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Speranța Rădulescu and *Lăutari*: Engaging with Musicians and Music-Making*

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Speranța Rădulescu began to do fieldwork among *lăutari* (professional, traditional, male Romani musicians in Romania, sing. *lăutar*) in the mid-1970s. Over her many years as an ethnomusicologist, she admired and respected *lăutari* and the song and dance music that they performed. She treasured the music, artistry, professional dedication, and culture of *lăutari*. Rădulescu also felt empathy for *lăutari*; she cared personally for them as they so frequently struggled to earn their livelihoods making music. Likewise, the *lăutari* with whom she worked valued and revered her, affectionately calling her "*Doamna* Speranța" [Mrs. Speranța]. Rădulescu cherished and cultivated her connections with traditional *lăutari*, and they reciprocated.

Rădulescu was deeply involved in traditional music of all kinds in Romania. She immersed herself in it as she sought to explore (and in many cases discover), comprehend, and publicize the rich and diverse musics and musicians throughout the country. She promoted the music traditions of Romanians, Hungarians, Roma, Jews, and other communities in virtually every corner of the country, a "mission" to which she painstakingly devoted herself. Over her nearly fifty years as a researcher, Rădulescu was extremely prolific, generating scores of articles and book chapters, authored and edited books, and a myriad of recordings of traditional music, complete with extensive liner notes. Within this broad panorama of scholarly pursuits was Rădulescu's

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commitment to the study of *lăutari* and their traditional music-making. She observed, recorded, and interviewed them, wrote and taught about them, and went on tour with them. Indeed her publications on *lăutari* – both written and audio – comprise a unique and important legacy that she left when she died in January 2022. An astounding number of the books, articles, and recordings that she wrote and well over one-third of the recordings that she produced focused on *lăutari*.[1]

Conversing with *lăutari* about their occupation and artistry is crucial to gaining an understanding of them and the genres that they perform. Rădulescu took this premise seriously and put it into practice especially in several publications based on interviews and conversations with *lăutari*. For this, she drew from the rich holdings in the Archives at the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest as well as from her own nearly fifty years of fieldwork. In this article I discuss works by Rădulescu that specifically employ significant portions of text from both archival interviews as well as in-person conversations with *lăutari*. I examine how, in these writings, the practices, mechanics, and thinking of *lăutari* are presented in their own words. I explore five works by Rădulescu that are invaluable contributions to the literature on *lăutari* and *lăutar* music-making. They include a cluster of four articles written in the mid-1980s, during the communist period, and a book that was issued in 2004, fifteen years after the Romanian Revolution. They illustrate how Rădulescu, whose career spanned the communist past and post-communist present, successfully managed to uphold her academic integrity both before and after the Revolution and how she was able not only to transcend the restraints that intellectuals faced through the end of 1989 but also to creatively exploit the liberties that all of Romania enjoyed from early 1990 on.

The five publications taken together offer fascinating portraits of Romani musicians and music-making. In them *lăutari* respond with candor, humor, and insider wisdom to questions posed, expounding upon a broad array of topics related to their own music-making as an occupation and the traditional music for which they are known. These topics include the *tarafuri* (small ensembles – instrumental or vocal-instrumental – in which *lăutari* perform, sing. *taraf*), their apprenticeship, instrumental specialization, contracts and payment for their performances, and the nature, from their perspective, of what Rădulescu calls "Gypsy music".[2] Based in large part on what *lăutari* them-

[1] See Rădulescu's website at www.sperantaradulescu.ro/en for a list of her written and audio publications.

[2] I translate Rădulescu's choice of ethnonyms in Romanian literally: her use of *țigan*

selves reveal about their profession and artistry, Rădulescu embellishes with context, clarification, and interpretation as she elaborates on their discourse.

All five of the publications considered here clearly reflect the appreciation – and fondness – with which Rădulescu regarded *lăutari* and their music-making. The interviews and conversations, as will be evident, also mirror the keenness on the part of the *lăutari* to be consulted, listened to, and valued. Finally, while the works discussed ahead contain commentary by *lăutari* from all over Romania, most of them reflect traditions in the southern regions of the country. This includes the historic provinces of Muntenia and Oltenia that are distinguished by "southern Romanian" *lăutar* music-making, which differs considerably from *lăutar* traditions elsewhere in the country such as in Moldova (northeastern Romania) and Transylvania (in the central and northern regions of the country). It goes without saying, of course, that Rădulescu felt a deep affinity and affection for traditional *lăutari* and their music-making throughout all of Romania.

Four articles from the 1980s: archival interviews with *lăutari*

Between 1973 and 1990, Rădulescu was employed as a researcher in ethnomusicology at the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest[3]. She frequently undertook fieldwork among *lăutari* at that time although her freedom to fully explore what she wanted to was obviously curtailed due to the communist-era restrictions. Nonetheless, as her husband Valeriu Rădulescu told me about her pre-1990 years as a field researcher, "Not a year would go by without her going to the *lăutari*. Three or four times a year she was with the *lăutari*. She'd get through the week with two cans [of sardines] and a hunk of bread!" [4]

Rădulescu earned her Ph.D. at the Academy of Music in Cluj in 1984. In that same year, she embarked on what would be a series of four articles on *lăutari*, the *taraf*, and music-making. The first three articles were published in consecutive years in *Revista de etnografie și folclor* [The Journal of Ethnography and Folklore], the primary publication of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore. "Istoria tarafului tradițional sătesc trăită și comentată de lăutarii înșiși: Secolul XX" [The History of the Traditional Village *Taraf* Experienced and Commented Upon by *Lăutari* Themselves: The 20th Century] was published in

is rendered as Gypsy, while her use of the plural *romi* is Roma.

