

Gramophone 78 rpm Recordings and Ethnomusicological Practice in Socialist Albania

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Abstract:

Although Albanians were a small, politically fragile and economically underdeveloped ethnic group, several record companies produced a sizable amount of Albanian music recordings during the first half of the XX century. Despite their great musical and cultural value, they have been almost totally neglected by ethnomusicology researchers. The aim of this paper is to shed light into the ideological grounds for this neglect during the socialist period. Initially, a general overview of Albanian language gramophone recordings obtained through archival work, company catalogues and other sources, is presented. Then, considering the ideological framework and cultural policy of Albanian communist regime, an interpretive approach is taken regarding the aforementioned neglect. One of the main findings is that the soundscape we get from these recordings is not in accord with the normative socialist identity the regime was seeking to impose on Albanians. The hostile stance toward Western capitalist countries, leading to a view of recording companies as exploiters of Albanian music and musicians, and the country's self-isolation imposed other crucial limitations. It is concluded that it is timely to engage deeply with Albanian gramophone recordings, whose rich soundscape will yield important historical and cultural insights.

Keywords:

Gramophone recordings, Albania, socialism, normative identity, traditional music.