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***The National Folklore Festival in Albania as a Musical Institution***

Folklore festivals became the most important form of presenting local music and dance to the general public in post-World War II Albania. The first festival at a national level was organised in 1949 in the largest football stadium of the country. Until the 1960s several others were held in different places at irregular intervals. In the 1960s the government decided to establish cultural activities which were to take place regularly on significant dates. This decision marked the birth of the National Folklore Festival (Festivali Folklorik Kombëtar) as an institution. It was organised every five years from 1968 onwards in the castle of the town Gjirokastër in Southern Albania. The date and the place were connected with the birthday and the birth place of the communist leader. In the firm selection process which lasted two years each time, six ministries used to take place, from the Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. All of the activities were broadcast by State Radio Television, the only one in the country. Some disapproval voiced against the festival after the fall of communism at the beginning of 1990s has been hushed again today. While the political monitoring has pretty much disappeared from the festival’s organisation, its place and time change according to the interests of the political party in power. What has not changed are features of the preparation work, including the “scientific” monitoring to “guarantee the authentic character” of the performances. Therefore, presentations in this festival are still used to show “what traditional music in Albania should be like”, trying to continue to exert control over the cultural norms of the participants and the broader public. Changes in this practice, related above all to local communities’ customs of music and dance-making, would facilitate the establishment of satisfactory forms of public presentation. The aim would be to help emphasize the need to not only consume, but also to better connote the role music and dance wield in the everyday life of individuals and communities and in the musical life in the country in general.

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