2) the sharing of the emotion in funerals (middle circle), when music acts as a means to establish and propagate relationships of pity and compassion (*milă*); and 3) the expression of emotion during the spontaneous parties in the Roma neighborhood (interior circle), when musicians cry of *supărare* (sorrow-anger) among brothers. The main differences among the three emotional modes concern twelve factors, related to the type of context (degree of performance organization, economic stakes, audience type); the interactions between participants (power relations between the musicians (M) and the public (P), posture and self-control, hierarchy among musicians); the organization of musical repertoire (what to play, when to play, for whom to play); and the way emotions are expressed (the main "protagonists" of the emotional experience, relation between emotions and musical actions, type of feelings).

Other comparisons of this type might establish a typology and a precise taxonomy of the relations between music, emotion, and performance context, which would come close, from a methodological point of view, to what Rouget (1985) proposed for the study of trance.¹¹ They would also allow to propose more general hypotheses about the way in which each emotional mode “works.” For instance, if one finds that, in two different societies, musicians have to respect the same prescription of not expressing or even feeling emotions, but must instead arouse them in their audience, this enables the comparison of strategies deployed in each of the cases. If these strategies are similar – for example seeking to activate biographical memories in the listeners by playing their “personal” tunes – this suggests that there are recurrent relations among musical actions and emotional processes.

The second way of extracting comparable data on musical emotion from the ethnographic context studied here consists of determining the similarities between the three situations of “musical tears” previously described. These concern: 1) a repertoire explicitly linked to the feeling of “sorrow” (*jale*); 2) a tendency to associate specific persons with musical tunes (the “personal” melodies); and 3) a quality of the subject which the Roma name *milos* (empathic). Such invariants can be considered as focal points, or deep structures, of musical emotion among the Roma living in this region, in the sense that they are not affected by the context or the type of performance. For this reason, they are good candidates for transcultural comparison.

Sorrowful Tunes and Music’s “Quality of Life”

In Ceuaș, Roma use the term *de jale* to name a part of their musical repertoire, composed of tunes in a non-measured rhythm (*doine*) or in an *aksak* rhythm and slow tempo (*de masă*, [ro] *meseliecri*). The “sorrowful” tunes are played in all three contexts of the above-described “musical tears,” which indicates that they play a fundamental role in eliciting the listener’s or performer’s emotions. What are the formal properties of these tunes, and how can we relate these with the participants’ emotional experiences?

The harmonic-melodic structure does not seem to define the “sorrowful” tunes in any unequivocal way. Even if the majority of these tunes are played in a minor mode with accompaniment in major chords, that is not specific to the *doine* and the *meseliecri*, and numerous dance melodies are also played in this way. Together with the rhythmical structure, two other parameters

¹¹ The comparison of numerous rituals and musical performances allowed Rouget (1985) to present a precise taxonomy (“shamanism,” “emotional trance,” “induced trance,” “conducted trance,” etc.) to distinguish situations in which the relationship between music and possession follows different rules.

differentiate the “sorrowful” repertoire from all other musical genres, and more precisely, the subtle asynchronies between melody and accompaniment, and an exacerbated ornamentation of the melodic line, which the musicians refer to by the concept of “sweetness” (*dulceață*, see Bonini Baraldi et al. 2015).

The term “sweetness” occupies a central place in the local discourse on musical emotion: if music has the power to make tears flow, it is precisely because musicians know how to play “with sweetness”; inversely, the one who “does not know what sweetness is,” “makes the audience laugh” (*a face să râdă*). By lending a perpetual movement to the notes (trills, vibrato, mordents, glissandos, etc.), the musician who has sweetness “in his heart, in his head, and in his fingers” (*în inimă, în cap, și în degete*) is supposed to “give life” (*bagă viața*) to a sonic matter which is, originally, something inert. According to the local discourse, it is precisely that very quality of “life” that confers an emotional potential to the sweet-sorrowful *de jale* tunes.

