

Women's Role in Sustaining the Practice of Tamburitza Instruments in Vojvodina¹

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Abstract: *In Vojvodina, the autonomous northern province of the Republic of Serbia, the collective (orchestral) playing of tambura instruments (of varying sizes and tunings) represents a particular style of the region sound mapping. According to literature, this practice has developed from the nineteenth century till today through multiple forms and in informal and formal contexts. The start of the twentieth century led to changes in the creation of the corpus of tambura instruments and the increase of strings for tuning. An intensive development of music-making on these instruments influenced the transformation of performance paradigms through the roles of specific orchestral instruments, playing techniques, interpretations, repertoires and styles. Since the beginning of collective tambura performances, women have participated primarily as members of the orchestra, while their role over the past few decades has shifted significantly. This chapter investigates the contemporary practice in which women have a more significant position in its sustainability, considering their participation in the process of formal and informal education, performance and creation of new compositions. Female tambura players are students, professors, musicians, conductors and composers and they visibly contributing to the survival of traditional types of tambura music and the development of new interpretational and genre frameworks. In addition to individual female tamburitza players' activities, the creation of women's tambura orchestras during the twentieth century had special influence on the sustainability of tambura music.*

Keywords: *women, tambura instruments, Vojvodina, sustainability, education.*

Until recently, the image of tamburitza playing in Serbian music scholarship emerged as a practice commonly associated with men, particularly in the representative cultural domain. Female playing of tamburitza was perceived as an exception within framework of patriarchal culture. In recent years, however, the role of women in performing traditional instrumental music has become an object of study of gender-oriented ethnomusicology aimed at the identification of female performers in traditional and contemporary music practices in Serbia and the Balkans (Nenić 2019: 9, 14). This study attempts to show

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the importance of women in the tamburitza tradition in the northern region of Serbia known as Vojvodina², with a particular focus on those who, through their performances, have contributed to the sustainability of tamburitza performance in the contemporary context.

Performance contexts of instrument playing frequently interact with presumptions concerning women's skills and stereotypes about gender roles (Klenke 2018: 10, 20; Wrazen 2010: 44). Karin Klenke defines female leadership contextually within the nation, religion, family, sports, politics, technology, etc. She states that "contextual factors set the boundaries within which leaders and followers interact and determine the constraints and demands that surround the leader-follower dyad" (2018: 10). Thus, within the tamburitza practice, "recurring patterns" can be followed through various women's roles, and especially the positions of formal and informal leadership with the expert power based upon competency (Northouse 2008: 4–5). Women's roles in tamburitza practice became especially prominent between the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. This chapter is based on recent research compiled through interviewing and highlights women whose experience has been important for the development of tamburitza music in Vojvodina, as well as on literature survey of the general principles of tamburitza playing in traditional and contemporary setting.

Tamburitza Practice in Vojvodina before World War II

Different ethnic communities in Vojvodina, in particular Serbs, Bunjevci, Roma, Hungarians, Croats, Rusyins, and Slovaks, are known for playing plucked string instruments called tamburitza. The tamburitza players perform in small ensembles (usually consisting of up to eight musicians), or in larger orchestras with sixteen or more performers which, recently, become a representative practice in a formalized institutional context. The contemporary tamburitza practice relies not only on folk music, but also on the transcribed examples of art and popular music, as well as on originally composed pieces for this type of ensembles.

According to written sources, the tamburitza practice has developed in Vojvodina from the 19th century into multiple formats, within both the formal and informal context.³ Relevant published data about tamburitza music in Vojvodina dates back to 1817, when playing on these instruments was recorded in Subotica (Sabo 1998: 55).⁴ The first half of the 19th century is also associated with a development of orchestral music in Serbian Bačka⁵ (Forry 2011: 141–142). According to information from the memoirs of

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- 2 Vojvodina is a region in the North of Serbia with a rich multicultural population, formed through century-long complex historical processes.
 - 3 Mentions of the tamburitza as musical instrument can be traced during the 18th and 19th centuries in various works of folk literature (Forry 2011: 139).
 - 4 According to Ivan Sabo, the first mentions of the tamburitza in Vojvodina are related to 1817, when Matija Petar Katančić had the opportunity to hear singing accompanied by the tamburitza in Subotica (Sabo 1998: 55).
 - 5 Bačka is a geographic region in Serbia and also a wider historic area that belongs partly to Serbia and partly to Hungary.

