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**THE FUJARA – A SYMBOL OF SLOVAK FOLK  
MUSIC AND NEW WAYS OF ITS USAGE**

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**Subject:** The fujara as the most significant musical instrument of the Slovak folk music.

**Purpose of study:** To present how an originally three-hole flute of shepherds in central parts of Slovakia has become a symbol of culture, nation and country.

**Methods:** Historical, descriptive.

**Key words:** Fujara, symbols, tradition and innovation, musical usage.

**Characteristics of the Instrument**

From the point of view of organology, the fujara is an approximately 180 cm long cylindrical overtone whistle with three finger holes. It consists of two tubes: the main tube is connected to a shorter one through which the airflow is channelled to the edge of the large bass flute.

From the point of view of acoustics, the tones change by the intensity of blowing, i.e. over blowing into aliquot tones and by using the three finger holes. The fujara is characterized by a mixolydic or hypoionic scale while the range of the instrument is up to 3 octaves (Elschek 1983: 160).

From the point of view of repertoire and interpretation, mainly slow, nostalgic and emotional shepherds' or highwaymen's songs are played on the fujara. Fujara players usually begin by a typical introduction-scatter called *rozfuk* based on the falling row of the tones from the highest towards the lowest. (Lubej 1995: 122; Elschek 1979: 47) An extraordinarily important part of the fujara interpretation is singing.

The fujara is not found in all of Slovakia, but only in a very limited mountain territory of the middle-Slovakian regions of Podpol'anie, Horehronie, Gemer and Hont.

## The Origin of the Fujara

The fujara received its current shape probably in the 17th century, but its origins can be traced back to the following moments in history:

### Links to the Middle Ages European instruments

– In the 16th century, the effort to reach various tunings by expanding the length of wind instruments led towards the creation of a new family of instruments.

– On this principle, a family of three-hole pipes of various lengths has been known in almost all of Europe since the 12th century (Markl 1972: 148).

– An additional air canal (i.e. the short tube) was constructed in order to simplify blowing and the managing of the finger holes on long instruments. It has also been documented on various types of other European pipes as, for example “Stamentien Baß” depicted by M. Praetorius (Praetorius 1619).

– The efforts made to establish an ensemble of the three-hole pipes did not have a chance to succeed due to their limited musical-technical possibilities. Therefore only the longest bass instruments have been preserved, which used to be used as solo musical instruments – a bass fipple flute, a bassoon or the above mentioned “Stamentien Baß”. These instruments have been indicated as the closest connections with the fujara (Mačák 1987: 345).

### Links to the shepherd's instruments

– The origin of the fujara cannot be seen without the context of the shepherd's culture that was formed by the colonization of Central Slovakia from the 14th to the 18th centuries.

– The shepherd's culture has been characterized by typical instruments in which four flutes dominate: flutes without finger holes (so-called end-flutes), flutes with three holes, flutes with six holes and double flutes. The three-hole flutes that are considered to be direct ancestors of the fujara are not often in use in Slovakia today. However, instruments preserved in museum collections document that in the 19th century they had been known in the whole Central and Northern Slovakia. The fujara, as a prolonged three-hole flute, has won recognition quite naturally and, until today good flute players have been good fujara players, too.

– The fujara is not found throughout the whole area of Slovakia, but only in a limited shepherd's territory in the heart of Slovakia (Podpol'anie, Horehronie, Hont, Gemer).

– Through the shepherd's instruments of Central Slovakia, the links to shepherd's instruments of the whole Central Europe can be identified, namely those of the regions of the Carpathian basin. This relation is transparent also from the terminological point of view, however the names *fuiara*, *fluer*, *furugla*, *flojara* etc. do not refer to fujaras but to other different Carpathian shepherds' flutes (Mačák 1999: 91).

## Development of the Fujara

Since its birth, the fujara has passed a long way towards the development of its acoustic qualities, repertoire, manufacture, decoration and musical use. The categorization of the Slovak folk songs identifies fujara songs as an independent layer within a range of the old songs culture. Besides characteristic musical attributes, mainly shepherds and highwaymen themes dominate in them, which together with historical facts (i.e. movement of highwaymen) enables one to connect not only the birth of the fujara, but also fujara melodies with the end of the 17th century.

