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Research Article

Children's singing games in the context of Kosovo's musical culture: Examples from Bujanoc and Preshevë

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Abstract

Children's singing games combine melody, rhythm, and words in musical practices that children learn from their peers and sustain through play. This descriptive study examines the musical features of six singing games recorded in Bujanoc and Preshevë between 2005 and 2007 and considers their relevance to Kosovo's musical culture and music education. Drawing on recording details and musical transcriptions, the analysis focuses on melody, intervals, rhythmic patterns, and forms of vocal delivery. The melodies feature major seconds, minor and major thirds, perfect fourths, and perfect fifths. In "Soll Makaron," rhythmic speech follows melodic singing, while "Dil dill dil" expresses a shared wish for the sun to shine. Repeating melodies and rhythmic patterns during play allows children to exercise their aural and rhythmic skills. The documented songs provide material for comparison with the singing games of Kosovar children and offer examples from the local repertoire for teaching melodic intervals and rhythmic patterns in music lessons.

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Introduction

The transcription and publication of 100 children's musical games recorded in Kosovo in 2010 documented the variety of melodies and rhythmic speech used in children's play (Rexhepi & Jordanoska, 2013). Children themselves play an active role in shaping this repertoire. Sadiku (2024) showed that children create variants of the same game by changing the melody, rhythm, lyrics, or rules of play as they perform game songs. The singing games collected in Bujanoc and the surrounding villages between 2005 and 2007 provide a basis for examining the melodic intervals and rhythmic patterns used in this practice (Sadiku, 2019).

Singing games are musical activities in which children combine words, melody, rhythm, and movement within the rules of play. Singing or rhythmic speech can serve to select a player, determine the order of turns, or coordinate movements. In counting-out rhymes, for example, children recite words rhythmically to decide who starts the game, while singing can accompany coordinated movements in other games. Marsh (2009) notes that children generally learn these games by listening to and imitating one another and reproduce them in play. The games documented in Kosovo by Rexhepi and Jordanoska (2013) provide regional examples through which to examine the melodic and rhythmic features of this repertoire.

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Children's musical creativity is evident both in the songs they create and in the ways they reshape familiar songs during play. As children continue to play a game learned from their peers, they may change its words, melody, rhythm, or manner of play. As these changes recur, variants of the same game emerge. Marsh (2009) emphasizes the interplay between oral transmission and musical creativity in this process. Drawing on field recordings, Sadiku (2024) compared the kinds of changes children make to their game songs. The resulting variants illustrate how children participate in transmitting the repertoire.

This study approaches musicality through the musical sensitivity and performance skills children display in singing games. These skills include singing intervals accurately, sustaining rhythmic patterns, and responding to changes in tempo and dynamics. When children learn a song by ear and repeat it during play, they can sing intervals without naming them and experience rhythmic patterns through movement and words (Marsh, 2009; Sadiku, 2019). The melodies from Bujanoc and Preshevë contain intervals such as major seconds, minor and major thirds, perfect fourths, and perfect fifths, illustrating how children sing these intervals in everyday play (Sadiku, 2019).

Significance of the Study

The study's original contribution lies in examining singing games collected in Bujanoc and Preshevë from the perspectives of ethnomusicology and music education. Analysis of the intervals and rhythmic patterns in these melodies provides concrete examples of how children perform these musical elements in everyday play. The collected songs also provide material for comparison with the repertoire of Kosovar children's musical games (Rexhepi & Jordanoska, 2013). The study's practical value lies in using the same field recordings and transcriptions to document local children's game music and to help teachers select songs for interval and rhythm exercises.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to identify the melodic intervals and rhythmic patterns used in children's singing games recorded in Bujanoc and the surrounding area between 2005 and 2007 and to examine how children perform them during play. It also considers how learning songs by ear, repeating them, and singing together may relate to the development of aural skills, melodic sensitivity, and a sense of rhythm.

Method

This descriptive study draws on recordings of children's singing games made by the author in Bujanoc and the surrounding area between 2005 and 2007. The material also includes a game recorded in Carravajkë, a village in Preshevë. The musical transcriptions were used to identify melodic intervals and rhythmic patterns, which were then examined in the context of the singing games.

Findings

The children's singing games collected in Bujanoc and Preshevë were examined in terms of rhythmic structure, melodic features, and performance practice. This section first presents the meters and rhythmic patterns used in the game songs, then describes how tempo and dynamics change during play.