Now, to associate ornaments with the emotional “power” of music seems to be a common fact in other regions of the world. In the case of instrumental music from central Asia, During (2004, 145) observes that “it is the moaning and the sighs of the lute which delight the music lovers. [...] Of the one that does not play these ornaments, it will be said that he has no pain (*dard*), that his hand is dry.” Sachs (1943) observed that in South-Eastern Asian music, ornaments are necessary so that they can “appeal to the heart.” From baroque music in the West to Jewish liturgical music, the *chazzanuth* of Eastern Europe, the Indian saying according to which “a melody without ornament is like a night without a moon, a river without water, a vine without flowers, or a woman without jewels” (Meyer 1956, 205) seems to be widely accepted.

As ethnomusicologists working in the field, we may verify if in different cultures we can find the same tendency, the same effort to confer a “pulsing quality of life” to music, so as to increase its emotional effectiveness. If this is the case, we might further inquire: What acoustic properties are necessary for the music to be perceived as being “alive”? Could that “living quality” of the music be linked to the idea of movement, obtained by different expressive means (vibrato, trills, glissandos, etc.)? If comparative research concentrates on notions such as beauty or musical taste (see Fernando and Rappoport 2015), I believe that it would also be useful to develop a comparative analysis on the idea of sonic/musical life, a criterion which could be linked in a fundamental manner to the emotional power of artistic artifacts (see Bonini Baraldi 2015).

Personal Tunes

In Ceuaș, other musical genres can accompany “musical tears,” even the dance tunes (*de joc*) in binary rhythm and fast tempos. This indicates that

the formal characteristics of the *de jale* (i.e. “sorrowful”) tunes are a possible source of emotion, but that they are not the only ones and are perhaps not even the most important factor (Bonini Baraldi 2009). Indeed, the analysis confirmed that, in all three described situations, music arouses emotions not so much for its formal properties, but rather for the relationship it maintains with specific persons.

How are these associations between tunes and persons formed? Some recognize their own story in the text of a song, others associate a melody with a precise moment in their life, others will explain their relationship with a particular melody by simply saying: “That’s how it is!” (*Așa este!*). In this last case, they refer to an affinity between persons and tunes rooted in the unconscious, not reducible to precise causes, comparable with those particularly strong affinities that can exist between two individuals. Even if the “owners” of the tunes are not always recognized unanimously, everyone agrees that musicians know the relations between melodies and persons better than anyone, as if they have the role of the “archives” of local memory.

In Western classical music, the association between sonic forms and particular entities (divinities, persons, etc.) is almost non-existent, which is why in scientific literature one simply speaks of a simple effect of episodic memory, known under the expression “Darling, that is *our* tune” (Juslin and Västfjäll 2008). However, the process of “musical personification” is common in different cultures around the world: it has been observed in other Eastern European regions (Sárosi 1971; Stewart 1997; Bouët et al. 2002; Stoichiță 2008), as well as in more distant societies. Among the Suyá in Brazilian Amazonia, “personal” songs contribute to asserting parental relationships, just as body ornaments, which differ for each sub-group in the community (Seeger 1987). Elsewhere, these associations concern non-human agents: deities (a case which is very frequent in trance rituals, see Rouget 1985), animals, or other entities, as long as they are perceived as alive. In the possession rituals that take place in Bastar (India) described by Prévôt (2014), the divinities are summoned to the “market of the gods” (*dev bazar*) by playing “their” tunes so as to establish a dialogue with them. Music is neither a simple call to the spirit, nor a representation of the spirit, but rather the spirit itself, which manifests in its sonic form. Among the Candoshi in Peruvian Amazonia (Surrallès 2003), each animal or animal species has “its song.” When the singer-hunter pronounces one of these songs-incantations to favor the hunt, he is supposed to transform into the member of the species that he wants to hunt.¹²

¹² Other examples of identification with an agent through sound are provided in Bonini Baraldi (2024).

The notion of "sonic agents" (Bonini Baraldi 2017) or "sonic beings" (Stoichiță and Brabec de Mori 2017), has been introduced to refer to those situations where a musical structure (a rhythm, a melody, etc.) is associated in a durable manner with a living being and is, at least partly, treated as if it was that very being. Several questions emerge: What type of interactions takes place between "sonic agents" and human beings? What happens in our brain and in our body when we engage in a relationship (or when we identify with) a "personified" musical form? Can we speak of "musical anthropomorphism" and call upon the theories proposed by anthropologists specialized in this subject (among others, see Boyer 1996)? How can we integrate the issue of sonic agents into a theoretical approach to musical meaning and emotion? These are open and intriguing questions that should concern both ethnomusicologists and cognitive scientists.