Jakov Ignjatović (1966: 84), in the same period Vojvodina tamburitza ensembles started performing in *kafanas*⁶ and ceremonial halls of prestigious European hotels as arenas for negotiating public and private music making.⁷ Performing in *kafanas* was especially important for establishing different musical practices and styles, exchanging experiences among performers and creating specific communication with the audience (Dumnić 2019: 140). Due to the fact that Vojvodina, as a part of Austria-Hungary during the 19th century, underwent modernization and urbanization, the development of tamburitza practice relied on permeability of the borders between rural and urban areas and hence on the exchange between folk and urban music (Ranisavljević 2011: 110). The repertoire of tamburitza ensembles included arrangements of traditional and popular dances and songs, as well as arrangements of popular works of art music (Forry 2011: 147).

A great technical leap in tamburitza music making took place at the beginning of the 20th century. The changes were related to the structure of the various tamburitza instruments and more specifically, to the number of strings, increased from 3 (tuned in fifths) to 4 (tuned in fourths). Furthermore, the instruments changed their shapes so that their formerly pear-like bodies would resemble those of the guitar, with the exception of the *prim*⁸, which maintained its old shape. This change in the shape of the instrument led to a “fuller” timbre, which in turn influenced the volume in orchestral music (Salaćanin 1998: 48). Since these transformations in tamburitza's characteristics, the playing practice of this instrument developed more intensively, while new performance paradigms emerged through the roles of specific instruments in the orchestra, playing techniques, interpretation, repertoire, and style (Sabo 1998: 60). In both urban and rural settings in Vojvodina, tamburitza practice contributed to a growing number of count of orchestras popularizing this music such as the Tamburitza orchestra of Vojvodina students, the Amateur tamburitza orchestra of the Mačkaši brothers from Mol, the Tamburitza orchestra of the Kozarski brothers from Stari Bečej, the Sokol tamburitza society from Subotica under the direction of Pero Tumbas and others (Dumnić 2019: 157). At the beginning of the 20th century, popular ensembles recorded their performances on gramophone records with various European labels (Brzić 2012: 69–70). Classically educated musicians such as Mita Orešković (1816–1867), Vasa Jovanović (1872–1943), Marko Nešić (1873–1938) and others, who anticipated the institutionalization of tamburitza practice were also members of these ensembles (Antunović 2018: 58–61; Lajić Mihajlović 2019: 22). They composed various songs in accordance with the style of folk music or published manuals for playing the tamburitza (Dumnić 2019: 166, 174, 177). They had an important role as the forerunners of the professionalization of tamburitza playing in Serbia. This coincided with the creation of the Tamburitza Radio-Orchestra in 1936 by Radio Belgrade, under the lead-

6 *Kafana* is a traditional Serbian taverna.

7 Besides in Vojvodina, the tamburitza practice was also popular in Croatia, Dalmatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, Austria, Czech Republic, and even on other continents, thanks to the work of emigrants (Kovačević 1984: 452) during the 19th century. The creation of Paja Kolarić orchestra in Osijek in 1847 is of exceptional importance for the development of regional practice, of which there are also written testimonies (Forry 2011: 142).

8 *Prim* is the name for the leading tamburitza instrument of the smallest dimensions.

ership of Aleksandar Aranicki (Dumnić 2019: 157–158)⁹. At the same time the standard of the eight-member tamburitza ensemble was established (Ranisavljević 2011: 211).

