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## IN FOCUS: MUSIC THAT UNITES

*Ivanka Vlaeva*

*(South-West University, Blagoevgrad)*

### **Abstract:**

This is a case study about Yildiz Ibrahimova. She is a multifarious musician that connects and unites people through music and this is something very important to her. This is the understanding that she follows and implements consistently. In this study I show her ideas, experience and achievements, but also point out some important examples of her work. They are classified in several main areas: choice of music material and methods, which she uses in her improvisations; social platforms that should unite different people and events corresponding to them; some significant projects and concerts. The study is based mainly on observations and analysis of concerts, records and interviews.

**Keywords:** the Balkans, music, Yildiz Ibrahimova, unite,

### **The Balkans as a music cross-road**

The history of the Balkans is an example of a mixture between different traditions. The culture in this part of Europe is on the cross-road. This is a huge advantage for music and its development. It gives diversity and richness for the coexisting phenomena. In the frame of Greater Europe there is a tendency to unite people through the culture, but this is not a new idea in Bulgaria. There are many examples how this works. I would mention here one important research experience – the studies of Raina Katzarova about common urban tradition that unite the Balkans published in the period between the 1930s and the 1970s<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See: P. Кацарова, Балкански варианти на две турски песни, В: *ИИМ*, 1973, 16, с. 115-133; P. Кацарова, 1938, Чъртици от музикалния живот на Копривщица преди Освобождението. – В: *Юбилейния сборник – Копривщица 1837-1937*, Т. 2, София, Изд. “Художник”, с. 378-423.

The focus of my case study is an example how music unites. It is the practice of Yildiz Ibrahimova who proves herself to be a performer in different music areas. Her vast knowledge and experience are a good basis for understanding music peculiarities and similarities of Southeastern Europe. She freely combines styles and techniques of different époques, regional folklore, genres and music means. But, most important, Yildiz Ibrahimova connects and unites through music – this is a credo which she follows. In this text I research her ideas, experience and achievements and also point out some important examples of her work which build upon my previous works about this musician. The research is based on concerts, recordings and interviews.

### **A short presentation of Yildiz Ibrahimova**

Who is Yildiz Ibrahimova? According to the listeners she is a musician who reaches the Universe through music. She is accepted by professionals and music lovers as the most famous Bulgarian jazz singer and she is a jazz star not only in Bulgaria.

In this presentation I will mention only some important facts from her biography. They show the prerequisites for the development of her creative work. The first one is the love towards music in her family. In many interviews she said that her mother used to sing for hours during her childhood while her father had a special interest in jazz music. The second one is her professional education as a coloratura soprano, because she could reach freely  $g^3$  (sol from three-line octave). When she was a teenager (about 15 to 16 years old) and demonstrated the low register with the lowest note F (fa from a great octave and even lower tones), her teachers realized that the singer has a voice range of four and more octaves. But unfortunately, there are no scores for her unusual voice range. The third, in her years of studying, she begins more and more to love jazz music thanks to the recordings of Ella Fitzgerald and other jazz musicians. Thus she decided that jazz is her music. “The freedom of improvisation captured me in jazz music” she remembers, but she believes that the training in opera singing gives the alphabet and technical freedom for music expression. The fourth is her repertoire which includes a wide variety of music. The most important is that the improvisation is the core of the performances. There are some types of Yildiz Ibrahimova’ repertoire: jazz works by George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, Sonny Burke; ethno music and especially the one based on the Balkan folklore (Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek, Sephardic, and Gypsy); classical music from different periods: from

Baroque<sup>2</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century works; contemporary experimental and postmodern music by composers of different national origins. Fifth, hybridization of music layers, historical styles and local folk excerpts has become a leading feature of her music compositions. Sixth, despite the special love towards fine arts and architecture, she concentrated on music. As a musician she understands the beauty of arts in their correlations and makes projects together with artists, dancers, and film directors.

### **The music changes the human being**

“Music gives people a freedom of spirit”, said Yildiz Ibrahimova. She believes in the ennobling role of music and explains that music changes the human and makes him/her more cosmopolitan, kind and open minded. She thinks that the song expresses feelings and people need them because of the increasingly automatized world.