Since the 18th century, reports about the fujara in written sources have increased. Since the 19th century, there are not only iconographic records but also the oldest preserved instruments at disposal. In spite of the fact that each fujara is mainly an individual, personal, artistic creation in which the technological, acoustic and visual aesthetic conceptions of the maker are projected, the above mentioned preserved instruments document some universal changes from the point of their development (Mačák 1989: 47–59; Plavec 2003):

- change of the length of fujaras: from about 90 cm in the 19th century to 170–180 cm in the 20th century;
- change in the placement of finger holes: instead of a back hole on older (and smaller) fujaras, all three finger holes are on the front side of newer instruments;
- change in decoration: from geometrical in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, through figurative decorations, up to herbal ornaments – *kvety*, i.e. flowers in the 20th century.

## Symbols of Fujara

Historical interest in the fujara has offered different approaches to studying this instrument (Elschek 2006: 28). In spite of the variety of connections between the fujara and traditional culture, other contextual transformations kept it alive overtime. It is a line beginning with the fujara representing shepherds and shepherd culture and ending with the fujara as a signifier of the Slovak culture, country and nation.

### A symbol of shepherds

Since its birth, the fujara had always been the most important instrument of shepherds and kept this status until the 20th century. The shepherds' musical culture in Slovakia has been marked by individualism, intimacy and pride, which are reflected in song, dance, playing of violins with string or cimbalom bands, playing of instrumentalists with soloists, as well as in an individual style of fujara interpretation. The latter is often marked with specifically ornamented and decorated tunes and the singing of mainly slow elegiac and melancholic fujara songs with strongly subjective and emotive contents. In the shepherds milieu, not only has the fujara song repertoire and its unique interpretation been established, but fujara, along with other musical instruments, has also become a valuable decorative artefact within the shepherd's carving inventory.

### A symbol of highwaymen

The shepherd's element cannot be separated from the highwaymen. Due to a great decline of the social and political situation in the 17th century and beginning of the 18th century, groups of highwaymen were formed, resulting in a mass exodus of desolate people into the shepherds' highlands.

This movement was poetically tuned in the poetry and songs in which the highwaymen are depicted as heroes, liberators of the folk from oppression and bondage. It is no wonder that the fujara and fujara songs were used in the periods of the national revival or at all the social riots of the 19th and 20th centuries.

### Symbol of the village of Detva

In the 19th century, in connection with the national revival and self-consciousness of Slovaks, the fujara became an instrument often mentioned in the works of romantic poets, the most famous example being Andrej Sládkovič's poem *Detvan* (1853) [Fellow from Detva]. Because of this work, the fujara has become a symbol of Detva, a small locality in the centre of the shepherd region of Podpol'anie (Mačák 1989: 95–96).

### Symbol of the Slovak culture

While in the works of Sládkovič the fujara was only a symbol of Detva, it gradually extended beyond its natural shepherds' context to represent the whole of Slovakia and became a symbol of the Slovak culture. One such moment was a performance of three musicians – a fujara player, a bagpiper and a flute player – who represented the Slovak nation at a dance ball in Vienna in 1850 (Mačák 1989: 98).

In the 20th century, the fujara's symbolic value was further enhanced by a large folklore movement, i.e. the staged presentation of folklore by amateur or professional folklore ensembles at home and abroad. It is necessary to note in this context that on November 25, 2006, fujara was proclaimed by the Director-General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritages.

It was awarded this status during UNESCO's third proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage – an international distinction designated to raise public awareness of the value of a heritage, including popular and traditional oral forms of expression, music and dance, rituals and mythologies, knowledge and practices concerning the universe, knowledge linked to traditional crafts, as well as cultural spaces.

### Symbol of the nation and the country

Since the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic in 1992, the fujara has become not only a cultural symbol, but also a national symbol of the country. The sound of the instrument can be heard in signature tunes of folklore festivals, radio broadcasts or during state celebrations and anniversaries. The fujara has even become a part of the image of the political and state representatives themselves. For example, the president of Slovakia, Ivan Gašparovič, often represents himself as a fujara player, giving a fujara as an official gift to foreign statesmen during their visits to Slovakia.

