

Fabricants d'émotion

*Musique et malice
dans un village tzigane de Roumanie*

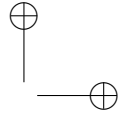
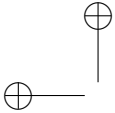
par

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S U M M A R Y

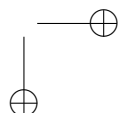
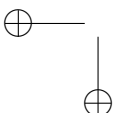
ZECE PRĂJINI IS A SMALL VILLAGE in the centre of the Moldavian region. It is special in two ways: firstly, unlike most Romanian villages, the majority of Zece Prăjini's inhabitants describe themselves as Gypsies or *Rroma*¹; secondly, music making is their main source of financial income. Such professional musicians are called *lăutari* (in Romanian) or *başabghiarea* (in Gypsy language). They perform at weddings, christenings, funerals, village feasts and fairs. Most of their clients are Romanians who live in the countryside or in one of the small towns in the area. The Moldavian *lăutari* currently play in two kinds of bands: brass bands — named *fanfare* — and smaller amplified ensembles, named *orchestre*. Both of them are described page 203.

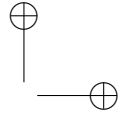
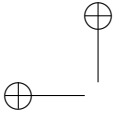
Şmecheri AND *ciorani* The Prăjinians say that technical creativity, but also lying, camouflage, speculation and fantasy all stem from a single intellectual aptitude, which is also an attitude towards the outside world. Several words can be used to refer to it, either in Romanian or in Gypsy. Two of them cover this entire semantic field: «*şmecherie*» and «*ciorănie*», which can be translated respectively as «cunning» and «slyness» («ruse» and «malice» in the French text). This translation and the way the two terms stand for the rest of the vocabulary of trickiness are discussed on page 2 and following.

One can be *şmecher* or *cioran* by manipulating village gossip, family intrigues, or the hopes and fears of the others, by outsmarting someone in negotiation (although the *şmecher* avoids plain fraud), or by mending a car engine through a clever but unlikely fix. In their broadest sense, *şmecherie* and *ciorănie* refer to a kind of cleverness and a way of interacting with humans or with artefacts. They do not suggest, by themselves, anything musical in particular.

However, the *lăutari* and their friends explain that professional success in the *lăutărie* involves the same principles as negotiating, repairing and inventing. A *lăutar* can be cunning when dealing with his

1. Throughout the text, I use Gypsy and *Rrom* as equivalents, for reasons explained p. 13 ff.





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listeners, but also while performing a tune: one can say that he plays «with guile» or «with cleverness», and it is possible to isolate portions of his performance as «tricks». This trickiness may serve to camouflage technical inabilities or to conceal memory gaps. But it is also — and more frequently — considered as the grounds of the best musicians' virtuosity.

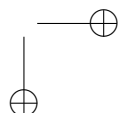
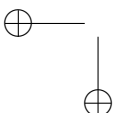
By combining ethnography with musical analysis, I have tried to shed a light on cunning and slyness, as ways of using and understanding circuitousness. This study draws on previous works on this topic. The most important influences were Détienne et Vernant (1974), Certeau (1980: 12,22) and Jullien (2002 et 2005), as well as manuals for military strategists (Clausewitz 1886, Sun Tzu 1972) and compilations of enthusiastic amateurs (like the famous *Book of ruse*, translated by Khawam 1976). What the Prăjinians bring into focus is the link which binds cleverness to a certain conception of pleasure, emotion and, perhaps, beauty.

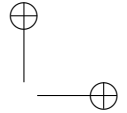
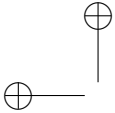
1. *The music factory*

The first part of the book is about being a *lăutar* and a *Rrom* in this part of Romania. As far as statistics are concerned, the link is clear: most professional musicians are Gypsies. Various historical arguments have been proposed to explain this statistic. However, the Prăjinians (agreeing in this respect, with their Romanian neighbours) also give another reason: they say that *Rroma* are specially «gifted» for emotional manipulation. This is usually a negative characterisation. But in relation to music, such a «natural inclination» tends to be considered as an advantage for them.

In a Moldavian feast, the *lăutari* are hired to act, not to communicate. As a result, in their own words, neither «talent» nor «pleasure» matter: emotional efficiency simply involves knowledge and devotion to the work (both may be more or less developed). For the audience, good music does not necessarily reflect the musicians' inner sentiments. Listeners do not attribute their own feelings to the supposed «sincerity» of the performance but directly to the sonic properties of what is being played.

