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Music at Funeral Ceremonies in Today's Slovenia

This doctoral dissertation provides an insight into funeral music as an ethnomusicological, anthropological, economic and cultural phenomenon, which has so far in Slovenia not attracted appropriate scholarly attention. It focuses on the role and importance of music at funerals in the context of the symbolism associated with death, departure and the concept of transience, and on the causes of different choices of music as an integral part of the leave-taking of the deceased, in conjunction with aspects of historical, social and cultural diversity.

Music has been used to accompany funeral ceremonies in various historical periods and environments, reflecting different culturally conditioned perceptions of death. The role of music in a ritual of farewell for the deceased is multi-layered: it stimulates the expression of emotions and sometimes facilitates their culturally conditioned dramatization, helping to relieve tension and torment; it gives meaning to the symbolic and memorial side of the ceremony and at the same time enriches the ritual in aesthetic terms.

*After an introductory review of music in the funeral context in different ages and places from all over the world, follows a short presentation of musical practices at funerals in Slovenia in the past. In Slovenia, there was a tradition of singing specific death songs, religious, memory and narrative songs, while protecting the deceased's body in his or her house. Nowadays, dying and death have been transferred to institutions, and so far this habit has also almost completely been lost. Slovenian ethnomusicologist Zmaga Kumer has published those songs in a book with the title *Ena urca bo prišla* (2003).*

The main data on funeral music in today's Slovenia was collected by ethnographic observation of musical practice in the years 2014–2017, with particular reference to the author's empirical research at 18 cemeteries owned by the Žale Funeral Company in Ljubljana and at 11 other chosen cemeteries in different regions in Slovenia. Empirical data is derived from the author's attendance at numerous funerals as well as on semi-structured interviews with employees of funeral companies, participating musicians and relatives of the deceased. This is the first empirical study of funeral music in modern Slovenia.

The thesis describes the organizational context of funeral music and its role in the planning of the funeral service. It explains the modern trend towards a rapid funeral, which is a result of the stigmatization of death, and it reflects on the fact that more than a third of funerals take place without live music. The thesis represents musicians who often perform in cemeteries in Slovenia. The traditional practice of male vocal ensembles or a trumpeter is still largely maintained, but this has tended to be replaced over the past year by different vocal and instrumental ensembles and solo instruments. It is a commercial niche, concerning the economic aspect of funeral music, which is dealt with in the thesis.

There are no restrictions regarding the choice of music, which can be any music, associated with the deceased. Folk songs are still predominant, followed by songs from the domain of popular music, classical music being requested least. The most frequently performed songs in Ljubljana's cemeteries in 2016 were 'Gozdič je že zelen', 'Lipa zelelena je' and 'Nearer, my God, to Thee'; for a trumpet solo the most common piece is 'Silence'. At Slovene funerals, the songs from Lojze Slak and Slavko Avsenik are also very popular.

Music at funerals in various Slovenian regions also reflects local characteristics of individual regions. For example, in the Primorska region, they also perform songs with the sea theme and songs in Italian, the language of the Italian minority from the area.

Some funerals, especially in Ljubljana's Žale, can also be accompanied by recorded music, played from the loudspeakers. In modern times, it's no exception to play music on tablets, mp3 players and smartphones. Such a practice of musical accompaniment of funeral rites is slowly but steadily spreading in the world.

Funerals of hunters and state protocol funeral are held according to the special protocol, where are also considered wishes about music of the deceased's relatives.

There is a significant difference in the hiring of musicians to perform at funerals. Ljubljana is a special case, since the central funeral company collaborates with musicians only on the basis of contracts, which does not mean that relatives of the deceased cannot hire any other musician, but most often they decide for the offer of the cemetery. In Slovenia, however, for music at funerals, with some exceptions, exist the principle of free market.

The hypothesis that music at funerals in different parts of Slovenia reflects its geographical, cultural and dialectological diversity, can be confirmed only in part, since with some exceptions, the choice of music at funerals is clearly personalized or individualized, reflecting the wishes of the relatives, as well as the deceased and his religious and other beliefs, character, profession, hobbies, etc. This is the case, as I have realised, both for the choice of music as well as for the whole funeral ceremony.

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