

# *Musical Ancestries: Bosnia Script*

## **MUSICAL ANCESTRIES™ – BOSNIA**

NARR: It was such a wonderful thing to have a grandfather who understood *who you were*. And who also understood how important your best friend was to you...a grandpa who was always delighted to spend time with both of you, even though you were just a couple of 10-year old kids! That's how Lejla felt about her **deda**, who had first come to this country from Bosnia back in the 1990s.

A gentle, patient man, he loved art, books, music and good food. He enjoyed nature, and found wonder in all of life's little discoveries. No words could express how much Lejla appreciated the way Deda smiled and spoke with her and her best friend, Petra. In their many hours together, he told them about the birds in the back yard – their individual songs, how they built their nests and what they liked to eat. He knew the names and the seasons of all the plants and trees that they saw on their walks together. And he would share marvelous stories with them from his treasury of memories about “the ‘old’ country”. Yes, Lejla *adored* her deda...as did her friend, Petra.

DEDA: My dear young ladies, what shall we do on this rainy day? I thought that we might explore some of the music of **Bosnia and Herzegovina**. Would you like that?

LEJLA: That sounds great, Deda!

DEDA: Alright, then. Music it is! Here, I'll turn up the volume. This is about coming to America, and it really reflects the rich folk music of Bosnia.

Let's talk about Bosnian history...it's a heritage we all share. And since I *lived* through some of it, I can explain how and why I came to St. Louis from Bosnia.

NARR: Deda went on to tell them about the region their families came from, **Bosnia – Herzegovina**, (pronounced HerzeGOvina by natives). Once, when part of **Yugoslavia**, there were three main ethnic groups, which had close ties to different religions. The largest group, **Bosniaks**, were mostly Muslim. The **Serbians** (or **Bosnian Serbs**) were the next largest group, and were largely Orthodox Christians. The **Croatians** (or **Croats**) were mostly Roman Catholic, and the **Yugoslavians** were the smallest group.

When the Yugoslavian republic began to break up in 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina (also called BiH, or Bosnia), formed a new republic. Internal conflict broke out, and the Bosnian Serbs led *military* attacks on the Bosniak and Croat *civilians*, which led to *ethnic cleansing*.

DEDA: During that time, many people had to flee Bosnia for their lives. I was among these people who escaped and found a home here in St. Louis. It was a very dark time in Bosnia that finally ended with help from the international organization called NATO.

Girls, did you know that now there are more than 60,000 people here in St. Louis who are Bosnians, just like us?

PETRA: No sir! My grandma never told me anything about this. Why not?

DEDA: Well, my dear Petra, it's not something that's easy to talk about. It was very, very hard for us to leave our country. We all loved it so dearly, but it was a matter of life and death. Once we were here, in some ways it was even more painful to deal with the *memories*. As a result, many of us simply started over, and we didn't talk much about the past.

LEJLA: So, Deda, how come you can talk about it now?

DEDA: Well, I've had enough years to come to peace with it...in my heart. But I also feel it's important for us to understand our past so we can move forward with that wisdom. It's my duty – and my gift to you girls – to share our rich Bosnian heritage with you. So... shall we begin with some folk music?

LEJLA: Oh yes!

PETRA: Yes sir! Please.

DEDA: Okay then, Bosnian folk music – what a great subject! There are four basic traditional or folk music styles: **Sevdalinka**, **Gusle**, **Ganga**, and **Kolo** – music for the **Kolo Dance**. We'll concentrate on **Sevdah** and **Kolo** today.

First, we have a traditional song of the Sevdalinka (or Sevdah) style. This particular song, *Sejdefu majka buđاشة* is thought to have originated in Bosnia's capital city, Sarajevo, centuries ago, when the region of Bosnia was still part of the Ottoman Empire. The song is being sung by a mother to her daughter who's going to be married. Like most folk and traditional songs, no one really knows who wrote it.

LEJLA: Deda, that's lovely. It sounds so tender. Don't you think so, Petra?

PETRA: Yes. And it seems very calm.

NARR: The beautiful melodies and songs found in Sevdah and other folk styles have several cultural influences. Over the centuries, Bosnia went through many changes. It had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian Kingdom, and also the Yugoslavia Republic. Bosnian folk music is essentially Slavic, but includes a rich mixture of many of the neighboring Balkan countries... along with

Turkish, Central European, Mediterranean, and even western musical influences.

DEDA: Over the centuries, the music spread among the **Bosniak** populations throughout the **Balkans**, including **Montenegro**, **Croatia**, and **Serbia**. Here's the same song, but this is a more modern interpretation by the artists Silvana Armenulić.

NARR: Even though this interpretation has a slightly faster tempo, the music is still not fast. That's because **Sevdalinka** melodies are often elaborate and emotional, and they're sung with great passion. Like much Balkan folk music, Sevdah uses very somber, minor-sounding modes, another distinguishing feature of this folk style.

DEDA: Now let's listen to some more upbeat music that's for festivals, fun and dancing – Kolo! This is the *Bosnia and Herzegovina Folklore Band*. Just listen and see what you think!