Considered alone, melodies are supposed to have «characters»: some are said to be mournful, others are happy, others lively, some are good for walking, some for drinking, some for dancing... A good *lăutar* understands what kind of emotion is needed for a given moment and





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seems to «adapt» the music to his listeners' expectations. But when the musicians talk about their activity, they do not appear to «serve» their listeners: rather, they manipulate them.

An important feature of musical cleverness consists in this capacity of insinuation and surreptitious action. The *lăutari* deploy techniques to impress, to urge listeners to dance, to obtain a break by tiring the dancers, to make a tip (*baçiş*) unavoidable... Some techniques have to do with speech and general presentation of self, while others unfold only through music. Some are well known and conventional, while others are recent, innovative and rather individual. Usually the latter are also more efficient.

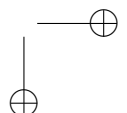
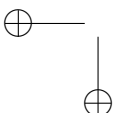
To put it briefly, musicians like to speak about themselves as «emotion makers». Comparing their activity to a craft allows them to present it as a «proper job», to negotiate its status and remuneration, in a society consisting mainly of peasants (who sometimes play music but treat it as a mere hobby). This can be understood even without reference to the actual detail of what they play. However, professional musicians also qualify as «tricks» and «mischiefs» some specifically musical behaviours.

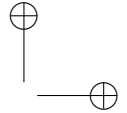
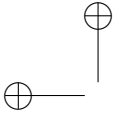
2. *What is a melody?*

Everything I play is *ciorănie*. Everything is stolen, from one guy or another... *Ciorănie* means that you listen to someone and you steal his *şmecherii*, you try to copy him. For me, this is just what music is about. If I had to invent it myself... Well, sometimes ideas also come to my mind, things that I have never heard before. This is my own fantasy. But if you rely on this to play... No, you rely on what you hear from others. You take a bit from him, a bit from another, you mix in a bit of yours... That is *ciorănia*.

Didic, saxophone player (quoted p. 135).

TUNES AND MOTIVES Every time it is learned and played back, a tune goes through a process of sectioning and recombination, which may be more or less accurate. To replay or modify a tune, the musicians break it up into smaller segments, which they treat as elementary units. Most tunes seem to be obviously divided into separate parts and motifs, linked by multiple patterns of symmetry, inversion, repetition and other





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formal processes. This analysis is discussed in chapters VI and VIII, and illustrated by several interactive documents on the DVD².

This kind of modular composition has already received attention in several ethnomusicological studies. What I bring into focus is the fact that musicians' freedom is not limited to combining pre-defined elements. It relies even more on a subjective partitioning of the performances heard.

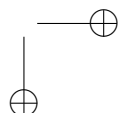
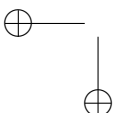
In Zece Prăjini, there is no consensual stock of motifs, which would be transmitted by tradition. The motifs cannot even be numbered, for two reasons at least. Firstly, there is no clear-cut limit between the variants of one motif and those of another. Secondly, many musical forms (tunes, parts, etc.) can be decomposed in different ways, and these are not always compatible (see for example fig. 8 page 144). This means that what is perceived as the minimal organisational level of a given performance is prone to vary from one listener to another. All *lăutari* being primarily listeners, what some of them treat as a unit may be broken with greater detail by others, or even by themselves at another moment.

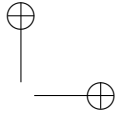
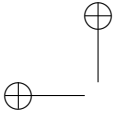
In the end, each performance stands as a highly structured ensemble where improvisation is not supposed to play any role. Between performances however, the tunes dissolve and recombine with an astonishing facility. This is the gap in which «cleverness» develops.

MUSIC AND TECHNICAL INVENTION The *lăutari* tend to treat music as grounds for competition and to view it as a constantly improving technique. One often hears that this or that tune has «progressed» (*a progresat*). Other metaphors are common such as «to speculate [on] the melodic line» (*a specula linia melodică*) or to «yield profit from the sound's value» (*a fructifica valoarea sunetului*). Underlying these expressions, the logic of (pretty) enhancements is that they are discovered in the tune, not added to it (see chapter X p. 184 ff).

The idea that music is a technical device, progressing through astuteness and contextual imagination, allows the *lăutari* to think the constant renewal of their repertoire. Their «melodies» (*melodii*) are not made up *ex-nihilo*. As Didic says, «everything is stolen, from one guy or

2. This kind of document (see docs. 1, 2 or 3 for example) allows a «paradigmatic» listening of the performances. The reader can either listen to the whole tunes or isolate small musical sequences in order to compare them acoustically. Some of these analyses are backed by conventional transcriptions in the main text. However, the interactive examples have the advantage of being close to the kind of mental operation that the *lăutari* practice daily (also, as a side effect, they do not require the reader to be familiar with musical theory).





