

THE EX-MAESTRO

When speaking of professionalism, the *zurnacies* turn their attention much more to the working maestro as well as to the tuition of the future one, than to the ex-maestro. The old maestri – still alive but not playing, or deceased but having left strong memories of themselves – are spoken of with a romantic pathos, not a realistic appraisal. There is not a concept of *former* musician in the verbal mythologization of the Roma musicians. The musician is eternal. These are usually their ancestors: fathers, grandfathers, grand-grand-fathers, who are the “golden times” of the music tradition. Far away in the past, beyond the living tradition, the old men, ex-maestri, are both adherence to the “golden times” and adoption of the very best of this tradition [Пейчева, 1999:169-170]. Those are “the oldest and best *zurnacies*”, “those who walk hardly, breathe hardly, who are hardly alive”, but though not performing any more they are true maestri: “It’s in the blood of those *zurnacies*. He was born such a man. While the *zurnaci* of today – his interest drives him to be what you please... The commercial. That’s right. He is not what his heart tells him” [III., p.7-8].

The opposition old-young can be drawn while determining the parameters of skilfulness of yesterday and today via the opposition “according to the blood – according to the interest”. But when musicians are asked like this: “When is a maestro no more such?” the mythologizations are not present. The opposition heart-body (the heart wants but the body is unable) and the matter of disability emerge in the pragmatic discourse.

The maestro of today speaks indulgently of the ex-maestri who are close to him in time and when he still needs to break the ice and to outline his own territory: “To cut the long story short, in Gotse Delchev, they just have the names *zurnacies*, they don’t matter. There aren’t such any more. Me being the oldest, we’ve met many times, I’ve been ever ahead of them... They’re of the old sort. How will he learn a song to play from the new recordings! They cannot play the contemporary music. For example, the sons, they’re interested in this, what they hear, they immediately (start paying it)...” [IO., p.22]. Ignoring the musicians from his generation and those from the generation of his teachers, the player, who is 58, admits that it is high time for him to give the leadership to his son. The hero-maestro is on the way of becoming an ex-maestro. Therefore it is worth quoting his version about this transition. According to him it depends on time: “M. used to be at those days. But he got old and nobody demands him. I told you it depends on time”. When does the time of a maestro expire? The musician’s story gives several benchmarks related to the physical strength, the desire and the memory: “It is felt. The strength of those days is lacking. This doesn’t attract me at all. In the past what you hear, having heard it for the first time, two or three times more hearing it, I got it like a magnet! Now how can I – the years do not allow me” [IO., p.24].

Many musicians have pointed out the gradual weakening of the musician’s memory as an indicator of the maestro’s decay. Forgetting the traditional repertoire and being unable to learn a new one, the *zurnaci* stops to be a maestro, since when someone does not perceive and give out music he cannot meet the demands of the customers and be an equal partner of his colleagues: “Those now, the same maestri who are older, they can’t play well. It should be a maestro our age, to take up this job. To play the song right to the end exactly. Otherwise those, the elder, have not this fresh memory” [B., p.10].

To be more particular, the notion of “memory” has a different meaning for the old and