[3] Between 1974 and 1990 it was called the Institute of Ethnological and Dialectological Research.

[4] Email communication, 26 May 2022; this and all subsequent translations are mine.

1984. "Ucenicia lăutarului" [The Apprenticeship of the *Lăutar*] was issued in 1985. In 1986, "Plurispecializarea lăutarului" [The Multi-Specialization of the *Lăutar*] was published. The last article in this sequence, although researched and written in the mid-1980s, was not published until 1996 when it was translated into English and printed in *East European Meetings in Ethnomusicology* as "Fiddlers' Contracts and Payments".[5]

Each of the four "*lăutar* articles", written by a then early-career Rădulescu, sheds light on twentieth-century *lăutari* and how they experienced music-making before the Romanian Revolution. Most of the excerpts from the interviews are from the Archives of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore and represent fieldwork by well-known senior folklorists over a fifty-year period that included both pre-communist (1933-1944) and communist eras (1944-1983).[6] From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, these articles not only paint vivid pictures of twentieth-century practices and traditions but also implicitly invoke comparisons with *lăutari* and their practices in today's post-communist world.

The history of the traditional village *taraf* according to *lăutari* (1984)

Rădulescu's first in her tetralogy of articles on *lăutari* based on interviews held in the Archives of the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore treats the twentieth-century history of the *taraf* as a *lăutar* ensemble and is based largely on reminiscences by older musicians. Their statements indicate that the *taraf* did not play a significant role in the village musical landscape until the twentieth century. Indeed, small instrumental groups of two or three musicians, "constituted the first important step toward the formation of ensembles" for which the term *taraf* in the village context could be used. Based on abundant recollection by *lăutari* during the mid-twentieth century, the first *tarafuri* "in the full sense of the word were those in which a melodic instrument . . . was supported by harmonic instrumental accompaniment". Moreover, while the *cobză* [lute-like strummed instrument] predominated in eastern and south-

[5] I have not been able to locate the original Romanian version of this article, nor is there explicit mention of who translated it into English. The editor of *East European Meetings in Ethnomusicology*, Marin Marian-Bălașa, includes the following remarks preceding the article: "Delay in publishing this article is quite regrettable, especially taking into account that it had been [completed] within the first years of the 80s; . . . since 1988 it has remained 'forgotten' in the [*Revista de etnografie și folclor*'s] portfolio" (Rădulescu 1996: 76).

[6] They include Alexandru Amzulescu, Ovidiu Bîrlea, Mariana Kahane, Mihai Pop, Adriana Sachelarie, Ghizela Sulițeanu, Adrian Vicol, and Constantin Zamfir (Rădulescu 1984: 159).

ern Romania until the 1920s, a number of urban instruments (the *țambal* [cimbalom: both large and small/portable], *chitară* [guitar], and *contrabas* [double bass]) were introduced at that time and gradually replaced it. A *lăutar* violinist (age 39) from a village in Ilfov County[7] in southern Romania says, in 1953, "The *cobză* isn't played anymore. It used to be played. But seeing as the *țambal* came, it took its place. The first in the village to play the *țambal* was Daddy. My grandpa played the *cobza* . . . And Grandpa's dad also played the *cobză*". As for the rise of the guitar, a 51-year-old *lăutar* from a village in Dolj County, who began as a *cobză*-player, recollects in 1955, "Daddy had me play the *cobză*, and in four years I had become a *cobză*-player, and he'd take me to gigs", but "then he needed a guitar-player; *cobză*-players weren't playing anymore, and so Daddy said that instead of making me a violinist, [it was] better for me to be a good guitarist". During the inter-war period, the double bass also entered village music-making. Another development in the composition of the *taraf* in the 1920s was that in addition to the first violin [*vioară*], a second violin "became an inseparable partner of the first" (Rădulescu 1984: 161, 162, 164, 166).

A really significant development in the traditional village *taraf*, also due to urban influence, took place during the 1940s and 1950s when the *acordeon* [accordion] was introduced; it "initiated a new stage in the evolution [of the traditional *taraf*]". A 50-year-old violinist from Ilfov County notes that "It was around 1936-'37 when the accordion was brought to the countryside. They began to bring them here from Bucharest when they played at weddings; after that, the first accordionist in our village was a nephew of mine, after 1940". Another *lăutar* – a 66-year-old rural vocalist-violinist from Teleorman County – says in 1951, "the accordions came out . . . that made four of us (violin, cimbalom, accordion, double bass). The accordion's been in demand for about four or five years". The portable electric organ [*orgă electronică portabilă* or simply *orgă*] also was eventually introduced (Rădulescu 1984: 167, 168).[8]

Rădulescu brings her discussion of the twentieth-century village *taraf* to a close with a consideration of the traditional rural Moldovan *fanfară* [an ensemble, often military, composed of brass and percussion instruments, pl. *fanfare*]. The *fanfară* originated around 1830 in larger cities (e.g., Iași and Vaslui in eastern Moldova and Bucharest and Craiova in the south) and

[7] Unless otherwise indicated, all counties henceforth mentioned in Rădulescu's publications are located in the regions traditionally known as Muntenia and Oltenia.

[8] The electric guitar was also embraced at that time, especially in "Transylvanian 'bands'" (Rădulescu 1984: 167).

became popular in villages about a century later. As a 63-year-old violinist-vocalist *lăutar* from a village in Iași County (in northeastern Romania) points out in 1949, "At weddings, the *fanfară* is requested; violinists are not requested. And at balls too they perform more and more; so, what can you do?" And a 34-year-old *lăutar* from the same village, whose instrument was the *cobză*, also laments in 1949 that "at the village dances, it's more and more *fanfare*: the *fanfară* is 'in power' in our village". Despite the radically different sounds of the *fanfară* and traditional southern Romanian *taraf* music, "the 'folk' *fanfară* functions exactly like an ordinary traditional *taraf*" – including where they perform (at weddings, baptism parties, balls, etc.), their repertoire, and the combination of ensembles composed mainly of instrumentalists but also vocalists (Rădulescu 1984: 169, 170).