The improvisation gives a freedom of expression for the performers and complexity of emotions for the recipients. Contemporary practice shows that there are no more limits for music and jazz is in the avant-garde of this process. It is possible to use everything as musical means, historical and local accumulations, musical structures, instruments and ensembles. Yildiz Ibrahimova said that the improvisation is that momentary sense of freedom that exudes energy. For example, every time she makes *Summertime* by George Gershwin the result is absolutely different<sup>3</sup> – in the musical context (place, audience, accompanied instruments) as well as in the way of improvisation (voice register, melodic and rhythmic structures, voice colours and articulations, dialog with the other musicians). I analyze variants of *Summertime* in her interpretation in the research.

Currently, it seems as if everything is known in music. In such a situation Yildiz Ibrahimova said: “Only jazz standards are not enough for me. I was born on the Balkans. My roots are here. We have a priceless treasure (I talk for each of the Balkan countries).” Thus she believes that the novelties would be a result of mixtures. The jazz performers also search for hybridization in their compositions.

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<sup>2</sup> Some music examples are: Baroque – J.S.Bach; Classics – W.A.Mozart; Romanticism – F.Liszt, G.Bizet.

<sup>3</sup> See three different performances – with piano, symphonic orchestra and jazz-folk band: *Yildiz Ibrahimova – Summertime. Bir Sesin Cazibesi 8.2.2014 TRT Muzik* [Online] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrqPU2sKwDk> – 20.08.2015; *Йълдъз Ибрахимова – Summertime.* [Online] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIB-i8SKiaE> – 20.08.2015; *Yildiz Ibrahimova & "Ku-Ku Band" – Summertime.* [Online] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QcsZrBaI-JA> – 20.08.2015.

Yildiz Ibrahimova finds a huge amount of music material for inspiration. Baroque is among her favorite styles. For that reason she uses *Badinere* by J.S.Bach or the aria of *The Merry Widow* by Giovanni Paisiello for an instrumental type of improvisation. She adores the mastery of singing from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries because of the cult to the high quality of the voice technique. The singer likes the freedom of contemporary music, the colours in traditional musical layers and experimental vanguard projects. She is surfing between Pablo de Sarasate's Gypsy Airs and Gelem Gelem using the timbres of such instruments as kanun and ney, and combines as well composer's music from the 18<sup>th</sup> century by W.A.Mozart (Spring song) and the Ottoman musician Dede Efendi (Yine Bir Gülnihal). Some of the recordings are by works of the most vanguard compositions: *Improvization* (1994) performed with the pianist Antoni Donchev<sup>4</sup>, *Aria* by John Cage and its replica for voice and orchestra *ContrARIA* by Roumen Balyozov (2012). Another impressing composition of this kind is *Real Bibop* performed by Lajos Dudas Trio<sup>5</sup>.

### **Music Unites**

“My point is that people should get to know each other as well as possible. ... When people know each other, they will see how close, how common are the things they have”. Yildiz Ibrahimova understands that there are similarities between cultures. She considers that there is music which is the same for the Balkans in general and there are many common things between Bulgarian and Turkish music, Bulgarian and Greek, Turkish and Greek. Thus she combines Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek, Romani folk music and makes specific mixtures.

There are some ways which Yildiz Ibrahimova uses to achieve her idea that “music unites”.

The first way is through the musical material. I give examples and analyze both the traditional and composers' music material in her improvisations (the time duration, the place of the material, the composition, the process of the improvisation, colours and techniques in the performances). “The music unites and preserves the traditions”, she thinks. Among the most famous of her improvisations are compositions built on the mixture between the Bulgarian folk

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<sup>4</sup> Йълдъз Ибрахимова и Антони Дончев – Импровизация (1994). [Online] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBaSkAvWuTo> – 18.08.2015.

