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Production of Thematic Channels of Radio Belgrade, RTS, Serbia.**

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SEPHARDIM – THE THREAD OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Production of Thematic Channels of Radio Belgrade, RTS, Serbia

Non-profit association COPEAM, dedicated to the promotion of dialogue and cultural integration in the Mediterranean region, which has operational headquarters in Rome at the offices of the Italian Radio and Television (RAI), this year for the third time announced a competition titled “Making a story from archives” for audio-visual work. This year’s regional competition was dedicated to the topic “The relationship between Mediterranean countries: a historical perspective”, which is not surprising, considering the fact that the association organizes various events to protect and promote the Euro-Mediterranean audiovisual heritage.

Young professionals aged 18 to 40, who belong to Balkan broadcasters and are active members of COPEAM, could take part in the race for the best realization. Another condition was that the programs must be realized in Serbian with English subtitles, and the duration should be between 5 and 15 minutes. Some of the evaluation criteria were the promotion of intercultural dialogue, creativity and originality in the use of audiovisual archives, as well as technical production (editing, sound, duration, new recordings).

In the big running, since the competition was open to all public radio and TV

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Ethnomusicologist Marija Vitas

stations from 26 countries which are members of COPEAM on both shores of the Mediterranean, Serbian ethnomusicologist Marija Vitas won the award for the best TV contribution. It was a short film called *Sephardim – The Thread of the Mediterranean*, produced by the Thematic Channels of Radio Belgrade. Marija Vitas was the official representative of RTS (public national TV service of the Republic of Serbia), with which she has long-term cooperation. In addition to the author, Marijana Rajić, Ognjen Škrbović and Snežana Grujić also participated in the realization of this twelve-minute documentary.

The film has a mosaic structure, made by combining narrative and musical segments.

The story is accompanied by rich visual illustrations, and apart from the author, who was the narrator, a couple of Sephardim from Serbia and the region also talked about their experiences. These were Konstantin Šibul, a student of ethnomusicology at the Academy of Arts in Novi Sad, who deals with his Sephardic identity and Sephardic music and culture, then Stefan Sablić, frontman of the band *Shira u'fila*, the most agile bearer of Sephardic heritage in the Serbian music stage, as well as Merima Ključo, an accordionist who nurtures the music of the Bosnian Sephardim. Starting from the fact that the Sephardim, leaving Spain at the end of the 15th century, temporarily or permanently settled in the wider Mediterranean area, and left traces of their culture in Morocco, Bosnia, Italy, Turkey, Greece and elsewhere, the author considers Sephardic music as a thread connecting different traditions and nations. As their main identity marker, the Judeo-Spanish language, Judezmo or Ladino, was highlighted, on which many Sephardic songs were sung, and which is in decline today. The influence of Sephardic music is visible in the songs of many Mediterranean cultures, which were taken from the Sephardic and as such nurtured or changed, so the author re-examines their origin and asks whether it would be correct to call such songs Mediterranean. The famous “Lela Vranjanka” stands out as the first such example, a song recorded in 1974 by Staniša Stošić, the soloist of Radio Belgrade, and which is widely accepted as a part of Serbian musical folklore. As another example of the use of elements of Sephardic melody, the author singles out the Greek artist Savina Yannatou and her performance of the traditional Sephardic song “La Cantiga del Fuego”.

The Sephardic Mediterranean thread is further woven through Sephardic descendants who perform the music of their ancestors, and among them is Israeli singer-songwriter Yasmin Levy. There were also a few words about Drita Tutunović,

probably the only person in Serbia who first spoke Ladino as a child, and who was the inspiration for one of the albums of the Serbian Sephardic band *Shira u'tfila*. It was also talked about Flora Jagoda, a Sephardic guitarist and composer born in Bosnia, who fled to America, and about the project of two artists from Bosnia, Merima Ključo and Jelena Milušić, which is a kind of homage to Flora Jagoda and the continuation of nurturing the almost eradicated Sephardic culture in Bosnia.



Band *Shira u'tfila*. Photo by Tanja Drobnjak

Through a short but meaningful story about Sephardic music, Marija Vitas managed to show the connection of Mediterranean cultures, their mutual influences and permeation in the historical perspective in the documentary “Sephardim – The Thread of the Mediterranean”. Interesting historical facts and the influence of music on the creation of Sephardic (and Mediterranean) identity, as well as the influence of Sephardic culture on contemporary art, which was little known to the wider public, were presented. Professionally shaped, and at the same time not burdened with ethnomusicological explication and meta-scientific terminology, the film is an ideal way to get acquainted with the historical perspective of the development and reshaping of a musical culture and the multiculturalism of a particular geographical area. The author managed to network her research skills and knowledge of traditional music with material from the program archive of TV RTS, the sound archive of Radio Belgrade and the documentation of Radio Belgrade, which resulted in a multimedia work that rightfully won the award.

As the winner, Marija Vitas expects a trip to Rome, where she will attend the award ceremony at the annual COPEAM conference. We hope that the film will soon be premiered on national television in the region, and until then it can be watched on the RTS website, which is certainly a warm recommendation.

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