Similar to the changes in instrumentation discussed by Rădulescu during the twentieth century, post-communist developments in the *taraf* have continued at a reasonably fast pace. They are likewise due to urban influence and have entailed primarily electronic and/or electric upgrades to existing instruments.

The apprenticeship of the *lăutar* (1985)

Rădulescu's second article in this series, published in 1985, begins with: "When being a *lăutar* is, by tradition, the fundamental occupation and principal means of subsistence in the family, the path that a child follows toward music is a natural step that is taken without reflection, without explanation, without alternatives, and without resistance". It reflects several key considerations that have long been essential to the life of *lăutari*: the urgency of making music for a living and the hereditary nature of this profession. Based on accounts by *lăutari*, Rădulescu outlines "the stages of apprenticeship" as: 1. The *lăutar*'s learning an instrument through individual study, consisting of two options: a. learning that is "guided and controlled by a teacher" or b. learning that is "unsupervised, based on imitating older musicians", followed by 2. The *lăutar*'s learning to play in a group: "apprenticeship in the *taraf*" (Rădulescu 1985: 111, 112).

Working with a "teacher", usually a father or other older male relative, was the most typical way that boys learned to play instruments. Moreover, Rădulescu writes, "*Lăutari* are rarely able to describe coherently or in detail the method by which they have come to master their instrument. But gathered and examined comparatively, their accounts, which are quite telling, can lead to some overall conclusions". Speaking of how his "teacher" proceeded, one *lăutar* violinist from a village in Ilfov County, recalls: "He'd show me: put

your finger here! I would play once with him; he'd let me play alone while he listened; when it wasn't right, he'd correct me again". Another *lăutar*, a *cobză*- and guitar-player from a village in Dolj County tells how he learned, simply: "Daddy worked with me, and in four years he had made me a *cobză*-player; he took me with him to gigs; he showed me the chords . . . he was a good musician; he knew both violin and guitar. At first he had me play easy things". Another rural *lăutar* from Ilfov County, who was a violinist and *țambal* player, recounts: "My uncle was a violinist, but he also taught me the *țambal* because he could play the *țambal* too. . . . The lessons went on for two years; every day my uncle showed me something new; then he'd leave me to practice alone". A *lăutar* from Clejani in Giurgiu County, a village where Rădulescu repeatedly did fieldwork,[9] says, of his mentor: "For about three years every day he took me to rehearsals; he would take me in the morning for an hour and a half and in the afternoon for an hour and a half" (Rădulescu 1985: 113). A violinist-vocalist from a village in Teleorman County recalls, with a bit of *lăutar* bravura:

> It takes about two or three years to learn the violin, but I learned it in six months. . . . Every single day I stayed at home next to [my dad] for four or five hours a day, both in the morning and in the afternoon. I would play right next to him. In other words, I would listen to what he was playing, and then I'd also do it. (Rădulescu 1985: 113)

Yet another violinist-vocalist – from a village in Argeș County – recounts that

> First I learned how to play melodies in *sol* [G] and *re* [A] . . . it depended on how my dad played them. Then [I learned how] the cadence (the melody and accompaniment) for the *ungurească* and *sârbă* [traditional Romanian dances] should be played. At first I learned some of the songs and then some of the easier dances. (Rădulescu 1985: 113)

In other words, a son would repeatedly imitate his father or older male relative, who observed and taught him.

The learning process could be a difficult experience; the boy "was not spared punishment . . . for mistakes or inattention". "He would strike me

[9] Clejani is the village in which the famed Taraf de Haïdouks, discovered by Rădulescu, originally resided.

on my fingernails with his bow", recollects a rural *lăutar* violinist from Alba County in Transylvania. Expressing his deferential response to corrective measures as he learned his instrument, another rural violinist-vocalist – from Teleorman County – recalls, "Well of course [he disciplined me], wasn't he the master, the teacher? Of course I cried – I was only ten years old", while a third – from a village in Ilfov County – recounts: "He would hit me plenty, 'cause he was irritated. I didn't get mad about it; why should I get mad? After all, I was the guilty one" (Rădulescu 1985: 115).

By contrast, a less common mode of mastering an instrument was by unsupervised imitation. One rural *lăutar* violinist from Ilfov County recalls that "the first time I learned was at home, in the village, on the verandah – from the boys in the village who knew how to play: from this one a little, from that one a little . . . I didn't have a teacher". "I learned all on my own; I listened to the other *lăutari* in the village", recollects another *lăutar* violinist from a village in Hunedoara County in Transylvania. And yet another, from rural Bistrița-Năsăud County (also in Transylvania), recounts, "I 'stole' from the others, I listened to the others, came home, and played" (Rădulescu 1985: 117). Rădulescu picks up on this key notion of "stealing" from other *lăutari*, stating that

> As a matter of fact, a *lăutar* throughout his active performing years, is always "snatching" and "stealing" melodies, schemes of accompanying, technical tricks, etc.; he imitates others and, more recently, imitates celebrities on the radio, recordings, or television in order to meet the demands of a public that is always avidly seeking novelty and is captivated by the latest fashion. (Rădulescu 1985: 118)

