

ŽEJANSKI KNTADURI (THE ŽEJANAN SINGERS)

By Mauro Doričić

Our folklore society, Žejanski Zvončari (The Žejanan Bellringers), was established in 1997 with the goal of preserving old carnival traditions. This society revived the activities of an older folklore group from the 1980s, which had, cultivated traditional dances and singing in cooperation with the Danica Folklore Group from Pasjak.

Our society is composed of Zvončari (The Bellringers), a male carnival dance group, another folklore dance ensemble that performs traditional dances from Opatija's hinterland, and Žejanski Kntaduri (The Žejanan Singers), a group devoted to old-style, two-part harmony *a capella* singing, which also has numerous popular songs in its repertoire.

Traditional two-part harmony *a capella* singing, known locally as *starinska kna* (old song), has been preserved in Žejân/Žejane through the present. In the old days, people would sing *starinska kna* at a variety of celebrations or simply while socializing at the local tavern. Today, this style of singing is mostly practiced as part of the activities of Žejanski Kntaduri. Some of the original songs preserved in the Žejanski language include: „Knd am tire“ (When I [asked] you), „Mes-am oča ši kola“ (I went around), „Oj ljepure nu žuka“ (Don't dance, rabbit), „Dela Jurine prla Štipe“ (From the Jurinas' to the Štipes') i „Fina feta“ (A nice girl).

In the 1960s, when electricity and the radio came to our village, songs from Italy, Slovenia and Dalmatia could reach us more easily, and this led to decreased interest in our traditional *a capella* style singing. During this period, the band Sandor, a trio made up of Boris Doričić, Cvetko Doričić and Miro Sanković, was active. They performed popular songs, some of which Boris Doričić had translated into Žejanski. One of the popular hits translated into Žejanski was the song “Marina,” which became an obligatory part of all celebrations and parties. At the same time, older singers continued to perform traditional *a capella* songs at folklore festivals and other cultural events.

After the Žejanski Zvončari Folklore Society was established in 1997, we came to the idea of creating an anthem for our group. Igor Doričić wrote the song “Žejanska” in the local Croatian dialect and did the musical arrangement. We started rehearsing it, but, as Žejanans, we wanted to sing our anthem in Žejanski, as well. Boris took on the task of translating it and we now have the song in two versions.

We continued adding more songs translated into Žejanski by Boris to our repertoire: “Marina,” “Tu ver fi ama” (You'll be mine) and “Pustu an Žejan” (Carnival in Žejân/Žejane). This last song gives a good description of our carnival traditions and The Bellringer's procession through the village. We also added a few waltzes and polkas, as well as instrumental versions of older traditional dances—the *ćotiš*, *mazolin* and old-fashioned polka. Then, in November 1997, we published our first audio cassette, self-titled “Žejanski Zvončari.” The singers were Boris Doričić, Cvetko Doričić, Lučiano Doričić, Josip Doričić, Ivan Sanković, Vilim Sanković, and Lučiano Turković.

We were very pleased with our first album on cassette because we managed to present our language in a fun way and thus contribute to its preservation. We continued singing, primarily in the Žejanski language. At the same time, we started working with singers of an older generation on the recovery of the traditional *kna*, a task they were most eager to help us with.

In June 1999, we were invited to the International Folk Dance Festival in Ruurlo in Holland. In addition to presenting traditional dances, at the organizers' urging, we also performed two spiritual songs on the accordion: “Ostani s nama” (Stay with Us) and “Isus na žalu” (Christ on the Shore). Later that year, we performed the same two songs at St. Andrew's Festival in our church in Žejân/Žejane, and from then on we added spiritual songs to our repertoire.

We also received help from Renato Pernić, who visited us while writing an article about our traditions, dances, music and instruments. We realized that he had purchased the last original *cindra* (a two-string mandolin-like instrument) from Žejane for his collection of old Istrian instruments and that he also had an old recording of traditional *kna* sung by the original singers. He allowed us to make copies of the recording and lent the old *cindra* to Cvetko Doričić, who made an exact replica of it.

To help preserve the traditional *knta*, in November 2001 we recorded several old songs, those most commonly sung in our region, together with the original singers. In addition to the songs in Žejanski, we also added a few songs in Croatian: “Oj javore, zelen bore” (Oh, my green maple tree), “Pusta mladost” (Lost youth), “Zakukala siva kukavica” (The gray cuckoo bird called), “Ča si mala letnji dan delala” (Girl, what were you doing on that summer day) and “Vela gora po leti zelena” (The mountain turns green in the summer). The songs were performed by Anton Doričić, Josip Doričić, Josip Rogutić, Franjo Turković, and Federiko Uković. To complete this CD, we added an instrumental on *cindra*, played by Cvetko Doričić, as well as a waltz and a polka.

At the same time, we worked on a CD titled “Amev pust” (My carnival), which featured popular songs. In addition to the title song in Žejanski, we also recorded: „Kte vote“ (How many times), „O zi de život“ (A day of life), „Žejanska“ (Žejanan song), and „Trej šoldi an fntra.“ (Three coins in the fountain). Boris Doričić wrote the lyrics for all of the songs, and Igor Doričić did all the musical arrangements. The singers were Boris Doričić, Cvetko Doričić, Igor Doričić, Josip Doričić, Lučiano Doričić, Mauro Doričić, Ivan Sanković, Vilim Sanković, Nenad Strčić, and Zdenko Uković. The CD was recorded in Lovran and produced by Ivo Popeskić.

In November 2004, we recorded our fourth CD, “Ojajna.” In addition to popular songs (“Oab golub” [Una paloma blanca], “Rozamunda” [Rosamunde] and “Motoriču” [The motorcycle]), this album also featured spiritual songs (“Čoajo anostu” [Our father], “Milost” [Mercy], and “Tiha nuopte” [Silent night]) as well as old *a capella* songs. It also includes “Roano oastez meg kosi” [Early this morning, I went to mow the field], a new song performed in the style of the traditional *knta*, and an expanded version of “Dela Jurine prla Štipe” (From the Jurinas’ to the Štipes’), accompanied by the *cindra*. All songs were translated into Žejanski by Boris Doričić and arranged by Igor Doričić. This fourth CD also contains the song “Martinja pul Frlani” (St. Martin’s Day in Frlani), written by Zvonko Turak and arranged by Adam Škrobonja, as well as a mix of Slovenian songs popular in Žejân/Žejane. The singers were Boris Doričić, Cvetko Doričić, Igor Doričić, Josip Doričić, Mauro Doričić, Željko Doričić, Ivan Sanković, Vilim Sanković, Nenad Strčić, and Zdenko Uković.

The Žejanski Kntaduri attend numerous regional and international cultural festivals throughout the year, as they continue their work of passing the old singing traditions on to the next generation of Žejanans. Our hope is to lay the foundations for preserving this important element of our village's intangible heritage.

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