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# ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

**Romania** is a European country whose population consists mainly (approx. 90%) of ethnic Romanians, as well as a variety of minorities such as German, Hungarian and Roma (Gypsy) populations.

This has resulted in a multicultural environment which includes active ethnic music scenes.

Romania also has thriving scenes in the fields of pop music, hip hop, heavy metal and rock and roll.

During the first decade of the 21st century some Europop groups, such as Morandi, Akcent, and Yarabi, achieved success abroad.

Traditional Romanian folk music remains popular, and some folk musicians have come to national (and even international) fame.

#### ROMANIAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Folk music is the oldest form of Romanian musical creation, characterized by great vitality; it is the defining source of the cultured musical creation, both religious and lay. Conservation of Romanian folk music has been aided by a large and enduring audience, and by numerous performers who helped propagate and further develop the folk sound. (One of them, Gheorghe Zamfir, is famous throughout the world today, and helped popularize a traditional Romanian folk instrument, the panpipes.)

The earliest music was played on various pipes with rhythmical accompaniment later added by a cobza. This style can be still found in Moldavian Carpathian regions of Vrancea and Bucovina and with the Hungarian Csango minority.

The Greek historians have recorded that the Dacians played guitars, and priests perform songs with added guitars.

The bagpipe was popular from medieval times, as it was in most European countries, but became rare in recent times before a 20th century revival. Since its introduction the violin has influenced the music in all regions by becoming the principal melody instrument. Each region has its own combination of instruments, old and new, and its own unique sound. This continues to develop to the present day with the most recent additions being electric keyboards and drum sets.

The religious musical creation, born under the influence of Byzantine music adjusted to the intonations of the local folk music, saw a period of glory between the 15th-17th centuries, when reputed schools of liturgical music developed within Romanian monasteries. Russian and Western influences brought about the introduction of polyphony in religious music in the 18th century, a genre developed by a series of Romanian composers in the 19th and 20th centuries.

#### WALLACHIA

Wallachia is home to the taraf bands, which are perhaps the best-known expression of Romanian folk culture. Dances associated with tarafs include: brâu, geamparale, sârba and hora.

The fiddle leads the music, with the cimbalom and double bass accompanying it.

**Muntenia** has a diverse set of instrumentation. The flute (*fluier* in Romanian) and violin are the traditional melodic element, but now clarinets and accordions are more often used.

#### **OLTENIA**

Oltenia's folk music and dance is similar to Muntenia.

Violins and pipes are used, as are tambal and guitar, replacing the cobza as the rhythmic backing for tarafs.

#### **FLUIER**

The common *fluier* is the equivalent to the tin whistle, but made out of wood with the lower aperture of reduced diameter. These are found all over the Balkans. In Transylvania it is known as *triṣcă*. The larger version is known as the *fluieroi*.

The *fluier* come in various sizes with the largest known as the *fluier* mare or caval and the smallest known as the *fluieraş* or *trişcă*.

The end blown (not stopped) smaller *fluieraş* and larger *fluierul* mare are types of *fluier* are found in Moldavia, particularly Bucovina. The *fluier dobrogean* is a variant found in Dobrogea which is similar to the small *fluier* of Moldavia. It has a seventh hole for the thumb (like a recorder) and is made of reed.



Similar instruments found in surrounding countries are known as: *Frula* (Serbia), *Duduk* (Bulgaria), *Dentsvika* (Ukraine), *Dudka* (Ukraine), *Duduk* (Serbian Vlach), *Floghera* (Greece), *Fluier* (Romania), *Furulya* (Hungary), *Fujarka* (Poland), *Jedinca* (Croatia), *Ovcharska svirka* (Turkey).

The end-blown *fluier* is a cylindrical tube open at both ends, like the *tilinca*, made of wood or metal with six finger holes. End blown pipes are also found in some surrounding countries: *Floyera* (Greece), *Salamayyia* (Eygpt), *Shupelka* (Bulgaria), *Soplika* (Ukraine).