<sup>5</sup> Lajos Dudas. *Real Bebop. Chamber Music Live. Lajos Dudas Trio, Pannon Classic feat. Yildiz Ibrahimova vocal, Sebastian Buchholz Alto sax, Lajos Dudas clarinet.* [Online] Available from: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyqH\\_iK5ihs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyqH_iK5ihs) – 18.08.2015.

song *Lale li si, zyumbyul li si* and a very similar melody – the Turkish song *Dilerim Bari Hüdadan*. There are recordings with different variants of this composition over time which was made in various contexts, with many ensembles and diverse instruments. Some of the most interesting examples of these as an improvisation, sound colours and a process of a completion made by Yildiz Ibrahimova and ensembles are the mentioned here: 1. a classical jazz trio (Zhivko Petrov – piano, Vesselin Vesselinov-Eko – double bass, Hristo Yotzov – percussions), Toronto 2013<sup>6</sup>; 2. a female choir of folk voices *The Mystery of the Bulgarian voices*, Sofia 2002<sup>7</sup>; 3. a *Tanini Trio* with traditional Turkish instrumentalists (Tahir Aydogdu – kanun, Bilgin Canaz – ney, Hakan Ali Toker – piano), Sofia 2015<sup>8</sup>; 4. a symphony orchestra – The Belarus TV and Radio Symphony orchestra in Slavyanski Bazar Festival, Vitebsk 2002 or the Razgrad Philharmony in a project *Jazz, Folk, Classics* 2015<sup>9</sup>.

Also, Yildiz Ibrahimova chooses nationally coloured composer's works for her hybrids as F.Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No.2* and Romani music or *Czardas* by Vittorio Monti and *Gelem Gelem*. Sometimes she makes even more unusual mixtures as the compilation between the Viennese composer W.A.Mozart and the Ottoman musician Dede Efendi – a basis for one of her experiments<sup>10</sup>. The classical route was kept by her in the current events where she added an instrumental singing line to the overture to the opera *Le nozze di Figaro* by W.A.Mozart.

The second way to achieve the idea about the mission of music accepted by Yildiz Ibrahimova is through the social ideas that have to unite people and the events corresponding with them. She often is a music ambassador on different important occasions. Sometimes, she is simultaneously a representative of both countries – Bulgaria and Turkey. I will mention some of them – the concert in Johannesburg, South Africa 2002 as a special ambassador to the United Nations as well as the performance in the International festival in Athens, Greece. The other forum which has declared the idea about united and peaceful Balkans has been the concert in

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<sup>6</sup> Yildiz Ibrahimova "Lale li si Zumbul li si" in Toronto. [Online] Available from: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0YpA\\_1qk20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0YpA_1qk20) – 18.08.2015.

<sup>7</sup> Dilerim Bari Hüdâ'dan – Yildiz Ibrahimova & The Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices (Live). [Online] 7<sup>th</sup> June 2002. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vcN4Q0iQac> – 18.08.2015.

<sup>8</sup> Йълдъз Ибрахимова – Лале ли си, зюмбюл ли си (2015). [Online] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-ut5GGSHy4> – 18.08.2015.

<sup>9</sup> Йълдъз Ибрахимова, Иво Папанзов-Ибряма и разградската филхармония. [Online] Available from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtFbRM-vY\\_A&list=PLUcsoPPjuLieQITEF24LQ8WWD\\_WF-wKfw&index=198](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtFbRM-vY_A&list=PLUcsoPPjuLieQITEF24LQ8WWD_WF-wKfw&index=198) – 18.08.2015.

<sup>10</sup> Йълдъз Ибрахимова – Пролетна песен / Отново една роза ме плени (2015). [Online] Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTOSfZuOGEU> – 18.08.2015.

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2012. Then twelve countries gathered on a stage their musicians to celebrate the 100th anniversary after the Balkan War.

The third way to unite through music is by her projects and concerts. I presented some of them in my researches – *Balkanatolia* as well as the newest *Orient Express* (a concert together with the Big Band of the Bulgarian National Radio, and Tanini Trio from Turkey) and *Jazz, Folk, Classics* (with the Razgrad Philharmonic Orchestra, Ivo Papasov-Ibryama and Trakia Band).

*Balkanatolia* is emblematic among them. The title is compounded of the words Balkan and Anatolia and the aim is to show the correlations between the traditions in this geographic regions. High class musicians from Bulgaria and Turkey were invited for the concerts. The two CDs were recorded under the same name (Istanbul, Raks Muzik, 1997) as well as the second part of her anniversary album *30 Years on the stage* (Sofia, Virginia Records, 2005). Among the musicians is the worldwide famous clarinetist Ivo Papasov-Ibryama awarded the BBC Radio 3 prize. Thus the idea of the common music region of the Balkans and around powered many of her projects.