## Fujara in Slovakia Today

Change in the geographical distribution of the fujara players

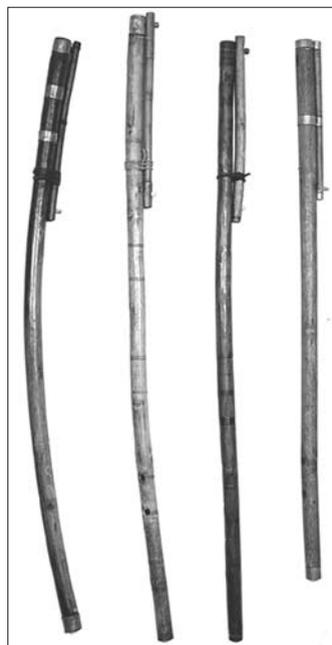
During the 20th century, the fujara overcame periods that could be marked as critical considering the number of its players and makers, as well as periods marked by unprecedented renaissance of this instrument, namely since the 70s of the previous century until now. The fujara surpasses the borders of the shepherd areas of Central Slovakia and spreads everywhere, including the towns. Fujaras can also be found as a decorative subject all over Slovakia: in family houses, on walls of Slovak Chambers, or as a part of restaurant interiors built in the style of highland architecture, for example, in the plain areas of Western Slovakia.

New social status of the fujara players and makers

The social status of the fujara players has changed significantly. While in the past the musicians were shepherds, today the fujara has been almost completely unknown in this milieu. On the other hand, the fujara now permeates other social groups. Among the makers and players there are computer experts, bankers, lawyers, managers of large companies, as well as people who are starting to produce fujaras or other folk musical instruments professionally. In the recent half-century, there has never been so many fujara players and makers as there are today.

Making and innovative construction of the fujara

The production of fujaras connects not only traditional technological procedures, but also a whole string of innovations. This concerns using modern working tools such as turning lathes, and completely new or non-traditional materials such as plastics, mountain ash, maple tree, walnut tree instead of the traditionally used kind of wood, i.e. black elder (*Sambucus Nigra*). Also new constructions and decorations have appeared (Garaj 2005: 201). After individual and not very successful attempts to produce double or triple fujaras, in recent times, telescopic fujaras assembled from two or three pieces have appeared (Šípka 2002: 60). It resulted from the practical requirement of musicians who, after the borders were opened, welcomed a storable and easily portable instrument. Within this context, it is necessary to mention one bizarre example of a new construction of the fujara, which is combined with the Australian didgeridoo. The new instrument received the name *fujaridoo* and it consists of several pieces, which can be assembled as a fujara or a didgeridoo.



Various fujaras  
from the Podpol'anie region.  
Photo: Tibor Szabó

### Association of the fujara players

Fujara players established their own organization in 2002 – the Association of the Fujara Players – as a civic association registered at Ministry Of Internal Affairs together with the statute, memorandum and organizational order. The role of the association has been to collect all materials and information about the fujara, to create archives with fujara recordings, and to provide a space for the debate and opinion exchange about the styles of playing, repertoire, etc. during the regular meetings of its members.

### Fujara on the internet

The debate forums about the fujara on the Internet are a popular space for exchanging opinions. Currently, there are two. They are available to registered members only, and interestingly, they were established not by Slovaks, but by people fascinated with fujaras in the USA and in the Czech Republic. The Internet in general has been a large source of information about the fujara. For example, on the website *www.fujara.sk* there is a vast amount of information about the makers, instruments with different tunings, the prices, how to play fujara, fujara songs and repertoire, and workshops focused either on playing or making fujaras etc.

### **Fujara – New Ways of Its Musical Usage**

Because of its ability to adapt to new contexts and new associations, fujara has demonstrated a vitality that continues to enhance its value as a symbol of the Slovak culture, nation and country. It is significant that while other national and state symbols have been untouchable, the popular usage of the fujara continues to thrive and goes far beyond the traditional context of the shepherd culture.

### Fujara with folk musical orchestras

Besides the traditional solo performance within the presentation of the Slovak musical folklore in the 20th century, a long string of fujara compositions and stylized folk music arrangements for smaller or larger string and cimbalom orchestras has come into existence since the 70s. The recordings of the Radio Folk Orchestra in Bratislava have become the model examples. Numerous amateur folk ensembles have started to use fujaras according to such recordings. An extraordinarily important consequence of this procedure has been its effect on fujara tuning. This has come to the fact, that because of the slogan, introduced by professional orchestra players *we need the fujara as a (real) musical instrument*, the makers began abandoning traditional ways of measuring finger hole distances, which led to forsaking the characteristic world of micro intervals of fujaras and opening a new use for them together with stable tuned musical instruments like cymbaloms, accordions etc.