#### **CAVAL**

In Romanian the *caval* most often refers to the long flute with five finger holes in groups of two and three with a simple block mouthpiece. It gives a soft and sad tone playing a distinctive scale with the first overblow producing E, and the second A:



It is found in Oltenia, Muntenia and south Moldavia. An old style of playing where the player growls whilst playing continues in remote areas and amongst the Hungarian Csango minorities in Moldavia.

The term *caval* is also used for end blown chromatic pipes similar to the Balkan varieties. The "Dobrogean" *caval* is completely open at each end, made in three wooden parts, with eight finger holes in the middle section and four breathing holes in the lower section. It is found in Dobrogea and Muntenia and is very similar to the typical Bulgarian *kaval*.

The term *caval* (or *kaval*) probably originated from the Arabic root ,,*q-w-l*" meaning ,,to speak". A modern word derived from this root is ,,*qawwal*" which can mean an itinerant musician and singer.

In Turkey *kaval* refers generally to flutes with specific names for the different pipes. Some *kavals* are end blown and others have blocks. Some end blown *kavals* look much like Albanian and Sarakatsani kavals.

In the rest of the Balkans, the *kaval* is a chromatic end blown flute. The Bulgarian *kaval* is made in three wooden parts (see *Dobrogean caval*)



and is found mainly in Thrace. Bulgarian *kaval* are played by placing the middle joints of all but the small finger of the right hand over the finger holes in the fashion of a bagpipe. It is thought that this instrument was brought to Bulgaria during the period of Ottoman Turkish rule.

A one piece instrument with a narrower bore than the Bulgarian type is found amongst the shepherds in Albania, Macedonia and rarely in Bulgaria These are made as pairs to be played together by two musicians and are also known as *dzamares* (derived from the Arabic *zamara*, meaning to blow or play) by Albanians and the Greeks, and *chifte kavali* (from Turkish for "double") by the Bulgarians. These *kavals* or *dzamares* are associated mainly with Albanians and Sarakatsani (Karakachani) semi-nomadic shepherds with a geographic nucleus in the mountain ranges extending from Kosovo (Shar range) through Western Macedonia and into Greece (the Pindus).

The paired *kaval* is also played by the Turkish Yürüks and the Slavic Miyaks. Yürüks of western Anatolia settled in the Skopje region at the end of the 14th century and were employed as soldiers, and later moved to the mountains north of Skopje. Miyaks inhabited villages along the river Radica, which runs parallel and close to the current Macedonian - Albanian border.

Paired *kavals* have been found in Bulgaria in the Rhodopes above Kavalla and in the Pirin Range and may have once been more common. These are not commonly found in Albania, Turkey, or among Sarakatsani in Bulgaria. This century the kaval has been associate with Slavic-Macedonian music, however, the instruments are actually still made by Albanians.

Many have suggested that these various long pipes known as *kavals*, *cavals* or *dzamares* were introduced by the Turkish during the period of Turkish occupation. However it is interesting to note that, with the exception of the Bulgarian *kaval*, the instrument exists mostly in the mountain areas populated by pastoral peoples, who were possibly remnants of the early Balkan peoples who lived in the area before the Turks, Slavs and even the Greeks.

# **TILINCĂ**



A 60 to 80 cm long metal or wooden tube, open at each end, without finger holes. This is an end blown flute which is held at a slant to the mouth and produces some 20 harmonics by either opening or closing the end of the tube with the forefinger. Despite its simplicity, it is used to play music from the slow *doina* to fast dances. It is found only in north Transylvania and Bucovina (both the Romanian and Ukrainian parts).

The only recordings of professional musicians from Bucovina playing the *tilincă* are Mihai Lăcătuşu, Silvestru Lungoci, and Constantin Sofian. Pipe players elsewhere in Romania have also learnt the instrument.

Block flute and transverse flute versions of the *tilincă* can be seen being played in folk groups outside its native region, this type is seen in some Hungarian bands playing csango music of Moldavia.

A similar instrument known as the *seljfløote* used to be made by young boys in some areas of Norway.