The newest Yildiz Ibrahimova's challenging project *Jazz, Folk, Classics* continues the above mentioned ideas in 2015. There Yildiz Ibrahimova collaborates with the Razgrad Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Krasen Ivanov, Ivo Papasov-Ibryama and Trakia Band with Neshko Neshev (accordion). The concert programme was accepted very well because of its wide music range. Some of the performances were already made in the towns of Razgrad, Varna, Rousse (Moskov, 2015; Ticketportal, 2015) and Sliven. The next were in Plovdiv and Sofia in September and October 2015. The ambitions of the musicians included in the project are to cross the Bulgarian borders – both geographically and musically. Thus, the world premiere is expected in the near future in the Zurlu Center Istanbul.

The spectacle is an amazing mixture of jazz, ethno and symphonic music which co-exist in harmony. Many of the audience which already listened to the concerts thought that these were “concerts for connoisseurs” (Ticketportal, 2015). The first part of the concert was *Rachenitza* from *Trakiiski tantzi* (Thracian Dances) by one of the patriarchs of the Bulgarian composers' music – Petko Staynov. The programme of the concert included parts of classical works among which was *Carmen* (Habanera) by Georges Bizet (a favorite one for Yildiz, but also for the audience) and a solo jazz improvisation on music excerpts by George Gershwin's *Porgy and*

Bess. Some music from her album *Marjanja* (a hybrid between elements of F.Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2* and Romani music) also was included. A new part of her repertoire was an Azerbaijani song<sup>11</sup> by the composer Tofik Kuliev which enlarges the music scope which she previously used in her projects. The Ivo Papazov-Ibryama and the musicians of Trakia Band performed some works typical for the so called wedding style in the development of the Bulgarian folk music („Stamboliiska rachenitza“, „Nostalgia“ и „Spasovsko horo“). Thus the aim of the musicians is to unite heterogeneous listeners through the mosaics of music stylistics. She thinks that “Everyone finds something for himself in our music, something similar and different as well. Because it is a different reading of what listeners know or maybe do not even know”<sup>12</sup>.

## Conclusions

Yildiz Ibrahimova believes that the artists do much more than the politicians. She said, “It excites me how music and art in general managed in the best way to unite people of different ethnicities<sup>13</sup>.” She searches for common things in different musical traditions, music layers and styles that unite.

The singer also thought that the current globalized situation is characterized by a blurring of boundaries between different types of music. For that reason she searches for music hybrids. Thus the collage technique and improvisation made between such collage parts is a peculiarity for Yildiz Ibrahimova.

She likes sound colours and searches for their refined nuances. The musical means for this purpose are: a brilliant singing technique (in the frame of her four octave voice range); co-existence of two or more ethnical materials in one composition (Bulgarian, Turkish, Greek, etc.); different instruments including traditional (kanun, ney, gayda); different types of ensembles

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<sup>11</sup> Йълдъз Ибрахимова – Лирична песен. [Online] Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElsqmipJMeg> – 18.08.2015.

<sup>12</sup> С. Николов, Йълдъз Ибрахимова представя програмата „Джаз, фолк, класик“ и споделя пред Джаз FM: „Берем плодовете на хилядолетна традиция, Jazz FM Radio. [Online] 24<sup>th</sup> September 2015. Available from <http://www.jazzfm.bg/bg/interviews/jyldyz-ibrahimova-predstavja-programata-djaz-folk-klasik-i-spodelja-pred-djaz-fm-berem-plodovete-na-hiljadoletna-tradicija> – 18.08.2015.

<sup>13</sup> See the interview: Н. Москов, Йълдъз Ибрахимова: Изселването на млади можещи е големият проблем на България. 24 Часа. [Online] 19 Март 2015, Available from: <http://www.24chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=4665845> – 18.08.2015.

(combo. big band, symphony orchestra, female folk choir); mixture of historical music styles (jazz, classical, traditional).

The cultures built on the cross-over places have their advantages. One of the most important is the ability to unite. It is the thing that Yildiz Imrahimova understands well and tries to use in her music work. She believes that music goes beyond ethnicity, religion and social strata. The music for her has possibilities which are seemingly without borders.