The next stage of learning was "apprenticeship in the *taraf*", a crucial step since the goal was to play in an ensemble (especially at weddings), thereby making a living. Once young *lăutari*-to-be learned their instruments, which typically happened within two or three years, "these youngsters, who by then have become adolescents, 'go out into the world' and are baptised by fire". As a violinist from Clejani (Giurgiu County) recounts, his dad was in charge of when he should join the *taraf*: "He took me to the village dance and to weddings so that I could learn with him. When I was fourteen, I formed my own band with three people altogether" (Rădulescu 1985: 118). A precocious *țambal*-player from a town in Ilfov County, whose father showed him off at performance events, proudly recalls: "I was little – 9 or 10 years old; people got

up on tables in order to see me" (Rădulescu 1985:119). Another child prodigy, a *cobză*-player from a village in Ilfov County, recounts that

> At age nine, I played the *cobză* better than all the other *cobză*-players in our village. Since my brother went into the army in 1907, Daddy didn't have anyone to play with, so he bought me a meter-long red woolen strap and attached it to my *cobză*. Then he took me with him to all sorts of village weddings and pubs like there used to be. When we'd take a break, I'd hold my *cobză* under my arm, but when the break was over, I'd duck my head right under that strap again – like the portable *țambal* players did. (Rădulescu 1985: 119)

As for *lăutari* and musical literacy, a sign of status, Rădulescu argues that although some profess knowing how to read music, most *lăutari* in actuality can only read music haltingly at best unless they have studied at a music high school or conservatory. She leaves the reader with what she considers perhaps the most telling and poignant view of *lăutar* apprenticeship – as articulated by a *lăutar* violinist from a village in Ilfov County, who in 1953 remarks that

> When we were little, we learned everything from our dad; later we grasped more and more, first from one *lăutar* and then from another . . . Such is our occupation: we "steal" one thing from one *lăutar*, and then from another something else; and we put all these parts altogether in one place. This is our "treasure", which we too pass on to others – it doesn't die with us when we do! (Rădulescu 1985: 123)

The multi-specialization of the *lăutar* (1986)

The third article in Rădulescu's *lăutar* tetralogy is concerned with "multi-specialization" among *lăutari*, that is, the tendency to play two or more instruments or at least one in addition to singing. Playing more than one instrument was common among *lăutari*, and in fact, few *lăutari* stuck to only one. The reasons for multi-specialization could be both personal and professional. Rădulescu points out that "the instrument chosen or imposed in childhood" on a budding young *lăutar* "is rarely the only one adopted, nor is it necessarily the one on which the *lăutar* will base his profession" (Rădulescu 1986: 32). In other words, at virtually any time in their training and/or career, *lăutari* can and do modify their own profile or broaden their specialization.

The most frequent reason for a *lăutar* to adopt a new instrument was that as he developed as a musician, he realized that the instrument that he had begun to learn as a boy was not the instrument on which he wished to establish his career, especially since the original choice of instrument for a son in a *lăutar* family is traditionally made by his father. As the boy-*lăutar* matures, he may realize that he would prefer to play another instrument which may also match his own musical aptitude better. A 28-year-old *lăutar* from a village in Tulcea County (in Dobrogea on the Black Sea) admits in 1953 that "playing the violin", which he had begun as a young boy, "gave me no pleasure, so at age 13 I began to play the clarinet". Often a boy is pushed into playing an instrument of accompaniment that is not only easier to wield than a more demanding instrument with a leading melodic role but also one that he can master more quickly and thus join the *taraf* sooner. But if the young musician has a lot of talent and advances particularly quickly as he learns an accompanying instrument, his father or other older *lăutar* may urge him to learn a more difficult melodic instrument. One 43-year-old *lăutar* from a village in Neamț County, in Molodva, recounts in 1949 that "I was playing the *cobză* with my grandpa at the village dance starting already at age eight; my grandpa was glad that I knew how to play the *cobză*". But at age 12 he left the *cobză* behind and took up the more challenging and expressive violin, which became his exclusive instrument. Another *lăutar*, age 44, from a village in Iași County (in Moldova), made a similar decision; as he puts it in 1954, "I already knew how to play the double bass and guitar before I took up the violin" (Rădulescu 1986: 33).

Sometimes the reverse happens, when an older *lăutar* no longer has the stamina and/or skill to play a prominent or demanding instrument. This may occur due to his own initiative or at the suggestion of other *lăutari* in his *taraf*. A 62-year-old *lăutar* in Bucharest performed the *țambal* until he was 40 at which time he transitioned permanently to playing the double bass, which was less taxing. Another from a village in Vaslui County in Moldova had played the violin but took up the clarinet. "I got sick of the violin", he professes, "because my strings kept breaking", an explanation, as Rădulescu suggests, "that probably conceals his own failure" (Rădulescu 1986: 33).

Decisions to change instruments or specialize in more than one were made for a variety of other reasons as well. One *lăutar* violinist (from Clejani in Giurgiu County) communicates in 1949 how he had suffered a work accident and lost the use of a finger, thus obliging him to adopt the double bass, an instrument that was easier for him to play given his handicap. Sometimes a *lăutar* adjusts instrument-wise in order to accommodate the needs of his *taraf*. An instrument may be lacking in the ensemble, in which case a *lău-*

tar may be motivated to pick up the necessary instrument especially if his instrument is somewhat dispensable. Or perhaps a *lăutar* wants to play a more prominent, visible role in the *taraf*, and so he switches instruments. Wishing to play instruments that are "the latest fashion" is likewise not uncommon and provides a motivation for switching from one instrument to another. A 41-year-old *lăutar* (from a village in Neamț County in Moldova) who had been a violinist since boyhood tells, in 1949, how he had a change of heart at age 17: "I learned the *țambal* [then]; it had just appeared in our village, and I was a big fan of it". The accordion also became extremely popular among *lăutari*, causing some to change instruments. A 26-year-old rural *lăutar* from Ilfov County recalls, in 1950: "I had played the *țambal* since I was very young – for about twelve years. The *țambal* formed the basis of my occupation. But now that I've learned to play the accordion, I only play accordion" (Rădulescu 1986: 33, 34).

