

According to ethnographic, historical, ethnic and other sources, the different types of the chordophone folk instrument, the *tambura*, are encountered with the Turks, the Arabs, the Siberian, middle-Asian, Caucasian and the Turkish-Tatarian peoples. Some of them are with marked positions while others are without any positions at all, some instruments have ancient Turk names, while others bear the name *tambura* (Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, the Uigur people) under Arabic phonetic influence. The *tambura* was carried to the Bulgarian lands by the Bulgars (the ancient name of the Bulgarians) from the time of Asparukh in the 7th c. The instrument of the Bulgars – the *tambura* (*balama*, *karaduzen*, *tambur*, *dutar*, *saz*, *drunkya*, etc.) was called *bulgaria* (*bugaria*) and it was under that name that it was widely-known on the Balkans. During the 19th century the *tambura* in Bulgaria was widely-spread in Dobrudja, North Bulgaria (in a straight line to the East from Lukovit, Lovech and Veliko Tarnovo), the Sredna Gora (Panagyurishte, Sopot, Karlovo, Kazanlak), the Kyustendil region, the Strandja region, part of the East Rhodopes, in Kostenets, Kotel and Sliven. Most probably, at that time the population from the indicated regions enjoyed significant contacts. Today, the *tambura* is not a frequently used instrument in the country. It is characteristic of the Pirin folk region where one can see instruments with various number of strings and different type of tuning. The modern *tambura* has also a pear-like shape with an elongated neck which ends with a head in the form of a spade. It consists of:

- **a body** (corpus, resounding box) carved of sycamore, (*Acer pseudoplatanus* L). An instrument made of sycamore is of the best quality and sound;
- **a neck** (a handle) - glued at its one broader end to the corpus and the narrower one containing the head. This is in real fact the neck of the instrument;
- **the peg box** - installed in the head. The *tambura* pegs are made of metal and are used for fixing the strings before tuning;
- **the metallic half-tone frets** - up to 24 in number, chromatically arranged. On the neck, there are markings as white dots on the 5th, 7th and 12th positions defining the fourth, fifth and eighth intervals;
- **a nut** - placed at the beginning of the neck close to the head; the strings lie on it;
- **a resounding board** (under the strings) made of spruce (*Picea exelsa* L) with three points of support;
- **a bridge** - placed at the lower end of the resounding board at 10 to 15 cm of the sound opening. It is also made of sycamore and is used for lifting the strings over the board and the neck;
- **the string holder** - fixed to the lower end of the body with eight openings of the strings, made of steel. The strings are tuned to e-b-g-d.

In the past there were not so prominent performers on the *tambura*, as there were on the *kaval*, bagpipe and *gadulka*. In the years after 1935, when instrumental folk groups like the Bistritsa

Chetvorka, the Trakiiska Troika, the Ugarchin Group, etc., were formed with Radio Sofia, the *tambura* took significant part in the ensembles as an accompanying folk instrument. At first its resources as a solo instrument were rarely used. It only after the formation of a Folk Orchestra with the Bulgarian National Radio that the *tambura* attained its place in the orchestra. There also appeared the first acclaimed performers who made use of the melodic, harmonic and technical resources of the instrument. A characteristic style of performance was also formed.

Rumen SIRAKOV is a prominent representative of the *tambura* style of performance in Bulgaria. He was born on October 1, 1941 in the village of Blateshnitsa, Radomir district. Aged 6 only, he started playing the *pishtyalka* (whistle) and the *dvoyanka* (double whistle), carved by his grandfather. Captivated by music, while still a student in Sofia he began playing the trumpet and the clarinet in school wind bands. His graduation from a school of classical guitar where he studied under Assen Dimitrov performed a significant role in his development but along with that he started playing the *tambura*, under the influence of the great master-performers on this instrument at the time.

At 17 he appeared in a competition at the Bulgarian National Radio Folk Song Ensemble and became part of this remarkable formation. That was the beginning of his professional career. His musical professionalism was further enhanced by his appearances in the Orchestra of Boris Karlov, the Lenovo Group, the Sadovo Orchestra, the Orchestra of Kosta Kolev and Petko Radev, where he expanded his harmonic and soloist skills.