#### **NAI**



*Panpipes* are widespread around the world and are known to have existed in Romania during Roman times from stone carvings and writings of the poet Ovid, although today's instrument is unlikely to be a direct descendent.

The name has changed in time from *fluierar* or *şueraş*, to the *muscal* then to the *nai*. The later two names are of Persian origin, suggesting the reintroduction of a version of the panpipes via the Ottoman Turks.

Later the instrument is documented in the courts during the 16th century under the name *ţeviţa*, then in the 17th century under the name *muskal*, through the late 18thcentury and 19th centuries the panpipe with violin and cobza formed the typical *lăutar* bands of the Wallachian and Moldavian plains and was becoming known outside Romania.

The Romanian *nai* is a slightly concave row of twenty tubes closed at the lower end giving a diatonic scale from B1 to G4. The tubes are tuned by inserting bees wax to the natural note, apart from F#. Recently musicians have added further pipes to increase the range. The natural pitch of a each pipe can can be adjusted to give the chromatics by inclining the instrument towards the musician, this allows sliding notes.

During the 20th century the nai was becoming less common with very few players continuing between the world wars. The most important remaining musician was Fănica Luca who began teaching a new generation of musicians with the "Barbu Lautru" folk orchestra in 1949 then at the Bucharest school of music from 1953. His most famous pupil being musicians Gheorghe Zamfir. The *nai* can now be found widely in gypsy *tarafs* through Moldavia and Wallachia and most folk orchestras.

#### **BUCIUM**



This is usually 1.5m to 3m in length and made of well-seasoned deal, maple, ash, lime or hazel wood which is conical or cylindrical bored, slit lengthways, hollowed out and then glued together. In the north it can be made of galvanised iron and folded like a trombone. As it does not have valves or finger holes it can only play the pitches in the natural harmonic series.

The generic term *bucium*, is used in the Muntenian Carpathians of Argeş and Prahova, and in the Moldavian Carpathians of Vrancea and Neamţ. The name *bucium* is derived from the Latin *bucinum* = trumpet blast.

In the northern regions the name appears to be linked to the Slavic *trambica*, may be via the *Huţul* and *Rusyn*. In Bucovina *trâmbiţă*, in Oaş and Maramureş *trâmbiţă* or *trânghiţă*.

In the Apuseni mountains it is known as *tulnic*, and is often played by women. The derivation for this word is not know. The difference between the *bucium*, *trâmbiţă* and tulnic is in the curve and the width; the *tulnic* is not curved.

The *bucium* has several different functions:

Integrated into pastoral life, it is used to call the sheep into the sheep-folds in the afternoons and evenings. In the Apuseni mountains it is also used in the morning when taking the sheep out. In Oaş there are two types of melodies, at the sheep fold, the *trâmbiţă* plays a high tune, and at the end of the milking.

In Bucovina, Oaş, Maramureş, and some villages in the north of Neamţ three of four *trâmbiţă* lead the funeral processions.

In the Apuseni it is also used for communication for people in the highlands, much the same was in Scandinavia.

In common with the Swiss *Alpenhorn*, Slovenian *Rog*, Serbian (Vlach Homolje) *bušen*, Polish & Ukrainian *trembita*, Lithuania *truba*, Estonia and Scandinavian *luur* it is only found in the mountain regions.

## FLUIER GEMĂNAT

A twin flute made from one piece of wood. Alongside the six holed *fluier* is a drone pipe. The drone may have a finger hole to change the note by a tone. The Bulgarian equivalent is the *dvojka*.



## FIFĂ

A short end blown pipe found in Oltenia. It has a closed tube producing only one note and is used mostly by women with a vocal melody.



# **OCARINĂ**

Although folk instruments can be found around the world, the Romanian instrument is based on a terracotta invention dating from the late 19th century in Italy. These were adopted by Romanian instrumentalists and were being made in Romania after the first world war. Most multi-instrumentalist pipes players have a number of ocarina items.