Multi-specialization, in terms of singing as well as playing an instrument, is also a key part of the *lăutar* profession, especially in southern Romania. Vocalists in rural communities are very frequently – though not always – also *primași* ("first" violinists in *tarafuri*, sing. *primaș*). Moreover, vocalists who play string instruments are "almost incapable of singing without an instrument" (Rădulescu 1986: 39). As a 60-year-old *lăutar* from a village in Ilfov County who both played the *țambal* and sang recollects, "As I grew older, I realized that with the *țambal* I always had to be in the back" of the *taraf*, which interfered with his singing. Then, in his mid-40s, as he relates in 1953,

> I took up the violin so that I wouldn't always have to play my *țambal* in back; . . . people would ask me to sing for them, but with the *țambal*, I could never come forward. Have you seen [vocalists] who play the guitar? They hold their guitars so that they can sing – even if they just hold the guitar in their hand. It doesn't make any sense to sing without an instrument in your hand, especially in the village. (Rădulescu 1986: 33)

How *lăutari* negotiate contracts and earnings (1996 [1987])

Researched and written in the mid-to-late 1980s, the fourth in this series of articles on *lăutari* was delayed by almost a decade before it was published. It treats the negotiations for employment and remuneration of *lăutari* who performed at traditional events. The article begins with the statement that *lăutari*, whether they earn their living partially or fully from music-making, are "permanently preoccupied" with being assured advantageous contracts and thus profitable earnings (Rădulescu 1996: 76).

The most frequent village event at which *lăutari* performed and earned income in twentieth-century Romania was the wedding, something that has not changed in the twenty-first century. This was followed by the Sunday village dance or the *horă*:[10] the "collective weekly dance-gathering" (Rădulescu 1986: 80). In order to hire *lăutari* to perform at weddings, employers would approach them to discuss possible performance engagements usually at the home of the *taraf* leader (typically the *primaș*); this might alternatively take place on the street or at the local pub. The *primaș* of a *taraf* in a village in Ilfov County, age 39, remarks in 1953 on this process. First, he says, the person putting on the event or the solicitor "calls me. He lets me know in advance, even one month before. [He] [p]ays us [the] *arvună* [earnest money] . . . before [someone else employs us]". A 30-year-old *primaș* in a village in Argeș County similarly comments, in 1955, that the "solicitor" typically "[hires] me from my home and pays [the] *arvună* to me". *Lăutari* also "frequent the pub . . . in order to keep themselves within the villagers' sight, to 'prospect the field', and to put themselves at the disposal of those interested in [hiring] them". In other words, *lăutari* sometimes looked for clients, especially at times of the year when there were few or no weddings. As a 45-year-old "local-intellectual" in Clejani (Giurgiu County) tells Rădulescu during her fieldwork in 1982, sometimes *lăutari* go to the home of a prospective employer, where "[t]hey are tested: [asked to] play a song, two, three or four. They are asked for specific songs, questioned about what instruments [each] of them plays, and how many of them are vocal soloists too, as *tarafuri* having several '*guriști*' (vocalists) are highly [valued] within villages in that zone" (Rădulescu 1986: 78, 79). In today's world, many wedding gigs are arranged, at least initially, via electronic communication channels or through various media that aid as employers contact *lăutari* and negotiate jobs.

Both weddings and Sunday village dances involved negotiations, which were either made by "oral agreement" or "written contract". For weddings, usually the groom or the groom's father approached the leader of the *taraf* and together they would decide on the number of musicians to be hired, the overall payment, the earnest money [*arvună*], the exact days and time periods that the musicians would be hired, and the transportation costs of the musicians to and from the wedding as well as guarantees that the musicians be fed during the wedding events and take breaks from performing. The employer typically requested "a band of precise dimensions", voicing his wishes for the

[10] The word *horă* (pl. *hore*) designates both the Sunday village dance and one of the most common dances in southern and eastern Romania.

instruments that he wanted in the *taraf*. For a written contract, these terms were agreed to and signed most often by the groom and the *primaș* or all of the musicians in the ensemble. The *primaș* was held responsible for the behavior of his fellow musicians, such as ensuring that they "not get drunk". The prestige of *lăutari* and thus their chances of future employment were on full display when they performed. Their livelihood depended not only on their musical skills but also on their behavior during the entire wedding, something they were all well aware of (Rădulescu 1986: 77, 78).

As for the Sunday village dances, not all *lăutari* were invited to play for them "but only those having special capabilities: nerves, excellent [rhythm], perfect [mastery] of the village's dance repertory, and [knowledge] of the customary succession of dances within the suite ('the rows of *hore*', as they are called in Vlașca [Giurgiu County]". A 50-year-old rural *lăutar* from Dolj County remarks in 1961 that he does not play at the *horă*. "There are others", he says, "youngsters; [I perform] only at weddings". Moreover, negotiations with the *lăutari* for the Sunday village dance jobs were handled by the "unmarried young men enjoying a certain prestige within the village". As a 28-year-old *lăutar* from a village in Tulcea County (in Dobrogea) mentions in 1953, a "bachelor, smarter [than the others], comes to hire us, [with] two or three [additional] young men". The village *horă* took place, for example, in the late 1940s, in front of a local inn or pub, in which case the innkeeper or pub owner would oversee the music-making by *lăutari*. By the 1960s, however, as communist institutions became increasingly embedded within Romanian society, the "village Cultural House [took over] more and more the role of organizing the village's *horă*". And by the twenty-first century, village dances such as described here hardly took place any more (Rădulescu 1986: 80, 81).