The Empathic Subject

Together with the musical properties of the *de jale* repertoire and the "personification" of specific tunes, the comparison of the three types of performances described above suggests that being "empathic" (*milos*) is a necessary condition for music to be associated with tears. What does this quality – no longer of music, but of person – have to do with musical emotion?

In Ceuș, the *milos* subject is, literally, the one who has *milă*, who is sensitive, inclined to have compassion and generosity toward the others. This term is also used to qualify the one who cries while playing or listening to the tunes of his/her beloved, as well as the one who attends funerals with an explicit expectation of crying for a deceased person who is not part of his family. But one can attribute a broader sense to that term: being *milos* also means being someone who knows how to attract the *milă* of his interlocutor, one whose actions are based on the understanding of how another is feeling, like the musician who seeks to touch a sensitive side of his client to obtain a tip. That is a more general sense of the expression "being *milos*": to act in the world based on the understanding of someone else's feelings. The Roma of Ceuș perceive that quality of the subject as a fundamental characteristic of their identity. "We are," they say, "more *mișoși* than the *Gajé* (the non-Roma)"; together, we form an "emotional minority" (Bonini Baraldi 2008), contrasting with the dominant manner of organizing the affects in the *Gaji* (non-Roma) society.

Now, the Romanian term *milă* can be translated as "pity," "compassion," or more generally, "empathy." The challenge for cross-cultural research would be, therefore, to understand if those same notions are used in other societies in relation to music, especially when emotions are involved. To give an example, in her research among the Ifaluk of Micronesia, Lutz (1988) analyzed the

numerous meanings of the term *fago*, a term that expresses fundamental values in local interpersonal relations and that the author translates as compassion/love/sadness. In an almost identical manner as the explanation given by the Roma for *milă*, it so happens that the Ifaluk say that they feel *fago* not just for a deceased or a suffering person, but also for music. In a similar fashion, Feld (1982) observes that among the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea, the prefix *gese* designates not just the act of inspiring pity (particularly in the case of a child crying), but also a very precise musical form, the descending interval of major second. Furthermore, Throop (2011) observes that among the Yap of Micronesia there is a strong propensity for compassion for the suffering of others, explicit in the recurrent expression *kab amiithum ngeak* (literally: “here is his pain”). These feelings of pity and compassion are also at the heart of a particular musical repertoire, where the expression *be liyeg amiithuun* (“his pain, or his suffering is killing me”) is frequently found. The effect of these songs is to generate the same feelings in the listener, to summon his empathy.

All these examples suggest that the semantic fields of pity, compassion, and empathy are used to describe the emotions induced by certain musical forms, and sometimes to name those same musical forms. This result diverges from the scientific research on the Western classical repertoire (Sloboda and Juslin 2010), where one speaks of gaiety, serenity, sadness, anger, fear, calm, surprise, but never of pity, compassion, empathy for (or with) music. New questions then arise. Is it necessary to have empathic dispositions to be able to be moved by music? Would opening oneself up to others and to music come under the same faculty? Is the role of empathy in collective performances more emphasized in societies where the relational dimension prevails over individualism, where solidarity is a response to material difficulties, where kinship relations are more intricate? Does music constitute a privileged domain for empathy, a means of reasserting its place at the heart of human relations?

Despite the general nature of these questions, the fundamental idea that comes through is the following: if we want to understand the emotional “power” of artistic artifacts, we need to explore the functioning of that human faculty which relies on the attribution of intentions and emotions to people and things (empathy). This question is of great scientific relevance today: the models explaining the perception of emotional content in terms of the mental processing of abstract forms are progressively being replaced by others, advancing the fundamental role of faculties such as simulation, corporeal imitation, empathic animation (among others, see Pinotti 1997; Gell 1998; Freedberg and Gallese 2007; Leman 2007). Unlike a great part of this research, that has the tendency to explain a macroscopic fact (the emotional effects of artistic artifacts) from a microscopic level (specifically, the process of “mirror”

neurons, considered the basis of intersubjective empathy), the challenge for ethnomusicologists is to develop a veritable anthropological paradigm on empathy, based on numerous examples coming from the most diversified world cultures (see Hollan and Throop 2011).