#### **CIMPOI**



The *bagpipe* was common throughout all European countries by the 16th century and is recorded to have been used in Romanian courts. During the period of Ottoman influence the bagpipe was replaced in the courts in favour of eastern instruments from Turkey. Although the countries of Wallachia and Moldavia were at war with the Ottomans and eventually became vassal states there was not a migration of Turkish people or a replacement of the nobility and rulers by Turkish. However, many of the Romanian nobles sided with the Ottomans and there was an importation of Ottoman influences and of Ottoman gypsy musicians.

However, with the rural shepherds and farmers the *cimpoi* continued to be played, but with the *fluier* as the main dance music instrument. With the displacement of the peasant musicians by the gypsy *lăutari* during the 19th and 20th centuries the *cimpoi* has nearly died out. Untill recently bagpipes were found in most of Romania apart from the central, northern and eastern parts of Transylvania, but now it is only played by a few elderly people. Within

the town folk ensembles the soloist pipe multi-instrumentalist generally will have a few bagpipe items with the orchestra.

The Romanian instrument has a single reed and straight bore chanter and is less stringent than its Balkan relatives.

- the bag, generally of goat skin is called the *burduf*, and often covered by embroidered cloth;
- the drone pipe, made of reed or elder, is called *bâzoi*;
- the chanter pipe, made of reed or elder, is called *carabă*. The chanter can be cylindrical or conical, single or double, straight or curved, from 5 to 8 finger holes;
- the reeds are single, rectangular tongue, cut from the common reed using a knot in the reed to stop the pipe.

These chanter options lead to 6 types of *cimpoi*; 4 single changer, 2 double chanter. The double chanter has one for the melody and the other has two drone notes a 4th apart which are set using a finger hole on the drone chanter.

#### **TARAGOT**



The *taragot* was invented by the instrument maker J. Schunda, working in Budapest, with advice from the Hungarian composer Gyula Kaldy, and was used in the premier of

Wagner's *Trestan and Isolde* in 1865. Much like the earlier *saxophone*, the *taragot* has a conical tube similar to the *oboe*, and the single reed mouthpiece of the clarinet.

The *taragot* should not be confused with the older Hungarian *taragoto* which is a double reed shawm similar to the folk shawm found throughout Europe and the Middle East. There is no doubt that the desire to re-construct this famous Hungarian instrument inspired the naming and invention of the modern *taragot*.

The *taragot* was used in the Royal Hungarian Army, but is rarely found in Hungary now. A Banat musician, Luţa Ioviţă, who had played it in the army during World War I, returned to Banat (Romania) and introduced it there in the 1920s for dance music. This created a sensation, and eventually gave rise to a specific regional style.

Dumitru Farcaş, native to Maramureş, has made the *taragot* popular throughout Transylvania, and is probably the best known *taragot* player.

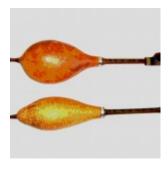
#### ALTE INSTRUMENTE CU O ANCIE – OTHER REEDS

**Solz de pește, (fish scale)** – A carp fish scale is rounded and kept in a glass of cold water until played. The musician holds it in his mouth between the lower teeth and lower lip.

**Bâzoi** – A small reed pipe with six finger holes. The name is the same as the buzzing drone pipe of a *bagpipe*.

**Pai** – Oat straw with a six finger holes and a reed like that of a bagpipe cut into the wall of the straw just under a knot. For recodings: Ion Lăceanu STM-EPE 01210.

**Tâlv** – A bottle gourd is used as the sound resonator attached to reed pipe.



#### THE VIOLIN – VIOARA

The earlier forerunners of the violin such as the *rebec*, Slavic *gusle* or eastern *kemene* are found in all Romania's Balkan neighbours, but not in the existing folk music of Romania.

It is probably that early violins were used in the courts and during the 15th to 16th centuries Serbian musicians were playing the Slavic *guzla* at Romanian courts. The first documentation of the violin in Romania is from the 17th century by an Italian monk regarding the *violini* music of Moldavia. This is unlikely to be the modern violin which developed less than a century early in western Europe. A later 17th century painting by Graz Codex shows a fiddler playing a rectangular bodied four string instrument.