Considering the practice of tamburitza until World War II, it can be observed that the roles of Kapellmeister (the ensemble leader), performers, and composers were dominated by men.¹⁰ This fact is not at all surprising, given that the spaces in which music was performed tended to be public (usually coffee houses and private celebrations), and these were considered inappropriate for women as musicians. According to biographical data about Vasa Jovanović, being a musician was not a particularly valued profession in society, so it can be assumed that at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the position of women playing instruments was specific (Brzić 2012: 66). Female performance in the public sphere was socially marginalized, as opposed to private spaces, and since the 19th century also served as a mark of class position, where the choice of the instrument and the manner of the performance could indicate the social status of a female musician; whether a woman should perform in the public often depended on the support of male family members (Nenić 2019: 82 et passim). Photographs from that period show that some *kafana* ensembles included performances by the wives of musicians as well as by other women. One of them was Olga Kwitzau from Germany, with whom Vasa Jovanović, the founder of the “Beli orao” (White Eagle) orchestra, fell in love (Jerkov 2003: 2).¹¹ Vasa taught Olga to play the tamburitza, and she later joined the “Beli orao” orchestra. In 1904 and 1905 she was active in different roles as kapell-meister,¹² director and member of numerous ensembles.¹³ Besides Olga, a special place is occupied by Mileva Radujkov, who, as the wife of musician Marko Nešić, played and sang with him in the same orchestra, “Beli orao” (Brzić 2012: 62). Olga and Mileva were not the only women who participated in the performances of *kafana* ensembles, as evidenced by numerous photographs from the beginning of the last century. This notwithstanding, there is not enough information to shed light on the biographies of these often anonymous female tamburitza players.¹⁴

The beginning of the 20th century represents a turning point for female musicians with the arrival of the *Damenkapellen* (all-female musical bands) to the Balkans. Their

9 According to Marija Dumnić (2019), Radio Belgrade Folk and Tamburitza Orchestra was founded for the purpose of accompanying the singers performing in radio broadcast. It is interesting that the tamburitza orchestra was more popular in Vojvodina than in other parts of Serbia and that in technical and arrangement terms it was better than the folk orchestra. The leader of the tamburitza orchestra, Aleksandar Aranicki, was a tamburitza player and a violinist who arranged about three thousand songs and about four hundred folk dance songs (Dumnić 2019: 157–158).

10 Pajo Kolarić, Mita Orešković, Stipan Mukić, Marko Nešić, Vasa Jovanović, Petar Ž. Ilić and Isidor Bajić were among the most important composers during the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century (Sabo 1998: 63–64).

11 The photograph with Olga Kwitzau was taken in 1905 in Leipzig (Germany)

12 She was a leader of a chapel “Carmen” (Brzić 2012: 53).

13 Olga Kwitzau was the conductor and director of the First Croatian tamburitza choir “Jelačić”, and later a member of the Croatian tamburitza choir “Jeka”, the Italian group “Risorgimento” and the Serbian-Hungarian group “Carmen” (Brzić 2012: 53).

14 In the book by Boško Brzić dedicated to the composer Vasa Jovanović, there is a photograph which supplies information about a certain Katarina Hrlić who was the conductor of the Croatian tamburitza chapel “Jeka” (Brzić 2012: 56).

emergence included German, Czech, and Austrian women's ensembles, hired to perform at venues such as hotels (Nenić 2019: 83). As an echo of this practice, female tamburitza musicians started appearing in amateur singing societies, which had already been established in churches in the second half of the 19th and first half of the 20th century. Such is the case of the Serbian Church Choral Society "Javor-gusle" from Šid which, according to a photograph dated 1903, included female tamburitza players (Figure 1). In addition to being played in the public sphere, tamburitza was additionally represented in private spaces, particularly as an instrument for ladies, which women used to make music in their own families, thereby expressing class of social affiliation. The practice of amateur salon performance was popular in the interwar period and relied on the use of printed musicals scores along with basic music literacy (Dumnić 2019: 141). The photographs taken before World War II showing women performing tamburitza music in a family context are rare. One of these precious photographs now belongs to the premises of the City tamburitza orchestra in Subotica and represents an anonymous family from Kanjiža in 1940.

Figure 1: Serbian church choir "Javor-gusle" from Šid. The photograph was taken in 1903 and is part of the photo archive of Bojan Trenkić, president of the Association of tamburitza societies of Vojvodina.