In 1968 Rumen Sirakov, together with the prominent *kaval*-player Stoyan Velichkov and Mihail Marinov, the stylish *gadulka*-player, founded the Trakiiska Troika. The name was adopted from the former group, founded in 1939 by Manol Todorov on suggestion by folk singer Atanaska Todorova. As one of the Trakiiska Troika he took part in a number of radio broadcasts and numerous concerts both at home and abroad.

Sirakov shows preference for the Graovo instrumental music and when asked about folk songs he says he likes best the Strandja songs. When playing the traditional *horo* dances, he chooses to use the droning strings, as it was in the traditional practice (Radomirska Rachenitsa). Many are the *horo* dances created by him which are broadcast on the Bulgarian National Radio: Didinata, Zhochkino Horo, Chetvorno Horo, Ihtimansko Horo (a hit in 1970, which entered the repertoire of all amateur folk orchestras), Kyustendilsko Horo, Blateshnichka Kopanitsa, Fiery Horo and many others. One can call his Piece for Tambura a classical composition for this instrument. This is a piece-concertino for *tambura* and folk orchestra, which has been included in the curriculum of the educational establishments for folk music art (the high schools in Shiroka Luka and Kotel, the Academy of Music and Dance Art in Plovdiv, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridsky, etc).

In the course of his 14 year teaching career at the Palace of Children in Sofia, Rumen Sirakov has trained many brilliant *tambura* performers like Lyubomir Vladimirov, Petar Tsambov, Alex-

ander Kassiyarov. At the same time he has methodically assisted the folk music training, by writing *horo* dances (Didinata, Chetvorno, Radomirsko, Fiery Horo, etc.), which have become very popular and are played even today. They are folk song based and developed on the improvisational principle with modulation deviations. All in all, the musical form is A-B-A.

In the recent years of his creative career Rumen Sirakov prefers playing on the so-called modern instruments (accordion, clarinet, synthesizer). "The synthesizer is best combined with the tambura," says Sirakov. In 1978, together with accordionist Georgi Emilov, he founded the Slavia Orchestra to which he became also an arranger. The Slavia Orchestra made a number of recordings for the Bulgarian National Radio and gave many concerts.

Rumen Sirakov enjoys an impressive career. Between 1985 to the present day he has been to London 7 times. Joe Boyd, who managed the Trakisska Troika and Trio Bulgarka as part of the Balkana Group, attended his concerts. He has had personal artistic contacts with George Harrison and Eric Clapton, the world-known guitarist. Balkana is also closely connected with pop-singer Cate Bush.

In Bulgaria Rumen Sirakov has accompanied the performance of all celebrated folk singers: Boris Mashalov, Gyurga Pindjurova, Mita Stoicheva, Atanaska Todorova, Valkana Stoyanova, Yovcho Karaivanov, Kostadin Gugov, Slavka Sekutova, to mention but a few. He is always capable of finding the best resounding motif, the most successful harmonic pattern which helps him in finding the best accompaniment to the solo singer.

Rumen Sirakov has established an individual style of performing on the *tambura* and this marks an instrumental school of its own. This style is marked by its own features: positioning of the instrument, the use of his left and right hands. His left hand uses the violin positioning of the neck, while the right moves the plectrum, which is done in rhythmic thirds. Thus he achieves warmth and temperament, beauty and aesthetic joy. Besides, Rumen Sirakov employs many of the techniques of other traditional folk instruments: *kaval* (*klepane, sechene, klepchene*); *gadulka* (finger shifting). His use of rich ornamentation is remarkable. What impresses most in it is the use of the hiatus.

Rumen Sirakov's art has been highly appreciated at prestigious international forums.

Recently he marked the 40th anniversary of his creative activity. His contribution as a performer and founder of the Bulgarian school of *tambura* performance is undeniable. He is one of the masters in the sphere of Bulgarian musical folklore who has devoted all his energy to it and has remained faithful to it through the various controversial stages of its development. He is still faithful to the keen difference between tradition and perfection, and the artificially imposed primitivism.

Prof. Manol Todorov
English translation A. Djelepova