Payment for weddings and village dances in the early twentieth century was in either cash or kind although it was evolving. Between 1920 and 1940, *lăutari* were still often paid in kind. A *lăutar* from a village in Ilfov County remarks, for example, that for weddings "in [a village in Călărași County], they used to pay us two-three chickens and wine too, but here [they pay] us only with money". By a decade later, such payments in kind were less common, replaced by cash. The *primaș* was in charge of the earnings for performances and was both the ensemble's "'accountant' and 'cashier'". He was the recipient of the earnest money and overall payment and collected "even the tips [gotten] by [the] musicians while performing", sharing the ensuing amount with the other musicians in the *taraf*, "according to a previous [verbal] agreement". Starting in the 1950s, the "equal sharing of amounts received by the team musicians" began to become an established practice (Rădulescu 1986: 82, 86).

Changes in the remuneration patterns started to take place in the 1970s and 1980s as certain *lăutari* became quasi-celebrities due to radio and television broadcasts and accordingly "increased their requirements", insisting on higher pay than the other musicians in the ensemble, particularly at weddings and baptism celebrations (Rădulescu 1986: 87). In retrospect, this clearly paved the way for the mega-celebrity performers, most of whom emerged after the Romanian Revolution. Such "star" musicians, often vocalists, rose to fame due to popular genres, such as *manele* [Romanian ethno-pop songs performed mainly by young male Romani vocalists, sing. *manea*], which profoundly altered the traditional *lăutar* repertoire.

A book from the early Twenty-first century: conversations with *Lăutari* (2004)

The four articles by Rădulescu from the 1980s were all written during the height of Nicolae Ceaușescu's repressive rule, when communist government control was particularly far-reaching. The topics of the articles were apolitical; they were subjects that were "safe" during the authoritarian regime in which they were written. There is, of course, no word of *lăutari* as Roma in these articles nor how Romani ethnic identity affected either their lives as musicians or the music they performed. Needless to say, questions about ethnicity, culture, and social status among Romani musicians in Romania were taboo in the 1980s (and earlier), when Romani identity was not even recognized. Once the Romanian Revolution took place in December 1989, however, freedom of speech, perhaps the most important form of liberty in democratic societies, took shape in Romania (and the other newly-liberated countries in Eastern Europe). This freedom was joyfully welcomed and resulted in a significant broadening of more open scholarly pursuit.

The intellectual freedom permitted after 1989 sheds light on the fifth and last publication that I examine here by Rădulescu, *Taifasuri despre muzica țigănească/Chats about Gypsy Music*. Like the four earlier articles, it is based on interviews with *lăutari*, or what Rădulescu calls *taifasuri* – informal, intimate conversations (streamlined in English as "chats"). Her goal here is to understand, through conversations with *lăutari*, most of whom she was familiar with, how ethnic identity informs the nature of traditional music. Both the questions posed and answers given reflect the freedom of speech and intellectual inquiry that permeated post-1989 Romania. The interviews took place between 1998 and 2003, and the book was issued in 2004, exactly two decades after the first of Rădulescu's four articles on various apolitical (but informative) *lăutar* topics was published. *Taifasuri/Chats* is extraordinary

not only because it reflects the freedom to ask and say what needed to be asked and said but also because despite her inescapable presence in the volume, Rădulescu by and large lets the *lăutari* do the talking. The book contains a brief foreword and an introductory section followed by twelve transcribed conversations that comprise the core material, bringing together exchanges between Rădulescu (and, at times, colleagues of hers who join or lead the conversations) and approximately 35 musicians.[11]

Rădulescu's primary goal in the book is to explore Romani ethnic identity and the ways in which it determines and informs music-making by Roma – a topic that could not even be expressed before 1990, let alone printed. She accordingly articulates the fundamental questions that drive the conversations in her introductory "Explanatory Note": "Does 'Gypsy music' exist or does it not exist? If it does, what is it? What is it like? What are the features that characterize it?". She goes on to explain that the discussions with the *lăutari* that are transcribed in the book pertain to "multi-instrumental and vocal-instrumental musics" performed by "Gypsy musicians in festive public contexts". The identity and nature of "Gypsy music" is a topic that intrigued Rădulescu for years. Indeed, she confesses this here, as she again addresses the reader, pointing out that a not insignificant motive for writing this book is actually her own personal quest: "the truth is that I don't really know what Gypsy music is", she writes; "this is one of the reasons why I set about writing this book . . .: in order to try to find out as much as I can about [Gypsy music]", reiterating that "I am not ashamed to admit that *I don't really know* . . ." (Rădulescu 2004: 14, 20).

How do the dialogues that Rădulescu and the various *lăutari* engage in aid in her own understanding of what "Gypsy music" is? The first chat takes place in Rădulescu's home in Bucharest in October 2002. It includes a group of six *lăutari* (all in their 60s and 70s except for a 27-year-old accordionist) from villages in Olt and Dolj Counties as well as Bucharest. They are friends and together form a *taraf* (with three violinists, one *țambal*-player, an accordionist, and a double bass-player). Rădulescu begins with her suggestive remark-cum-question: "So, I asked you whether you are Gypsies . . ." to which Costică Enache (the *țambal*-player) responds "in an animated way": "No, no, we aren't, we aren't! Honestly, if . . ." at which Rădulescu interjects "Maybe you are, I don't know; I'm just asking you . . ." Enache resumes: "Well, but I'm telling

[11] The book contains an English translation (by Adrian Solomon) of the initial sections of the book, including the introduction, while the twelve conversations are summarized.

you sincerely, if we don't know the [Romani] language . . ." Rădulescu again: "And you think that if you don't know the language . . ." Enache: ". . . nor do we have that type of behavior . . . ." Rădulescu continues: "But what, do you think that Gypsies all necessarily have 'that type of behavior'?" to which Enache responds, "after a moment of reflection", "You know what? We think that in our village that we are a bastion of decency . . ." (Rădulescu 2004: 48).