Women and Tamburitza Playing between the Second Half of the 20th and the Beginning of the 20st Century

The development of tamburitza music, which took off in the second half of the 20th century, completely separated rural from urban music making, because uneducated musicians played in rural areas, while the musicians in the cities relied on the skills of musical literacy (Ranisavljević 2011: 110). Professional orchestras were formed in the cities at regional radio stations, and amateur playing under the auspices of cultural-educational and cultural-artistic societies became especially popular (Vukosavljev 1990: 65). Informal institutions also worked on music literacy and popularization of tamburitza music, so that large orchestras were formed, numbering from twenty to as many as seventy members. The founding of the Great tamburitza orchestra of Radio Novi Sad (1957)¹⁵ holds a special significance for tamburitza playing in Vojvodina. Their work introduced the symphonic concept of orchestral music making in tamburitza playing and thus led to further development of tamburitza music in the region (Ranisavljević 2011: 213).

A turning point in the development of tamburitza music in Vojvodina, as well as in Yugoslavia, was the year 1958, when a meeting of tamburitza experts was held in Novi Sad on the initiative of Sava Vukosavljev and Julije Njikoš (Vukosavljev 1990: 66). It was then that individual orchestral scores for each instrument of the tamburitza family were established and the names for the instruments adopted from folk terminology: the *bisernica* (*biser* meaning pearl) or *prim*, the *brač* or *basprim*, the *tambura* cello, the *bugarija* or *contra*, and the *begeš/tambura* bass (Sabo 1998: 60). In addition, an agreement was created to establish the Festival of tamburitza music of Yugoslavia in Osijek and the creation of original musical works for tamburitza orchestras started (Vukosavljev 1990: 66). This organization of the tamburitza playing laid the foundation for the contemporary performing practice, which is still relevant today in all contexts of tamburitza music making. Through the presence within the media space of Radio Television of Vojvodina and the creation of festivals initiated during the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, this practice gained its legitimacy and popularity in public discourse.

Since the communist government of post-World War II Yugoslavia supported the process of female emancipation, girls and women were, for the most part, able to participate in various kinds of formal and informal tamburitza education. In addition to playing in amateur orchestras, they also had the opportunity to study in elementary music schools, where tamburitza playing was introduced in 1950.¹⁶ They thus gained enough

15 This orchestra started working in a small ensemble in 1949 as the Tamburitza orchestra of Radio Novi Sad. Over time, it changed its name several times. In 1957 it was renamed the Grand tamburitza orchestra of Radio Novi Sad, and during the period 1974–1992, it was the Grand tamburitza orchestra of Radio Television Novi Sad. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia, in 1992, it was called the Grand Tamburitza Orchestra of the Radio Television of Serbia, and since 2008, the Grand tamburitza orchestra of the Radio Television of Vojvodina.

16 Isidor Hadnadjev introduced the tamburitza in the teaching subject at the music school in Becej in 1950, thus initiating the formal training on this instrument. In addition, in 1960, in collaboration with Sava Vukosavljev and Branko Čenejac, he published six books of the *School for tamburitza of the Vojvodina system* as basic literature for learning in music schools (Slavić and Petković 2020: 46).

skills to the point that, upon completion of their music education,¹⁷ they were able to take on several leadership positions in the Vojvodina tamburitza tradition for the very first time.

As a great connoisseur of tamburitza music, Sava Vukosavljev popularized this instrument among the female students of the School for teachers in Novi Sad from 1953. to 1958., where he worked (Zečević 1998: 20). Since only girls were educated at this institution, their instrumental education included playing one of the offered instruments such as: violin, tamburitza (Figure 2) or accordion. Most of the girls opted for the tamburitza, so Sava Vukosavljev, in addition to two choirs and a group of singers, established a large and a small tamburitza orchestra (Mihalek 1998: 72–75). Later, as teachers, Vukosavljev's former students worked on popularizing the instrument within the primary school system, that is, in the work of music sections (musical groups in schools).

Figure 2: Sava Vukosavljev with the women's tamburitza orchestra of the Educational school in Novi Sad. The photograph was taken in 1951 and is part of the photo archive of Bojan Trenkić, the president of the Association of tamburitza societies of Vojvodina.