Rhythm, Tempo, and Dynamics in Game Songs

The most common meters in the repertoire are 2/4 and 4/4. Rhythmic patterns in these meters include a quarter note followed by an eighth note or the reverse, single sixteenth notes, groups of two or four consecutive sixteenth notes, dotted eighth and quarter notes, and eighth and quarter rests. These examples show how different note and rest values are combined within the same meter.

Tempo and dynamics can vary with the course of the game. Children tend to sing more softly during quieter play, while their singing grows louder and faster as the game becomes more active. By repeating the same song during play, children revisit its melody and rhythmic patterns and experience changes in tempo and dynamics as they sing.

One of the children's games documented in the collection is "Playing with the Sun" (see Photo 1).



Photo 1. Playing with the Sun

Ancient cultures are said to have had a rich artistic life in which music held a special place. Peoples once described as "primitive" sang to the gods to ask for rain, sunshine, abundant harvests, and successful hunts. Even today, children sometimes use ritual songs to express a wish for sunshine or rain.

Examples of Singing Games

The ritual game "Dil dill dil" is one such example. In this game, children ask the sun to shine.[2] As in the period before Guido d'Arezzo, children today learn songs by ear, listening to them and repeating them several times. Learning by ear helps children develop their musical ear, sharpen their sensitivity to pitch and rhythm, and strengthen their memory. The solmization syllables that Guido d'Arezzo drew from the Hymn to St. John to teach pitch are still used to give pitches recognizable syllable names. Similarly, the stressed syllables found in children's own musical creations can help them practise singing different pitches.[3]
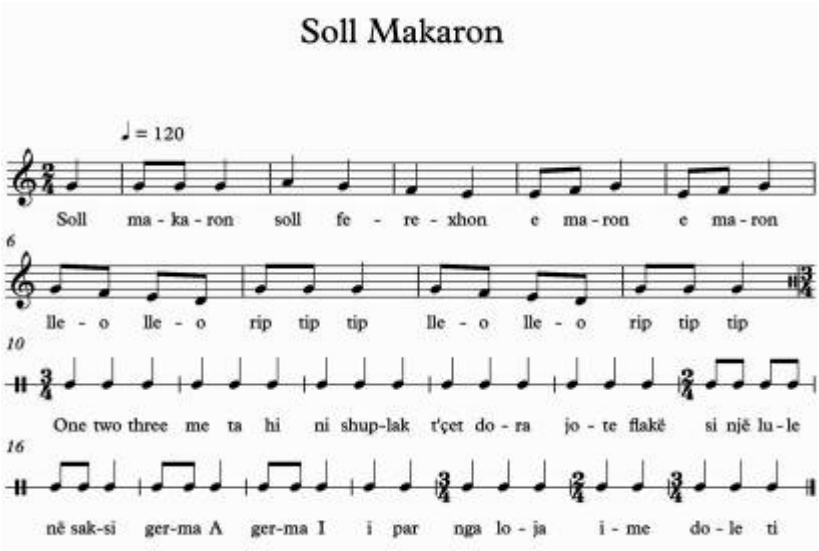


Figure 1. Musical Transcription of the Game Song "Soll Makaron"

In the seventeenth century, Jan Amos Comenius placed singing instruction immediately after the mother tongue and mathematics. According to Spahiu (1976, p. 11), Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi also attached particular importance to children's music education. Pestalozzi argued that "the development of the musical ear should be based on folk songs" (as cited in Spahiu, 1976, p. 11). The author of this article suggests extending this principle to children's own musical creations.

In *Guidelines for Singing Exercises Based on Pestalozzi's Fundamental Principles*, Pfaifer and Negel recommended practising rhythm and melody separately to develop the musical ear, with particular emphasis on melodic exercises (as

[2] The author recorded Lulëzim Dalipi's performance of the game "Dil dill dil" in Bujanoc.

[3] The author recorded the game "Soll makaron" in Bujanoc.

cited in Spahiu, 1976, p. 11). A similar practice can be found in children's own games. Reciting counting-out rhymes helps children develop a sense of rhythm, while singing games allow them to practise melody and rhythm together.

Children's own musical creations stimulate their creative inclinations, strengthen their memory, and shape their artistic taste. Performing these pieces hundreds of times gives children firsthand experience of musical creativity. Singing some of these songs in pairs, in groups of three, or in larger groups helps children develop their ability to sing together.

