

FLUTIST LEARNS THE KAVAL – HELPS OPEN THE WORLD TO BULGARIAN MUSIC

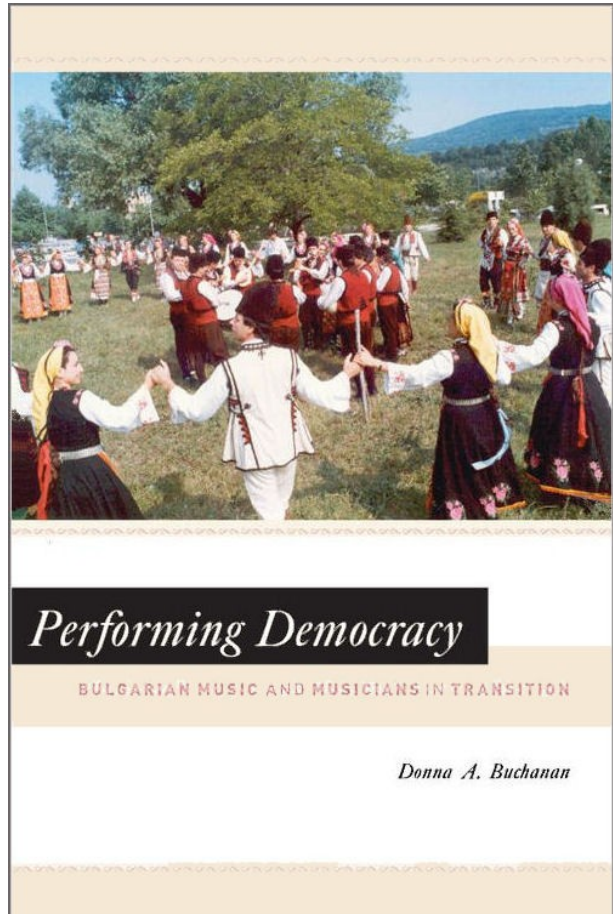
One book you'll likely find near the top of any recommended reading list for a class of Bulgarian Folk Dance is Donna Buchanan's 2006 **PERFORMING DEMOCRACY; BULGARIAN MUSIC AND MUSICIANS IN TRANSITION**. Buchanan teaches musicology, formerly headed the Russian, East European and Eurasian Center at the University of Illinois, and directs the University's Music Ensemble "Balkanalia". She has helped organize overseas exchange programs between universities in the US and Eastern European educational counterparts.

Buchanan's writing reads like a fine novel. It is based on her own experiences arriving as a US graduate student in Bulgaria, meeting, discovering friends and interacting with the musicians whose work gave birth to so many of our own Balkan choral and dance pieces, finding a mentor to teach her to play the flute-like kaval, and learning ways to study and do research in a society who's unwritten rules discouraged personal interaction between a young single woman and men (married or single).

Buchanan's account lets us discover a rich cultural landscape. Her field work in Bulgaria spanned the decade between 1988 and 1996, covering the end of an era when state-supported folk music and dance ensembles represented Bulgaria at home and before the world. With the end of socialist support, musicians struggled to adapt their work to a new generation, one too often with scant patience for their parent's traditional "folk" music.

The book's accompanying CD/DVD provides numerous examples of photographs, music, notations, lyrics, and dances. It puts real faces on the names, pictures on places, and sounds to go with each referenced song or musical piece.

Almost every page of my own copy has marginal notes; and as I read, many of the people Buchanan



Performing Democracy: Bulgarian Music and Musicians in Transition. by Donna A. Buchanan. University of Chicago Press, 2006. 519 pages + CD/DVD

introduced became friends. Phillip Koutev, for example, traveled around the rural villages in the late 1940s to recruit young women with good voices to move to the capital city and become members of the National Choral Ensemble. Parents entrusted Phillip and his wife personally with their daughter's well-being – a responsibility they took very seriously. On my study wall there is a photograph of Koutev and from time to time, when I look at it, I thank this person whose work unexpectedly brought to life so many of the beloved Bulgarian pieces our folk dance groups enjoy today.

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