Women made a special contribution to the preservation and development of tamburitza practice during the 1970s and 1980s. They became the first tamburitza professors to take formal and informal leadership positions, thus establishing a triadic relationship within gender, teaching and tradition, as the one described by Wrazen (2010: 43) among the Polish Górale community in Canada. Considering the Polish tradition of playing in an ensemble and dancing in North America, Wrazen stated that in their home area in Poland, men played a major role as bearers of this practice. However, by moving to North America and changing their lifestyles, women have taken an important role in the initiatives for preservation of local traditions and the transfer of knowledge (Wrazen

17 Within music education in Serbia, tamburitza can be taught in primary and secondary music schools, while at the higher level there are no such opportunities. That is why students after high school for tamburitza enroll in another course at music faculties.

2010: 45–46). Indeed, women's leadership and knowledge transfer was distinctly emphasized between mothers-leaders and their daughters, where the learning process is personalized at a deeper emotional level and the girls' desire to be like their mothers was significant (2010: 45–46). In the tamburitza practice in Vojvodina, one can also speak of women who were role-models for younger generations of girls in finding adequate space for women's playing and teaching. Among them, Mira Temunović from Subotica stood out, and later Sonja Berta, Marijana Marki, Dušica Ševo, Smiljana Jančić, Zorica Opačić, Julijana Baštić, Milica Lerić and others.¹⁸ The music careers of most of them were marked by the study of tamburitza in the formal system (music schools), as well as the acquisition of skills through orchestral performance in the informal sphere (municipal tamburitza orchestras and those belonging to cultural and artistic societies). Having acquired their academic education, and as a result of their performance skills and professional expertise, they obtained positions of professors and conductors. Mira Temunović (born in 1964) from Subotica played the most significant role among them, as she was the eldest in that generation, and the first to accept the position of conductor (Figure 3). At the time when she affirmed herself as a tamburitza player, this instrument, according to her, was marked as "male" and connected to the tavern context. However, as being educated in music at the primary and secondary music school, and later on obtaining a degree in music pedagogy from the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, Mira's approach was different. Within the tamburitza music scene, her performing career lasted for 30 years, mostly through performances with the City tamburitza orchestra from Subotica (since 1977). Professionally, she pushed the boundaries in several fields, the most important of which is proving her playing skills and virtuosity, which is why she matched her male colleagues (Nenić 2019: 124). In other words, it was not expected that a woman can play tamburitza as well as a man. Thus, at the invitation of Zoran Mulić, she collaborated part-time with the Tamburitza orchestra of Radio Television Novi Sad in the performance of Ravel's *Bolero*. In addition, she has been working as a tamburitza teacher in elementary music schools since 1987, and she turned her great playing and pedagogical experience into the first curriculum for tamburitza for music high schools. Indeed, from her position of pedagogue she formally contributed to the introduction of this instrument in high school music education in 1995 at the Music School in Subotica. She also formed a tamburitza orchestra in this school, and she conducted it for many years and having achieved significant results at competitions.¹⁹ She is also involved in conducting and pedagogy in the informal system through her involvement in the Croatian Music Association, where she has been active since 2000. The confirmation of her notable pedagogical work lies within the award of the Association of music schools of Serbia for her life's work, which is awarded for outstanding professional achievements. Her dedication to tamburitza music and connection with the instrument is also expressed by her nickname – Mira Tambu-

18 In addition to the mentioned tamburitza players, we should point out the performers of the older generation who is not active now, such as Jelena Obad Šćiteroci, who conducted the orchestra in Futog.

19 Mira, in an effort to extend the boundaries of women's participation in tamburitza music, assembled her students into the women's tamburitza ensemble "Korona", which operated from 2007 to 2014.

ritza. Her entire career and activity have contributed to her being recognized as a leader in the world of tamburitza. She is aware of her leadership position, which, according to her own words, she gained thanks to the fact that she always had a clear vision of what she was doing with immense patience, persistence and perseverance (Mira Temunović, interview, Subotica, 6 Februar 2022). During her career, she often faced prejudices that accompanied her as a woman, until she proved her performing and pedagogical competencies. Because of all these qualities in particular, she managed to fight for her position in the tamburitza practice of Vojvodina and to be respected by her colleagues and the wider community.

Figure 3: Tamburitza professor Mira Temunović (photo from the archives of Mrs. Temunović).