The modern violin arrived in Romania in the 18th century and is known by a variety of names; *cetera* - Transylvania, *scripcar* - Moldavia, *lăuta* -Banat & Hunedoara. In Oltenia and Muntenia many different tuning systems were originally used for certain dance tunes, but these have mostly now been abandoned.

Adaptations to the standard violin can be found in several areas:

• In Oaş the bridge is moved up to the fingerboard to give a shrill penetrating sound.



• In Vrancea resonance strings are strung under the main strings. This adaptation is possibly based on the *Viola d'amore* or *Kerman* which was played in the courts during Ottoman rule. The Csango of Gyimes insert a single "echo" string into their violins.

# SECOND HARMONY VIOLIN – CONTRĂ



In a few areas of west Transylvania a second standard violin is used rhythmic harmonic accompaniment. This is though of as the "old style" compared with the developments in central Transylvania.

The second violin in the Transylvanian counties of Mureş, Bistriţa, and Cluj has only three strings (two G strings and one D string), strung across a flat bridge, tuned to G-D1-A so that chords can be played. Known as *contră* or *braci* this was found by Bela Bartók (1914) and included in his written works in 1934. It is most probable that this development came about through the gypsy musicians of the central Transylvania *taraf*.

Typically, two consecutive chords are played from a single stroke of the bow by using a slight movement of the wrist to pulse the note, this style is known as "românesc". The style of playing just the off-beat chords is known as "nemţesc" (German).

The gyspy *taraf* play for both the Hungarian and Romanian communities in these regions. Many of the villages also have mixed population. Hence this style of string ensemble with the *contră* is equally representative of both the Romanian and Hungarian tradition in this region.

#### **STROH VIOLIN**



The Stroh violin, invented in England by Augustus Stroh, was used in the recording industry from the late 19th century until the introduction of electronic amplification. A standard violin was not powerful enough to record on the wax cylinders whereas the Stroh violin uses a mica resonator and a horn to amplify the sound much like the gramophones of that time. These live on with the Romanians of Bihor who still make them in the villages and call them "vioară cu goarnă" (violin with horn). Other names are vioară cu pâlnie (funnel violin), vioară-corn (horn violin).

The D, A, E strings are the same as a standard violin, but the G sting (lowest pitch on a standard violin) is replaced by a thinner string just for the mechanical stability of the the instrument. The musicians only use three upper strings.

#### **BASS**



Cello and bass have been added to the *lăutari* bands since the 19th century. For easier transportation in the rural areas they are somewhat smaller than the classical instrument, having only three strings. They are known as *cel* or *gordon*. In Banat and surrounding areas the strings were hit with a stick to give a more percussive sound for fast dances (the example above). This technique has mostly been abandoned except by the *Csángós* of Gyimes and musicians around Bicaz, both these regions being high in the eastern Carpathians. In these areas they have developed the technique to give a totally percussive instrument. The left hand, instead of stopping the string against the fingerboard, lifts it so that it slaps back down on the fingerboard and then the right hand uses a stick to strike the thick strings.

## **COBZĂ**

The lute was known several thousand years ago in Mesopotamia and Egypt but only appeared in western Europe in the 10th century. The west European instruments became highly developed with many strings



and were generally fretted.

The Romanian lute, known as the *cobza*, is a short necked, unfretted lute very similar to the *oud* of Iraq and Syria. This form of the instrument may have arrived in Romania via the *lăutari*. The professional musicians in Romania are know as *lăutari* which directly translates as lute player. Similar instruments are seen in 16th century paintings on the walls of several monasteries.

The *cobza* has a soft tone, most often tuned to D-A-D-G. It is generally used to accompany violins or pipes. Playing melodies is rare due to the short neck construction. Once widespread through Moldavia, Oltenia and Muntenia *cobza* have become rare in village music, but can be seen in many "folk orchestras". The *cobza* can also be found in the *Csango* minority villages of Moldavia.