### Meditation music, music therapy

A space for exploring oriental, Chinese and Indian religious and philosophical streams has been made available by the change of the political system, and by the



Juraj Kubinec from Utekáč with his sons.  
*Photo: Tibor Szabó*

opening of Slovakia to the whole world. The representatives of these beliefs use native artefacts in an effort to effectively infiltrate these non-European influences. In such way, the fujara has been used too. Current music therapy represents another such stream; it uses the fujara sound more and more often for therapeutic procedures.

#### Ancient Slavonic music

An extraordinarily powerful movement of people focused on integration into nature and the refusal of all civilian advantages, has appeared in Slovakia as a pendant of strange philosophical streams. A return to the Pre-Christian or ancient Slavonic gods and music has been an extremely important part of their spiritual life. They have been using folk musical instruments for that – among others, the fujara.

#### World music

This concept is used quite consciously since it carries many connotations in Slovakia. The fusion of fujara with other ethnic musical elements and instruments as well as streams of modern popular music has been extremely popular. Such recordings are also created abroad; Marco Trochermann represents the fujara in this context in Germany, Bob Rychlik in the USA, Walter Vogelmayr in Austria and many others. Also jazz, rock or experimental music can be counted in this category where the characteristic sound of the fujara has been used independently from the “traditional” repertoire and playing technique.

## Conclusions

Today, for Slovak folk music, there is no other instrument that holds more significance than the fujara. From the point of view of organology, there are two visible features – its length up to 180 cm and an additional air channel connected to the main tube. The main part of the fujara repertoire, are shepherd and highwaymen songs. The birth of the fujara dates back to the end of the 17th century influenced by prolonged Middle-aged flutes and a rich family of shepherd instruments of the Carpathian basin. As an originally three-hole flute used by shepherds in central parts of Slovakia, it became the most important symbol of shepherds and highwaymen. Since the second half of the 19th century, the importance of the fujara stepped beyond the shepherds' context to become a representative of the Slovak culture and all the Slovakian folk musical instruments. In the 20th century, the fujara has been known, accepted and presented as an important attribute of the Slovak identity and a symbol of the Slovak nation.

On the other hand, the fujara has found its reflection in specific processes and changes concerning the morphology, decoration, social status of fujara makers and players as well as its spreading and its new ways of musical usage. Today fujara is to be found throughout Slovakia including urban milieu, thus permeating all the social layers. Since the last 30 years the number of fujara players and makers has been steadily increasing. With the aim to share their experience, they have been creating their own associations and present the world of the fujara on the internet. Hand in hand with the manufacture of fujaras, new technological improvements have appeared which are reflected in the construction, decoration and acoustic properties of the fujara. Such „new“ fujaras have won recognition not just as solo instruments but also in string, cymbalom and brass bands. Last but not least, fujara has recently found its use within the popular stream of world music.

The Slovak nomination of the project *Fujara, musical instrument and its music* had been reviewed by independent expert institutions and the international jury during its meeting in the seat of UNESCO in Paris. If the fujara has been placed on the List of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritages, it has happened because it is an instrument that represents a remarkable artefact of our cultural heritage by its unique construction, artistic realisation, marvellous sound and songs. However, it is equally important that by the same attributes, the fujara is also able to address and fascinate people living in today's modern world.

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## **FUJARA – SLOVAKŲ LIAUDIES MUZIKOS SIMBOLIS IR ŠIUOLAIKINIS JOS NAUDOJIMAS**

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### **Santrauka**

Šiandien slovakų liaudies muzikoje nesama kito instrumento, savo reikšmingumu prilygstančio *fujarai*. Ši trijų skylučių fleita, kuria Slovakijos vidurio regionuose grodavo piemenys, maždaug nuo XIX amžiaus vidurio tapo visos slovakų instrumentinės liaudies muzikos simboliu. XX amžiuje *fujara* tapo svarbiu, plačiai žinomu, pripažintu ir populiariu slovakų tapatybės atributu bei slovakų tautiniu simboliu. Antra vertus, *fujaros* įvaizdyje atsispindi ir tam tikri procesai bei pokyčiai, susiję su jos sandara, puošyba, visuomeniniu *fujaros* gamintojų ir atlikėjų statusu, taip pat jos paplitimas ir nauji muzikavimo būdai.

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