Activities that make pitch and rhythm tangible can help develop the musical ear. Children's own musical creations provide particularly suitable examples of such activities. Rhythm is easier to grasp when accompanied by clapping, body movements, or walking with steady steps. Children's natural inclination to move makes it easier for them to experience and understand rhythm. Reciting counting-out rhymes rhythmically, for example, provides a basis for experiencing and understanding different rhythmic patterns. Sensitivity to melodic motion also develops as children notice and experience the sounds around them. When performing their own musical creations, children repeat different pitches and rhythmic patterns hundreds of times with enjoyment and enthusiasm, practising them regularly in the process. Such repetition and regular practice contribute to the development of the musical ear and to children's broader musical education.

Children's songs and folk songs are also recommended for teaching musical intervals. Children's musical education and aural development are best supported when they participate deliberately and actively in games accompanied by rhythmic speech or singing. During play, children sing together or take turns. When they hear a new song from a friend and like it, they become excited and want to learn it. To do so, they need to hear and sing it several times. Play provides a setting in which this learning occurs naturally. Children of different ages and genders take part, each with distinct musical abilities, personality traits, and psychophysical characteristics. As they play and perform, children display musical abilities that vary in kind and level of development. Some have a strong sense of rhythm and more limited melodic skills. Others show a particular aptitude for melody and have less developed rhythmic skills. Some stand out for their poetic abilities, while others have beautiful and powerful voices. Their musical activities develop in response to their innate musical aptitudes, previous musical experiences, and everyday activities. These activities take shape through the contributions of different children and reflect both individual and collective expression. As children play and perform together, they draw on their experiences and demonstrate their musical and rhythmic performance skills, poetic expression, and acting abilities. Bringing these elements together in a single musical, artistic, and poetic creation supports aural development and broader musical learning in a natural and spontaneous way.

Active participation in games and in the performance of rhythmic or melodic pieces supports the development of musicality in all children. In play, children are free from the fear, shyness, tension, and confusion they might experience before a panel assessing their musical aptitude. Play is particularly helpful for children whose aural skills are less developed, as they support one another when singing together. The melodies children create are generally simple, with few leaps or melismas (ornaments), a relatively narrow range, and an melodic line that changes direction infrequently. The rhythms are also generally simple, with regular meters such as 2/4 and 4/4. These features make the melody and rhythm easier to grasp for children with less developed aural skills.

As children's own musical creations illustrate, short pieces with clearly defined rhythms and melodies make a stronger emotional impression on children. Such pieces are easier to grasp by ear and retain in memory. Children also find melodies they like easier to grasp. Despite their limited experience, children have a well-developed aesthetic taste in music and other areas.

In performing their own musical creations, children learn to sing a range of intervals, including major and minor seconds, thirds, fourths, and fifths, with ease. They internalize these intervals through repeated singing, often without knowing what the intervals are called.

When children sing the lines of "Emanuele elekontele," they practise singing major seconds and major thirds[4]

[4] The author recorded the game "Emanuele elekontele" in Muhoc, a village in Bujanoc.
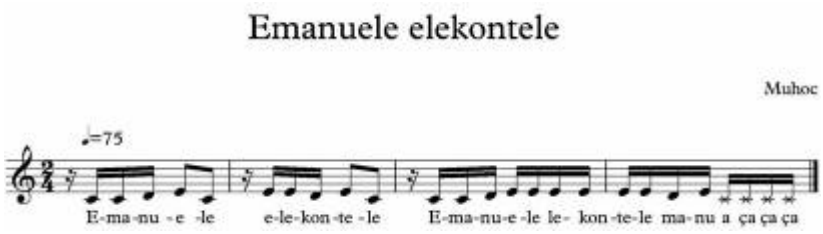


Figure 2. "Emanuele elekontele" (Muhoc)

When children sing "Flej si sikola," they practise singing major seconds and minor thirds..[5]
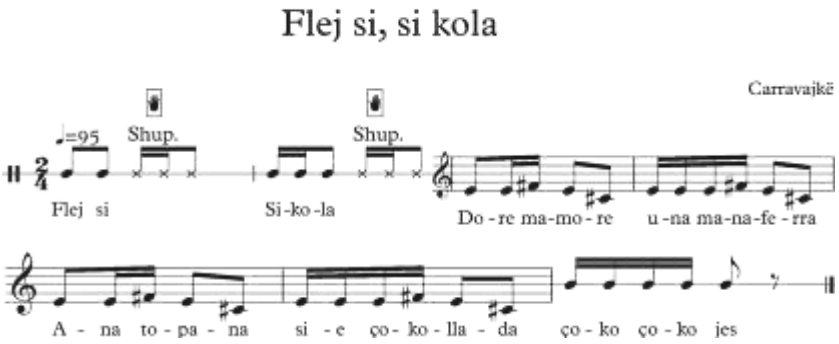


Figure 3. "Flej si, si kola" (Carravajkë)