Later in the same chat, moving from ethnicity to song genres, in which again overlapping meanings, including "nesting orientalisms" (Bakić-Hayden 1995) are expressed, the accordionist remarks that "They're singing *manele* now for Romanians. But the Gypsies don't like them anymore." Rădulescu asks, "Do you think that *manele* are Gypsy?" "No", he responds, "absolutely not. They're Turkish . . . ." One of the violinists jumps in, apparently "indignant": "That's not music, Mrs. Speranța!" Another violinist adds, "It's perverse, the *manea*!" The accordionist again speaks: "It's also Bulgarian . . . ." One of the violinists says: "These *manele* are Bulgarian, and Yugoslav . . . and Turkish. They aren't pure, they aren't pure!" Rădulescu then poses another question: "And so you're saying that now Romanians like *manele* more?" to which all of them shout "Yes!!" (Rădulescu 2004: 53).

In the second chat, recorded in November 2000 in a village in Olt County, where the two *lăutari* and two female Romani vocalists who converse with Rădulescu (all of them elderly), reside, Rădulescu asks whether, when they were performing more frequently in the 1960s-1980s, they sensed any difference between Gypsy and Romanian weddings. One of the female vocalist answers: "Yes. Yes. In terms of the music, yes. For Gypsies, we performed *lăutar* music – *lăutar* songs, among them the more Gypsy songs, songs about sorrow". Rădulescu prods her: "So you're saying that the songs 'of sorrow' are more Gypsy . . .?" The singer answers: "Of sorrow, that's it. The way Romica Puceanu and Gabi Luncă sang.[12] The Romanians didn't like the Gypsy songs 'to listen to' – like Romica's, like Gabi's – the way they sang . . ." (Rădulescu 2004: 60).

The vocalist continues, later, noting that when Roma celebrate a wedding in their village, "they only have music from Bucharest". Rădulescu asks, "What do you understand 'music from Bucharest' to be?" The vocalist answers: "*Lăutari* who perform the kind of songs I was talking about before – more sorrowful songs". Rădulescu later asks the two elderly *lăutari* who

[12] Puceanu (1926-1996) and Luncă (1938-2021) were well-known female Romani vocalists from Bucharest who excelled in southern Romanian *muzică lăutărească* [*lăutar* music], including *cântece de ascultare* [songs to listen to].

have joined the discussion, "You've told me that you don't consider yourself Roma but rather Gypsies, or even 'mixed Gypsies'. I'd like to know which music you consider to be yours? . . . I mean . . . the music of this place, of the people of this village." One of them responds, "We consider the music here to be [ethnic Romanian] folk music." Rădulescu continues: "What do you mean by that? The *sârbă*, *horă* . . .? Gypsy songs?" The other answers, "No, Gypsy songs are sung less often here. When Bucharest musicians come here, they sing *lăutar* music, that is, Gypsy [music]. But here we perform folk music" (Rădulescu 2004: 62, 65-66).

Another chat, the fifth, is recorded at Rădulescu's home in Bucharest in August 2002.[13] As *lăutar* music [*muzică lăutărească*] is debated, Rădulescu turns to the question of musicianship and how different ethnic groups "hear" and thus understand music, in this case, traditional Romani "songs to listen to". This elicits a conviction by Constantin Fărâmiță, a 65-year-old *lăutar* violinist and double bassist from Bucharest, regarding superior music-making. Rădulescu asks him, "[D]o regular Gypsies [hear and] understand music like Romanians do or do they hear it differently from them?" Fărâmiță answers: "[A]s a rule, you should know that Gypsies are more sensitive, more emotional [than Romanians]. They cry sooner, you know, when they hear music like this." Rădulescu comes back with: "There are, however, Romanian *lăutari* . . . ." Fărâmiță retorts with: "But not a single one can actually perform *lăutar*-style . . . ." "Not a single one?" asks Rădulescu; "But you told us earlier that one did exist . . ." Fărâmiță replies, "No, no. Romanians??" he sneers; "Eee! That guy was an exception . . . ." Fărâmiță explains that the key is to grow up in a *lăutar* family, complete with *lăutar* "blood" as well as the "*lăutar*-ness" [*lăutărie*] that permeates the household. He clarifies, saying that the Romanian "exception" mentioned earlier "was not from a family of *lăutari* but was raised in the Gypsy quarter, among *lăutari*. His parents and grandparents grew up there" (Rădulescu 2004: 84-85).

The tenth chat takes place in March 2003 in the town of Gherla in Cluj County in Transylvania, at the home of a 45-year-old Romanian violinist, Emil Mihaiu. In addition to Mihaiu, Ion Teiș, a Romani guitarist, age 30, is present. Teiș notes that that the "troupe" (*trupă*) that he performs with is comprised of two Roma (a keyboard-player and himself on the *chitară-braci*[14]

[13] I attended this chat as well.

[14] The *chitară-braci* is a standard electric guitar that provides the accompaniment that is usually produced on the *braci* in the traditional Transylvanian *taraf*. The *braci* is a three-stringed viola in scordatura tuning that has a flattened bridge on which triads can be easily played.