In addition to Mira Temunović, positions of exceptional professors and conductors of city orchestras in Vojvodina are occupied by Sonja Berta (born Jaramazović in 1981) and Marijana Marki (born Crnković in 1980) from Subotica, as well as Smiljana Jančić (born Vejnović in 1980) from Ruma. Sonja Berta is the daughter of the outstanding tamburitza performer Stipan Jaramazović, from whom she learned to play. She then continued her training at the Music School in Subotica in the class of Mira Temunović. Since the tamburitza is not included in the official higher education system, Sonja continued her musical training by graduating at the Department of Music Pedagogy at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad. For many years, she was the concertmaster of the City Tamburitza Orchestra from Subotica, and she passed her exceptional playing technique down to her students. She particularly contributed to the improvement of the playing technique by solving problems that she had to face when adapting compositions that were not originally written for the tamburitza but for some other instrument (most often the violin). Thus, with her gifted student Ivana Macković, she achieved extraordinary results by teaching

her to perform long series of *pizzicato* and flageolets in the composition “Czardas” by Vittorio Monti.

Marijana Marki, conductor of the City Tamburitza Orchestra in Subotica and tamburitza professor in Vrbas, is also the first and so far the only woman who was a full-time member of the Grand Tamburitza Orchestra of Radio Television Vojvodina (2005–2009). Before Marijana, women were engaged in this professional tamburitza ensemble in Serbia only as part-time associates within projects.

Among the young women conductors, Smiljana Jančić stands out. She is a tamburitza teacher at the music school in Ruma and the conductor of the local city orchestra “Branko Radičević”. She combined work in these two institutions, by merging formal and informal practice through orchestral playing. Namely, all her students from the school are members of the city orchestra, which enables Smiljana to introduce new interpretations in her work with the musicians. She was able to improve the orchestral performances she conducts through working on the elements of interpretation, such as: good appropriate musical phrasing, clear dynamic shading, and the correct and simultaneous performance of tremolo by all members of the orchestra. This way of interpretation has greatly contributed to the improvement of the dynamic and expressive features for the wider practice of contemporary tamburitza orchestras. Since many of Smiljana’s students play in the orchestra, gender and teaching intertwine within the framework of cross-generational knowledge transfer and performance itself, similarly to the conveyance described by Wrazen (2010: 41) between Polish Górale women of different generations in Canada.

In addition to the women in music schools who promote the local, Vojvodina repertoire and style of tamburitza playing techniques, an entirely new type of approach has developed. This comes from “Josip Slavenski” Music school in which Professor Galina Subotin, a domra player originally from Russia, works. She is employed as a tamburitza professor and though her work she changed the way of holding the instruments by insisting that tamburitza should be played with crossed legs, and leaning on the thigh, which was not part of the Vojvodina tradition. Besides this, Subotin has introduced a technique of playing which includes a firmly placed right wrist as opposed to a relaxed placing of the right wrist, and the usage of the plastic (guitar) pick rather than one made of cow horn which was more traditional. These elements are not a part of the folk musical expression and, as such, are often the target of criticism. Despite that, her students emphasize that the benefit of playing following Subotin’s principles is reflected in the phrasing, sound technique, and mastery of the instrument, and the positioning of the right hand.

A special group of women leaders in tamburitza practice consists of those who play in taverns or within women’s tamburitza bands. The only woman who currently leads a *kafana* orchestra is Dušica Ševo (born Rožić in 1972), who has been leading “Biseri” (The Pearls) orchestra for thirty years and works as a chapel master in the *kafana* “Osam tamburaša” (Eight tamburitza players) located at the Petrovaradin Fortress in Novi Sad. Along with her performer career, she has an academic education and has been working as a tamburitza professor in Becej for twenty years. Interestingly, her *kafana* orchestra consists of men with whom she grew up together in the orchestra of the folklore society in Temerin. The members of the orchestra chose her as the leader because she is the most musically educated and has excellent abilities in communication and negotiation with potential employers of the ensemble for concerts. The role of the chapel master for Dušica

is specific because it includes taking care of the quality of the musical performance, as well as the marketing of the ensemble. Her position as the leader of the orchestra is particularly delicate, because it not only involves strenuous playing and singing in the cafe that lasts throughout the night, but also specific communication with the guests. Dušica states that such a job requires intelligence and advanced social interaction skills in order for a woman who performs in front of an orchestra to be understood as a professional in her work and not through her gender-biased stereotypes.