The name *cobza* most probably arrived via the Slavic *kobza* from a Turkic central Asian *kobuz* or *komuz*. It is likely that the *kobza* evolved from an instrument spread by one of the invading Turkic tribes. The *komuz* is the national instrument of the Kyrgyz who believe they are the decedents of the Huns who invaded east Europe in the 4th century. The Bulgar migration from upper Volga to the lower Danube during the 6th and 7th centuries are known to have had lute type instruments. The Polovetsians who descendents are thought to be the Gagauz of the Ukraine and Moldavia.

The Ukrainian *kobza* is different in construction and can be traced back to an earlier instrument of the northern Slavs. It is mentioned in the 10 -11th centuries by wandering Arab scholars who visited Kyivan-Rus. The term *kobza* have being introduced into the Ukrainian language in the 13th century to differentiate this instrument from the *husle* string instruments.

The *kobza* was a favourite instrument of the Ukrainian Cossacks, and in the courts of Polish kings and Russian tsars, but fell into disuse as it was gradually replaced by the *bandura*. The Hungarian medieval lute was known as the *koboz*, a term now applied by Hungarians for simpler Romanian *cobza* when played by Hungarians in Romania.

So, we have the musician known as *lăutar* meaning lute player where lute is derived from the middle eastern *oud* but generally refers to a fretted and often long necked lute. The *cobza* instrument is almost identical to a middle eastern unfretted short neck *oud*, and the name comes from the Turkic instrument, possibly via the northern Slavic *Kob3a* which is a fretless instrument of the lute family, but different in construction to the Romanian *cobza*.

### ZONGORĂ

In Oltenia the *cobza* has been replaced by an adapted *guitar* which has fewer strings and is tuned similar to the *cobza*.

A version used in Maramureş and Oaş is known as the *zongora*. This has a reduced number of strings, two when Bartók visited the area, later increased to three, and now more often strung with thicker strings at the top and bottom.

The instrument is often held vertically when played. The string layout is compressed to the central inch of the fingerboard



to allow rapid rhythmical strumming. Originally only a few chord changes were used, but nowadays more interesting chord structures are used by younger musicians.

*Zongora* is also the name for the "piano" in Hungary. The origin of the name *zongora* would be interesting to know.

## **ȚAMBAL**

This is a development of the Persian *santur* that came to many European countries in the 11th century, becoming popular from the 17th to 19th centuries. It is a trapeze shaped soundboard with 20 to 35 courses of strings, which are struck with two wooden



hammers. In English-speaking countries it is known as the dulcimer from *dulce melos*, Greek for sweet sound and in Germanic areas, it is called *Hackbrett* meaning chopping board or chopping block. In Romania it is know as *ţambal*, similar to the Hungarian *cymbalom* and Ukrainian *tsymbaly*.

Records show the existence of the *ţambal* in 16th century in Romania, but it did not become popular until much later when it was taken up by the *lăutari*. During the late 19th century it was observed in several areas of Muntenia and by the end of the century was quite widespread, taking over from the *cobza*. The instrument, which can be played hung from the shoulders by straps, spread into the villages by the 20th century. The accompaniment formulae are relatively few and are generally rhythmical in Wallachia and Muntenia, and harmonic (arpeggios etc.) in Transylvania and Banat.

The *tsambaly* was probably introduced into the Ukraine by wandering Gypsy and Jewish musicians. The earliest mention of the Ukrainian *tsymbaly* dates back to the 17th century. The Romanian Gypsies introduced the instrument into Greece in the 20th century where it is known as the *Santouri*.

In Hungary, only a few peasant musicians were still playing the small cimbalom by the 20th century, although gypsy orchestras used the large concert cimbalom. This Hungarian concert *cymbalom*, was developed by Schunda in the 1870s. It stands on four legs and has many more strings providing an extra octave of range and a damping pedal like a piano. This has become essential in the Romanian town *lăutari* orchestras and is know as the *ţambal mare* with the older version now known as the *ṭambal mic*.