[*braci*-guitar, the *braci* being a three-stringed viola, a traditional instrument in Transylvania]), along with three Romanians: a violinist, saxophonist, and bass guitarist. The interethnic nature of this ensemble is representative of the intersection of the local Romani, Romanian, and Hungarian musics in Transylvania. Rădulescu attempts to tease this out with Teiș and asks him to put into words various differences between "Gypsy", Romanian, and Hungarian musical style. She asks him, "Is it possible to play the same melody in a certain way for Romanians and in another way for Gypsies?" He answers, "Of course, one can do that. For Gypsies one plays more rapidly, more forcefully, at a faster tempo, but for Romanians, one plays sort of more gently." Rădulescu continues: "Do you mean when it's a question of the same melody or just in general?" Teiș responds, "No. Yes. Even if it's the same piece." Rădulescu persists: "Are there also other differences?" Teiș tells her, "For Gypsies there are more harmonies – that's for sure. And the music is more complicated – as complicated as possible . . . . For Romanians, the music is simpler". As the chat continues, Rădulescu turns again to the question of ethno-musical style, asking Teiș, "Is the music of Romanian Gypsies different from that of Hungarian Gypsies?" He answers, "How could it not be?! There's a big difference! So – for Hungarian Gypsies, they sing in Hungarian of course. But they sing in Gypsy-Hungarian! And for the Romanian Gypsies they sing in Gypsy [Romani], but only in Gypsy, not in Hungarian! I played with a troupe about three or four years ago with . . . Hungarian Gypsies. And we'd play half-and-half at weddings: we'd play half of the program Romanian and the other half Hungarian" (Rădulescu 2004: 155-156, 158).

The excerpts that I have chosen to present here just barely skim the surface of the rich discourse that fills this book of conversations. Each *lăutar* is unique, and each response conveys convictions and opinions that further our understanding of *lăutari* as Romani musicians living and earning their livelihood in a complicated interethnic world of music-making. Rădulescu hovers above the chats, initiating and guiding the conversations, prodding the *lăutari* whom she has gathered to think and talk about various questions, and listening, clearly, with great interest as she is also formulating her next question. After all, she seeks answers to her questions in *them* – the *lăutari*; it is *they*, she believes – or at least hopes – who will provide the keys to her inquiries.

But are there clear-cut answers to these questions? Rădulescu herself confesses, even before the conversations in the book unfold, that, "as might be expected, the investigation-chats . . . have not entirely clarified what is and what is not Gypsy music" (Rădulescu 2004: 38). While the "findings" in this book perhaps move her – and us – closer to understanding how ethnic iden-

tity and musical performance are intertwined, I think we can justly say, and Rădulescu would surely concur, that the jury is still out. The question "What is 'Gypsy music'?" remains an open one.

The most significant contribution of this book, very simply, consists of the dialogues between the various *lăutari* and Rădulescu. These conversations were initiated by Rădulescu, then a senior scholar with decades of experience behind her, as a type of personal journey to sort out what "Gypsy music" is. She assembled various groups of *lăutari* from all over Romania – sometimes just one and sometimes an entire *taraf* – and posed big and at times uncomfortable questions relating to ethnic identity and how it informs music-making. How *lăutari* candidly answer Rădulescu's many probing queries is precisely what is so special – and unique – about this book. Similarly, Rădulescu's inquisitive intellect, her spirit, and inimitable personality infusing the lively dialogues are "pure Speranța" – profoundly appreciated all the more given that she is no longer with us.

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Throughout the many decades of her rich and productive career, whether connecting through archival interviews or in person-to-person conversations, Rădulescu considered the countless *lăutari* whom she knew and encountered, as her own words say it best, "people whom I care for and feel close to, respect, and consider my friends" (Rădulescu 2004: 31). All of Rădulescu's publications discussed in the previous pages of this article are about *lăutari*, and all of them focus on what *lăutari* have to say about being *lăutari*. The four articles written in the politically repressive 1980s and based on recorded archival interviews of *lăutari*, concern twentieth-century *lăutar* history, how *lăutari* acquire their performance skills, their specializations as instrumentalists and vocalists, and how they are hired to perform at public celebratory events. And while, in the archival interviews, most of the questions were posed by folklorists other than her, Rădulescu brings the many responses together into four coherent collective "testimonies", carefully and sensitively synthesized and interpreted.

Chats about Gypsy Music, Rădulescu's book published in post-communist 2004, also contains interviews, here called conversations or chats. These discussions cover new ground. Indeed, they are unprecedented; they turn to bold and even at times daring questions posed by Rădulescu, who does not shy away from controversy. And the willing *lăutari* provide open and honest, though often complicated and ambiguous, answers to them. The fundamental topic of the twelve published conversations in the book departs from the earlier histor-

ical, pedagogical, organological, and economic considerations to address how ethnic identity intersects with music-making and performance and how ethnic identity in music-making is revealed and expressed – a topic that is relevant, timely, and, as the diversity of responses reveal, sufficiently complex.

The publications discussed here make clear how Rădulescu's admiration for traditional *lăutar* music informed her longtime pursuit to deepen her own and others' understanding of musicians – who, as Roma, have long been marginalized and misunderstood – as well as to promote and preserve their music. Indeed, she considered *lăutar* music a precious cultural "treasure" that all of Romania could and should appreciate. Rădulescu demonstrates the importance of giving *lăutari* the opportunity to tell their story in their own words and, by extension, granting them the respect that they have often been denied but clearly deserve. The dynamic connection between Rădulescu and the many *lăutari* whose interviews and conversations are discussed in the preceding pages is unmistakable. It is no exaggeration to say that these texts have all inspired me greatly in my own work on *lăutari*. Celebrating them here as my *in memoriam* to Speranța Rădulescu provides a fitting tribute to an unforgettable and beloved colleague and friend.

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