A distinctive feature of "Kë kë kineska" is the perfect fourth. When children sing this song, they practise singing that interval.[6]
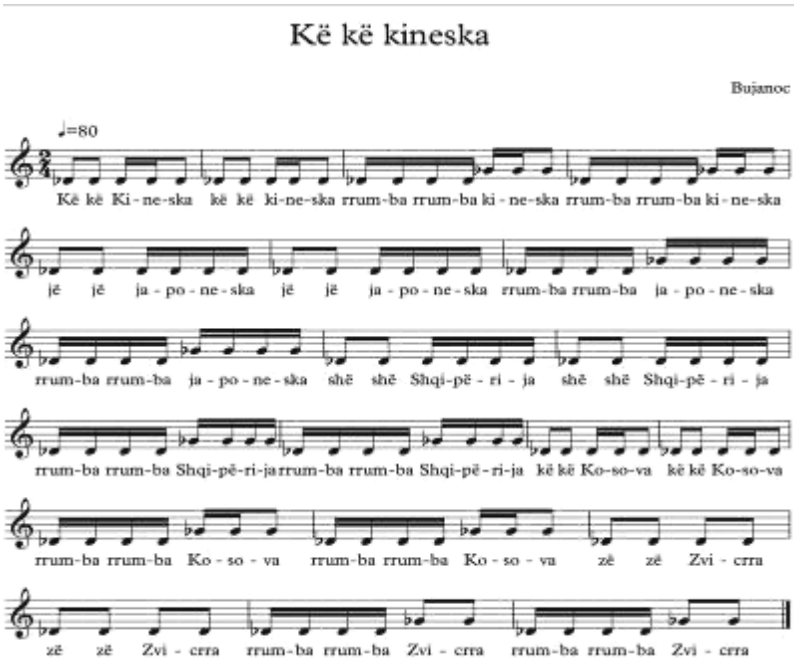


Figure 4. "Kë kë kineska" (Bujanoc)

The song "Kontaksisti n'bibliotekë" features a perfect fifth among its melodic intervals. Children practise singing this interval as they perform the song.[7]

The song "Kontaksisti n'bibliotekë" includes a perfect fifth among its melodic intervals. Children practise singing this interval as they sing the song.[8]

[5] The author recorded the game "Flej si, sikola" in Carravajkë, a village in the municipality of Preshevë.
[6] The author recorded the game "Kë kë kineska" in the city of Bujanoc.
[7] The author recorded the game "Kontaksisti n'bibliotekë" in Raincë, a village in the municipality of Bujanoc.
[8] The author recorded the game "Kontaksisti n'bibliotekë" in Raincë, a village in the municipality of Bujanoc.
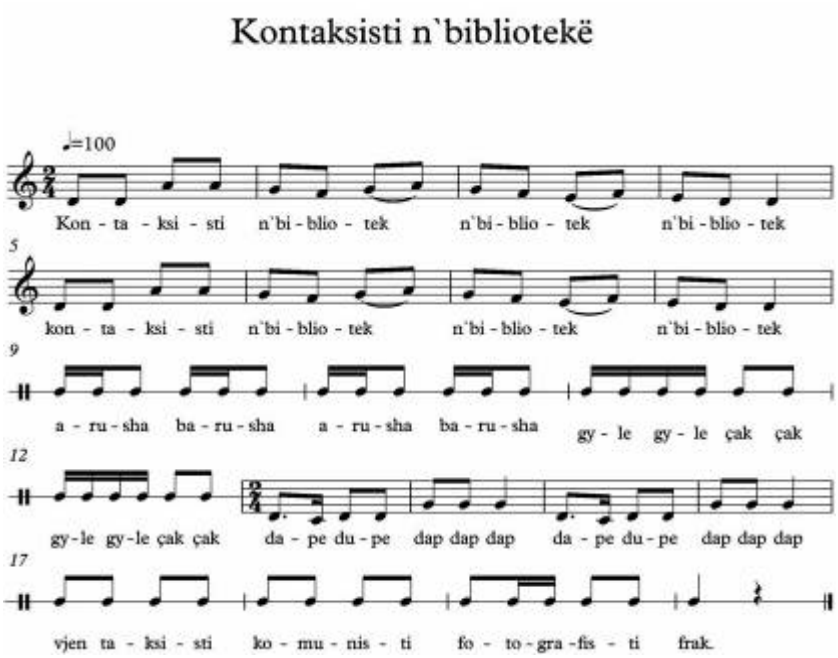


Figure 5. "Kontaksisti n'bibliotekë" (Raincë, Bujanoc)

Children may encounter difficulties when a music teacher asks them to sing the same intervals in a solfège exercise. In their own songs, however, they sing these intervals accurately, easily, and with enjoyment. As they sing, they do not need to identify the interval as a fourth, a third, or a second.

