



Review Article

An analysis of Avni Mula in terms of his contributions to Kosovo folk music

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Abstract

This study aims to thoroughly examine Avni Mula's contributions to Kosovan folk music. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative approach. The study analyzes Mula's life, artistry, and contributions to music from a historical perspective, drawing on biographical data and artistic works. Information regarding Mula's musical career—including his roles as a singer and composer—and his influence on the Kosovan folk music repertoire is explored in detail. The research is based on content analysis supported by literature review and historical documents. This methodological approach focuses on understanding Mula's musical aesthetics, his fusion of folk music with professional artistry, and the cultural significance of his works. Furthermore, data obtained from interviews and music critiques regarding his influence are used to assess his contributions more comprehensively. The findings aim to reveal Mula's lasting impact on folk music and his musical legacy. This method seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of both his singing and compositional careers. Mula's works modernize folk music by drawing inspiration from daily life and blending it with art. By establishing a strong connection between folk traditions and musical art, Mula made significant contributions to the preservation and enrichment of cultural heritage through music.

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Introduction

Avni Mula is a complex figure who embodies both interpretive and creative qualities at the highest level. Born in 1928 in the city of Gjakova, Kosovo, and raised first in Shkodër and later in Tirana, Mula always identified as a Kosovar, leaving a lasting mark on the music scene with his voice and artistic spirit, making significant contributions throughout his life. His artistic profile began to take shape in the cultural and artistic city of Shkodër, where the first encouragement toward music came from Shkodër-born composer Prenkë Jakova.

In 1947, he moved to Tirana and started working with the Popular Army Ensemble. In 1952, he was admitted to the P.I. Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow, where he was trained as a lyric singer. During his time in Moscow, he also began performing in concerts, and during one major event, he sang Simon Gjoni's famous song "Luleborë." This performance received much admiration and interest from the audience at the time.

After returning to his homeland, Mula became a baritone soloist at the National Theatre of Opera and Ballet (TOB) and also worked with the Folk Songs and Dances Ensemble. He performed with great success in many important roles, such as Rigoletto in Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Figaro in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, and Gjeta in P. Jakova's *Mrika*.

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Photo 1. Avni Mula (Gjakovapress, 2025)

Avni Mula's career as a singer expanded further when he began composing. In the 1960s, he participated in a radio song festival for the first time with his piece "Këndoj." His compositions include vocal works, ballads, cantatas, poems, suites, stage works, and choreographic tableaux. He also composed operettas, with *The Carnival of Korça* being his most well-known. He produced significant works in ballet and opera as well, such as the ballet *Vajzat e Malësisë* (The Highland Girls) and the three-act opera *Borana*.

Special attention should be given to Mula's creative works written for the Folk Songs and Dances Ensemble. Some of these include:

- *Bareshat e gëzuara* (Joyful Shepherdesses – a choral couple's dance),
- *Valle festive* (Festival Dance with Choir),
- *Valle me motive kosovare* (Dance with Kosovar Motifs),
- *Valle myzeqare* (Dance with Myzeqara Motifs),
- *Valle me motive tropojane* (Dance with Tropoja Motifs).

These works left a significant mark on the ensemble's repertoire and were staged with great artistry and professionalism by choreographers such as F. Shaqiri, P. Agolli, V. Istrefi, and K. Dervishi. As the titles suggest, all of these dances include choral elements; vocal music was always an essential part of his creations. These works often featured songs performed either independently or alongside dance, paralleling folk songs.

In addition to these, Mula also composed orchestral and film music, although his strongest creative expression was most evident in his songs. He composed over 1,000 songs for both children and adults. Some of his most well-known works include:

- *Valsi i lumturisë* (Waltz of Happiness)
- *Shqipëri o vendi im* (Albania, My Country)
- *Nënë moj do pres gërshetin* (Mother, I Will Wait for My Braid)
- *Trëndelinë* (Trendyli)

and many others that were highly praised by both the public and critics. A profound understanding and grasp of the essence of folk music from north to south enabled a professional blending of its vocal, orchestral, and stage works—especially the dances composed for the Ensemble—with the folk music tradition. Avni Mula successfully utilized the motifs of Kosovo and Tropoja and integrated the folklore of the Myzeqare region with the pentatonic structure of the Tosk region. In one of his early interviews, A. Mula stated:

"Creating art for the people is impossible without the support of the people; it is like building a castle without a foundation" (Millosi, 1978). He further added: "Understanding the life of the people, their rich folklore, is vital for an artist. One must listen to its phonetic, visual, and verbal folk music. I was lucky to closely follow the folklore festival in Gjirokastra. I discovered what an incredible teacher it was" (referring to the most impactful folklore festival held in 1978).

Mula's aesthetic understanding regarding drawing inspiration from folk music was expressed as follows: "[...] *It is not possible to understand folk music by listening to it just once. You must feel it, live it, and love it. You can find it among the people, with shepherds, by the hearth, at weddings, in songs, and festivals. That is where the people's table is. Furthermore, you must integrate what you discover into your artistic and aesthetic consciousness—not superficially, but in the details*" (Gërcaliu, 2007).

In one of the interviews, when Avni Mula was asked, “You have sung many songs, but which one affected you the most?” he answered: “I have many songs that were also performed by others. But I left it to my people to decide which one was the best for me. Because I sang them all the same way, I wrote them all with great love” (Gazeta, 2011).

In this context, Avni Mula shares the view of the esteemed musicologist Professor Albert Paparisto. Paparisto stated, “The first step in creating national music was the stylization, elaboration, or use of the melody of folk songs. The value of this type of work arises from composers’ creations enriched with technical knowledge and their ability to generate new emotions from old folk music material” (Paparisto, 1970).