CONCLUSION

Scientific studies on musical emotion are generally confined to the case of Western classical music, to the performance model associated with it, and to an ethnocentric conception of the person and the emotion. To reach more general hypotheses on this vast and complex research subject, it is necessary to study the relationship between music and human emotions in other societies and to compare data from a transcultural perspective.

The first objective of this article was to analyze how music and emotions are related in a specific ethnographic context: a small Roma village in Transylvania (Romania). Here, the types of performance, just as the manner of feeling and expressing emotions, radically differ from Western norms and habits. My methodology focused on the description, analysis, and interpretation of three types of performances in which music and tears go together.

The second objective was to outline a transcultural approach to musical emotion. My ambition here was not to develop an extensive analysis, but to show which new questions could emerge by comparing my data with those coming from other parts of the world. At first, I highlighted the differences among the three types of “musical tears” previously described. This resulted in a model which synthesizes the emotional modes among the Roma of Ceuaș. This model also intends to show how the relations between musical actions and emotional behaviors change according to the performance context and, in this aspect, it may be considered as a reliable starting point for transcultural comparison.

In a second phase, the linking of the three situations of “musical tears” hinged more on their common points than on their differences. This enabled the highlighting of focal points, or deep structures of the relationships between music and emotion among the Roma of Ceuaș in the sense that they are not affected by the performance context. The interlinking of these three factors with data coming from other societies has opened new questions regarding the problem of musical emotion. These revolve around notions such as living quality of the music, personal melodies or sonic agents, and musical empathy. In my opinion, future comparative research on these subjects could lead to more general – and less ethnocentric – hypotheses on the relationship between music and human emotions.

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FILIPPO BONINI BARALDI
MUSIC AND EMOTIONS: A FIELD STUDY AMONG TRANSYLVANIAN ROMA AND
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RESEARCH MATERIAL

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ФИЛИПО БОНИНИ БАРАЛДИ

МУЗИКА И ЕМОЦИЈЕ: ТЕРЕНСКО ИСТРАЖИВАЊЕ МЕЂУ ТРАНСИЛВАНИЈСКИМ РОМИМА И НЕКОЛИКО МЕЂУКУЛТУРНИХ ПОРЕЂЕЊА

(Резиме)

Први циљ ове студије јесте анализа односа између музике и емоција у малој ромској заједници у Трансилванији (Румунија). Пажња је усмерена на опис и тумачење следеће три врсте извођења, у којима музика и сузе теку истовремено: 1) професионално „услужно” свирање, где ромски музичари настоје да емоционално дирну своје клијенте, бирајући најприкладније мелодије; 2) спонтане забаве у ромском насељу, где је изазов да се изгради осећај братства кроз емоцију *supărare* [мешавина туге и љутње]; и 3) сахране, где музика и плач доприносе стварању осећања *milă* [саосећања, сажаљења, емпатије], што представља кључну одлику ромског идентитета.

Други циљ је да се предложи нека међукултурна поређења у вези с музичком емоцијом. Прво истичем разлике између три контекста у којима се јављају „музичке сузе”. То доводи до модела који синтетише промене односа између музичких радњи и емоционалног понашања у

зависности од контекста извођења. Даље, анализа сличности између три ситуације у којима долази до „музичких суза” истиче три „жаришне тачке” или „дубоке структуре” односа између музике и емоције међу Ромима из Чеуаша, у смислу да оне нису условљене самим контекстом извођења. То су: 1) репертоар који је експлицитно повезан с осећањем жалости, сачињен од *de jale* [жалосних] мелодија које су „оживљене” преко појачане орнаментике; 2) процес повезивања одређених мелодија с одређеним особама; и 3) склоност субјекта да буде *tilos* [емпатичан]. Преплитање ова три фактора с подацима из других друштава отвара нова питања у вези с проблемом музичке емоције. Они се односе на појмове као што су „живи квалитет музике”, „личне мелодије”, „звучни агенси” и „музичка емпатија”.