Summarize

Table 1 summarizes the six singing games collected in Bujanoc and Preshevë, listing their recording locations and the main features identified in the analysis.

Table 1. Children's singing games and their salient musical features

Game song	Recording location	Salient feature	Illustration
Dil dill dil	Bujanoc	A ritual game song sung to ask the sun to shine.	Photograph 1
Soll Makaron	Bujanoc	Rhythmic speech follows melodic singing. The rhythmic section uses 3/4 and 2/4 meters.	Figure 1
Emanuele elekontele	Muhoc, Bujanoc	The melody includes a major second and a major third.	Figure 2
Flej si, si kola	Carravajkë, Preshevë	The melody includes a major second and a minor third.	Figure 3
Kë kë kineska	Bujanoc	A perfect fourth is a distinctive feature of the melody.	Figure 4
Kontaksisti n'bibliotekë	Raincë, Bujanoc	The melody includes a perfect fifth.	Figure 5

As Table 1 shows, singing games offer children a variety of melodic and rhythmic experiences. Both "Emanuele elekontele" and "Flej si, si kola" feature a major second. The former also includes a major third and the latter a minor third. "Kë kë kineska" and "Kontaksisti n'bibliotekë" show that the repertoire also includes wider intervals, such as perfect fourths and perfect fifths. In "Soll Makaron," the shift from melodic singing to rhythmic speech illustrates how children combine different forms of vocal expression within a single game. In "Dil dill dil," the song expresses the children's shared wish for the sun to shine.

Discussion and Conclusion

The singing games collected in Bujanoc and Preshevë provide a regional perspective on children's play and oral transmission in Kosovo's musical culture. Considered alongside the musical games that Rexhepi and Jordanoska (2013) collected from Kosovar children, these examples provide a basis for examining how game melodies, rhythmic speech, and lyrics are used in children's musical cultures in Kosovo and the surrounding region. In "Dil dill dil," the song expresses a shared wish for the sun to shine, while "Soll Makaron" brings melodic singing and rhythmic speech together in a single game. These examples illustrate the musical and cultural functions of song in children's play.

The melodies examined here range in their use of intervals from major seconds to perfect fifths, illustrating how children sing these intervals during play. When children learn songs by ear from their peers, they remember the melody, rhythm, and words together (Marsh, 2009). The changes they make to these elements during play help reshape the repertoire as it is passed from one generation to the next (Sadiku, 2024). The educational role of music emphasized by Spahiu (1976, p. 6) can be seen in the ways children listen, remember, repeat, and sing together in these games.

Singing, dancing, and listening to music as a family may encourage children to make music. Combining melody with poetic language and giving children opportunities to repeat songs they enjoy may also encourage participation. Songs selected from the repertoire of Kosovar children and from the neighbouring communities documented in this study can be used in music lessons to practise intervals and rhythmic patterns, articulate words clearly, manage breathing, listen to one's own voice, and explore vocal range. Children's game music can thus support musical learning and help pass on Kosovo's musical culture to younger generations.

Biodata of Author



Dr. **Albin Sadiku** was born on March 10, 1974, in Bujanoc. He completed his primary education in his hometown and pursued his secondary music education in Prizren. He graduated from the Faculty of Music in Prishtina, specializing in General Music Pedagogy. He later earned a second degree in Ethnomusicology from the same faculty. He continued his postgraduate studies at the Faculty of Music in Tirana under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Vasil Tole. In June 2006, he was awarded the title of Master in Musicology. Since 2003, he has been working as a researcher at the Albanological Institute of Prishtina, in the Department of Folklore, Ethnomusicology Section. He has published scholarly articles in various journals across Kosovo, Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, and other countries. On October 23, 2014, he defended his doctoral dissertation at the Center for Albanological Studies in Tirana. In 2017, he published the monographic study "The Art of Children's Singing in Bujanoc and Presheva: Play, Song, Lullaby." In 2020, he released another monograph titled "The Role, Function, and Use of the Šarkija in Kosovo." Most recently, in 2023, he published "Female Singing in Albanian Wedding Traditions in Bujanoc and Presheva". Affiliation: Institute of Albanology in Pristina, Folklore Department, Ethnomusicology Section, Pristine, Kosovo Email: albinsadiku@hotmail.com ORCID: 0000-0003-1506-6291

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