According to Wrazen (2010: 42), one type of women's participation in tamburitza music making and gender performative practice is the establishment of orchestras whose members are women. Such attempts were made in Vojvodina at the beginning of the 21st century, with the orchestras "Korona" (active from 2007 to 2014) from Subotica and "Đurđinske devojke" (from 2012 to 2016) from the village of Đurđin near Subotica. However, the most popular ensemble is "La banda" from Novi Sad (Figure 4), which was founded in 2013 and performs at cultural events in the country and abroad, as well as at private celebrations such as weddings and birthdays. This orchestra is specific in that it also has percussions, and its repertoire relies on the arrangements of evergreens and popular music. The very fact that only young women play in the ensemble contributed to the media and the general public turning their attention to ensemble's performance, which, according to other colleagues, influenced the popularity of tamburitza practice. This was confirmed by a member of this orchestra, Milica Lerić, who pointed out that the ensemble "La banda" seems "exotic" and attractive to audiences outside Vojvodina (especially in Belgrade). According to her, the audience usually notices and comments on their appearance, and only then pays attention to playing. Most of their fellow tamburitza players suggested that they capitalize on the fact that they are the only female tamburitza band in Serbia. However, this ensemble is committed to quality performance, therefore the members of the group meet regularly and rehearse during the week, while on weekends they mostly perform. The professionalism of their work is reflected in the fact that there is a clear division of roles and duties within the ensemble. Thus, the member of the band Jelena Sabo has the role of manager, Milica Lerić and Milana Milanković are announcing arrangements, and Neda Radman takes care of the ensemble's visual identity. In addition, they specifically organize singing rehearsals in order to complete the musical performance and ensure the quality of the presentation. Through these activities, "La banda" manages to bring the instrument even closer to the audience through a gender-marked interpretation of "pieces unusually arranged by females".

Figure 4: *La Banda Women's Orchestra in 2018. was obtained by the courtesy of Milica Lerić, a member of this ensemble.*



Given that the field of tamburitza practice today includes women who are musically educated at the academic level, they are also arranging the musical scores they perform. However, their authorial work is not included much in their professional activity, except in the case of bass tamburitza player Stanka Ninkov Cana (1981–2019), who composed numerous songs and thus enriched the tamburitza repertoire. Her first authorial works were recorded in 1997 with the performance of the compositions “Zima u Bačkoj” (Winter in Bačka) and “Salaši” (Farms) at the festival “Zlatne vojvođanske žice” (Golden Strings of Vojvodina) in Novi Sad. At the same event in 2005, she presented the song “Tamburaši svirajte” (Tamburitza Players, Let’s Play), thus continuing her engagement in composing tamburitza music. She further established her performing and composing skills during 2007, when she recorded five authorial pieces for dance with the Grand Tamburitza Orchestra of Radio Television Vojvodina, while a year later she published an audio edition for the record label “Vojvodina Music”. During her short life, she founded the non-standard trio “Pannonian Pearls”, which consisted of bass *prim*, *contra* and tamburitza bass, performing with it together at various events in Vojvodina. In her work with the tamburitza, Stanka combined performing and composing activities and pushed the boundaries of tamburitza music interpretation by experimenting with a chamber ensemble composed of three instruments.

Conclusions

The historical overview of the development of tamburitza practice in Vojvodina shows that along with the improvement of playing tamburitza instruments, there was a process of greater participation of women in this field of music, especially after the World War II. The greatest contribution of women to the maintenance and development of certain

aspects of tamburitza skills was expressed through various formal and informal leadership positions that they claimed at the end of the 20th and the first decades of 21st century. Through their dedication to tamburitza practice, they have been fundamental in its development and sustainability, as shown by their engagement in training young performers, popularizing playing tamburitza instruments, improving the music education system, expanding technical and interpretive abilities of musicians, and composing new works for tamburitza instruments. It is certainly not possible to talk about male and female teaching methods here, as is the case in some other practices in the world (Magowan 2007; Rice 1994; Wrazen 2010), but the significant role of women in cross-generational knowledge transfer is evident as well as gender-oriented collaboration within women's tamburitza orchestras.

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