One of Mula’s most successful songs, *Të verdhat kaçurrela*, deserves special emphasis. This song has (personally) earned the title of a folk song. Furthermore, in Mustafa Gërcaliu’s book *Midis dy dashurive*, it is stated: “In 1975, a festival titled ‘Cultured Folk Songs Festival’ was organized. Among 32 songs, Avni Mula’s song *Korrieri partizan* (known among the public as *Të verdhat kaçurrela*), with lyrics by Fatmir Gjata, won the first prize” (Gërcaliu, 1970).

Gërcaliu also discusses how the song spread among the public: “[...] *Those who sang this song, played it on the flute, or murmured the line ‘Të verdhat kaçurrela’, spread it orally [...] reaching as far as Kosovo and Macedonia*” (Gërcaliu, 1970).

This song was performed by Avni Mula and accompanied by the orchestra and mixed choir of the Ensemble of Popular Songs and Dances. Though the song is simple and comprehensible, it resonates fully with all its complexity. A brief analysis shows that the song is in E minor and begins with a thematic instrumental introduction by the orchestra, highlighting folk instruments, such as clarinet and violin, which are commonly found in our orchestras. After the first and second refrains, a choir is added, creating a march-like atmosphere. This structure transforms the song into a typical piece based on folk intonations, enriched with a dance rhythm—consistent with the composer’s well-known stylistic approach. The merging of classical structure with folk music intonations has made this song one of the most professionally crafted and successful works, best reflecting Mula’s aesthetic. It demonstrates that the source must intertwine with creative consciousness to produce a lasting work over time.

The timbre of Avni Mula’s baritone voice (Ballata, 2013) was both naturally and professionally cultivated, adding strength to the songs he created or performed. For this reason, the “perfect” harmony in his interpretations is clearly observed between creation and performance—an attribute often found in singer-songwriters. His powerful voice combines vocal range, clear diction, rich technique, and a full, resonant tone. However, the most striking aspect is Avni Mula’s ability to instantly internalize the emotional intensity required for either an operatic character role or the narrative of light popular songs. This quality stands out in both his vocal delivery and stage presence.

Conclusion

Avni Mula will undoubtedly remain in our memory not only for his extraordinary acting skills on the opera stage but also as a singer whose performance abilities were equally evident on the concert stage. His innate talent, combined with the professionalism he acquired over the years, enabled him to masterfully establish a connection between his vocal expression—as the primary instrument of the human voice—and his inner voice as a composer, embodying the essence of a truly versatile artist.

Biodata of Author



Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Holta Sina (Kilica)** is a musicologist and educator at the University of Arts in Tirana (UART). She studied Musicology at the Faculty of Music of the Academy of Arts (now University of Arts, Tirana) in the class of Prof. Albert Paparisto (1990–1994). She completed her degree under the academic supervision of Prof. Sokol Shupo (1994) with the highest results. She then worked as a scientific researcher in the Department of Ethnomusicology and Ethnochoreography at the Institute of Folk Culture (IFC) under the Academy of Sciences of Albania (1994–2000). In 1998, she specialized as head of the Ethnomusicological Archive of IFC at the PhonogrammArchiv in Vienna, Austria, under the direction of Prof. Ditrich Schüller. She completed postgraduate studies and a Master’s degree in Musicology (at the Academy of Arts) under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Fatmir Hysi

(2006) with top results. In 2011, she earned the title of “Docent” at the Faculty of Music, UAR.T. She defended her Doctorate at the Albanian Institute of Studies (IAKSA/QSA, Tirana) under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Shaban Sinani (2013), again with the highest evaluation. Her scientific activity spans from 1996 to the present and includes participation in several research projects, such as: involvement in the development project of the National Folklore Festival 1995 in Berat, serving as a scientific committee member for the selection of folk music groups as an ethnomusicologist; and taking part in scientific expeditions organized by IFC (Academy of Sciences of Albania) in Himara (1995) and Durrës (1999), particularly among the Kosovar population displaced by Serbian genocide. She has participated in dozens of national and international symposiums, conferences, and scientific panels from 1996 to 2022 in Albania and abroad. She is the author of numerous scholarly, critical, and journalistic articles published in academic journals and media in countries including Albania, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Romania, and the United Kingdom. She is also the author or co-author of:

- *Music 5* (textbook for 9-year schools, 2007, Ministry of Education and Science), co-authored with Elira Aliaj;
- *Opera: Concept and Structure*, Express Print, Tirana (2016);
- *The Ekphonic Codices of Albania* (scientific study), Academy of Sciences of Albania (2019);
- and co-author with Prof. Dr. Zana Shureriqi Prela of the book *60 Years of the Faculty of Music at the University of Arts (1962–2022)*, bilingual (Albanian-English), Naimi Publishing House (2024).

Academic contributions: She has developed course programs for musical form analysis (lecture cycles, recommended literature) and musicology; served as academic advisor and scientific opponent for undergraduate and master's theses in musicology and music education. She has been a member of admission and thesis defense committees in the field.

Since 2002, she has been a full-time lecturer in *Musical Work Analysis* and *Musicology* (bachelor and master programs) at UAR.T. In 2023, she was awarded the title of *Associate Professor* at the Faculty of History and Philology, University of Tirana. She is a permanent member of the Doctoral Commission and its subcommittees, and a member of the Organizing Committee and Editorial Board of the International Conference on Arts and Education (ICAE, 2025).

Currently, she is the *Head of the Musicology Department* (chair of the subject group) in the Faculty of Music at UAR.T.

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