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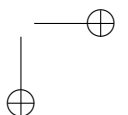
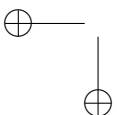
another...». Nevertheless, it is still frequent to hear that this or that tune is «new». A dozen of «new» *melodii* thus come into fashion every summer, while others sink imperceptibly into oblivion.

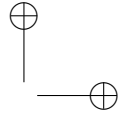
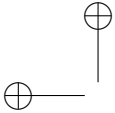
What the *melodii* are should be easy to understand — at least nobody in the region is surprised by their properties — but it appears to be difficult to conceptualise in musicological terms. In Zece Prăjini, it is common sense that the same *melodie* can be played as a *horă* or as a *sârbă* (two different musical genres, see p. 205 for a description and doc. 3 for an example), that changing a part for another does not necessarily change the *melodie*, that it can be played on an instrument or another... But few listeners are able to keep track of this chain of variants (and few actually try to). At some point, they stop speaking about one *melodie* and start counting two. It is impossible to identify the degree of variation beyond which the melodic models break apart and multiply.

What gives consistence to the *melodii* identified by the Moldavian listeners is not their acoustic shape. The role these entities assume in musical interactions is more decisive: they are invested with an agency which allows them to persist in-between performances and act in ways perceived as autonomous. These qualities fill in the gap between the technical skill involved in the production of the tunes and the pleasure felt by the listeners. Through these «musical beings» the guests can let themselves be acted upon by the music, while keeping the musicians at a distance. The third part of the book discusses the involvement of cunning and slyness in the actual construction of these sound devices during performance.

VARIATION AND SPECULATION To play the tunes they hear around them, young musicians begin by deriving easier variants from them. There is no special repertoire for beginners. One learns through tinkering with what others play, and the first step is to find ways to circumvent one's technical weaknesses. This art of «camouflage» will later become, for the virtuoso, an art of cunning and «speculation». Chapter IX deals with the link between the trickery of the beginners and the brilliant inventions of the elite *lăutari*.

Chapter X presents the facet of «cleverness», which is needed for collective playing, as well as individual fantasy. In spite of the fluidity of the repertoire, and even with a small number of rehearsals (the common sense in Zece Prăjini is that good musicians need not rehearse), several musicians still manage to agree upon a common path during

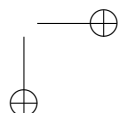
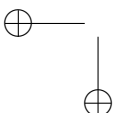




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the performance. Visual communication is not the most important. It is usual for professionals to perform in spatial configurations in which they hardly see each other. For coordination, the *lăutari* pay more attention to clues embedded in the music itself. To be able to insert these clues (without spoiling the tune), to discover and interpret them, constitutes a kind of «sixth sense», which is commented upon as yet another way of being clever. This premonitory ability is linked with the exuberant fantasy of the virtuosos, in that both of them create links which tend to contradict the parcelling of the melodies into motifs. They both contribute to the natural, unavoidable logic which makes the tunes seem autonomous.

Zece Prăjini should not be seen as a «representative» community. It is peculiar in several respects. For example, it is quite rare to find such a concentration of Gypsy musicians in a single village. However, the ideas discussed by the Prăjinians have many echoes in other parts of Romania, the Balkans, and even the world. They are representative of a certain way of treating music: as a craft aimed at economic benefit, linked to emotions but rooted in technique, as a set of tools more than a system of rules, etc. Due to the unusual number of musicians and the high degree of competition amongst them, many matters that would be implicit elsewhere are made explicit in Zece Prăjini. As a conclusion, I suggest that these ideas should be treated as a kind of popular musicology, specially designed by and for professional musicians.



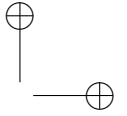
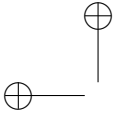


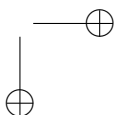
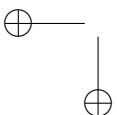
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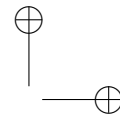
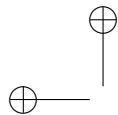
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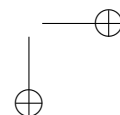
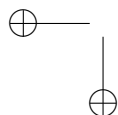


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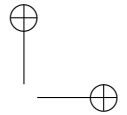
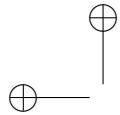
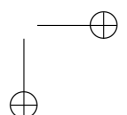
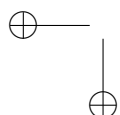
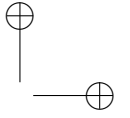
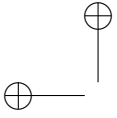


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