NARR: Kolo has a good deal of Serbian influence. But because it's enjoyed so much for its upbeat sound and the social nature of the dance, it's popular throughout the entire Balkan region, and it's often played at celebrations like weddings. Its simple steps invite everyone in the crowd to join in – which they usually do!

PETRA: Deda, this is *great!* I love it! I think I've heard this before...at one of the St. Louis Bosnian festivals!

LEJLA: Yep, I think we've even danced it there, Petra. Wanna try it again? C'mon Deda, let's all dance!

NARR: The three of them danced for several minutes until Deda finally said...

DEDA: Alright, girls...that's enough for this grandpa!! You have more energy than I do! Besides, I'd like to talk about the St. Louis Bosnian Festivals you mentioned. Aren't they fun? Petra, what's your favorite part of the festivals?

Petra: Mmmm...I really like the music...and dancing with my friends!

Deda: And you, Lejla?

Lejla: For me it's the food! Especially the pastries – the cheese, meat and spinach pies. I always eat too much! How about you, Deda, what's your favorite?

Deda: I love the smell of the meat roasting for the **donner kebab** – and then putting it in the soft bread with the salad vegetables and dressing – delicious! Like a Bosnian gyro!

Of course, I love the music, too. You know, we have some fine Bosnian musicians here in St. Louis. I happen to know two of them. They're both accordionists... Edo Sadikovic and Amir Salesevic. Maybe I can introduce you at the next festival!

L & P: Ooo! Yes! Please!

DEDA: This gives us an opportunity to discuss the instruments that are used in Bosnian music! Sounds good?

LEJLA: Yeah!

PETRA: Yes sir!

DEDA: We'll start with the obvious, the **accordion!** It's the backbone of much of Balkan and Bosnian music. It provides rhythm,

harmony and often the melody for the songs and dances! Accordions are used in *many* nations and cultures throughout the world because they're so adaptable and portable! Listen to this one, being used as a solo instrument in a Bosnian/Serbian folk song, *Jorgovan...*

DEDA: Girls, I need to be clear...I don't want you to think that accordion is the *only* instrument used in Bosnia...there are many others. For instance, the violin is often a solo instrument. There is also the **Sargija**, a stringed instrument that is shaped like a tear drop, similar to the lute or oud. It's used for rhythm and harmony. This is another Kolo piece, *Kruno i Jelena*.

NARR: Among the many different instruments, there are **stringed instruments** and **woodwinds** that are the same as those we have in western culture. Two of the more popular **percussion instruments** in Bosnian music are the **tambourine** (we all know that one) and also a drum called the **davul**. (It's also called a **tapan**, **atabal**, or **tabl** in other cultures). It's a large double-headed drum, played with mallets. The Balkans' tapan *rhythm* is complex with many accents and time signatures.

DEDA: Girls, let's take a look at Bosnian music with a modern sound. Instead of folk instruments, you'll hear violin, guitar, and flute. In this piece, we first hear the musicians as they get familiar with the rhythm and notes, and then they put all these pieces together. It doesn't take them much time to really get into the music! I think you will like this. The musicians call themselves *The Seven Eight Ensemble* – just like the time signature!

PETRA: Oh, you're right, Deda! That was terrific! Wow, they're good!

DEDA: Yes they are! You have a good ear, Petra. Actually, both of you do. You're both 10 years old, right? It's probably time to start taking music lessons.

LEJLA : Oh, wow! Seriously?

PETRA: You think so?

DEDA: Let me do this... I'll talk with your parents. Then, we'll see what happens.

L & P: *Yesss!*

LEJLA: Deda, back when you were living in Bosnia, did you play any instruments?

DEDA: Interesting you would ask. Yes, I did play... accordion.

PETRA: *Really?!* Do you still play it? Can we hear you? Do you have any recordings?

DEDA: No, Petra. Those days are long gone. But I must tell you that whenever I hear a good accordionist, my heart wells up... with love for the instrument and for those wonderful days when I lived in beautiful Bosnia-Herzegovina.

PETRA: You miss it, don't you?

DEDA: Yes. Sometimes. But then I think of how very fortunate I am to be here in my adopted country – which took me in when I had nothing. When I got here, St. Louis opened the biggest door in the world to me – the Arch! Just think – you weren't even born yet! Your mommies and daddies were just little kids themselves!

PETRA: You know, Deda, until today, I never really felt *excited* about being Bosnian. But you've taught me so much about the beauty, joy and music of Bosnia-Herzegovina, that now I'm really proud to say, "I'm Bosnian".

LEJLA: I get what you're saying, Petra. I'd really like to learn more about Bosnia. Like the food and the clothes and the people... Deda, d'you suppose we might ever go there to visit? Maybe together with Petra and her family?

DEDA: Well, girls, it would not be exactly the same, but there would be much for you to learn. Understand, it would take some long-range planning... and we'd all have to save some money to do it... But I think that's a *marvelous* idea! You know what? Let's *celebrate* your plan with some more of that great traditional Kolo music! Thank you, girls, for being such an inspiration to me!

L & P: Thank YOU, Deda! Let's *DANCE!*