

The Mandolin Tradition in Gjakova, Kosovo: Historical Development and Cultural Identity

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Abstract

This study examines the tradition of the mandolin in Gjakova, Kosovo, tracing its historical arrival, institutional development, and deep integration into urban cultural life. The mandolin entered Albanian territories during the 1920s through trade connections with Italy, Western-oriented educational reforms, and foreign occupations. Its spread to Kosovo, particularly Gjakova, followed similar paths but developed unique local characteristics. In Gjakova, Catholic merchant families and students returning from abroad played a significant role in introducing and popularizing the instrument.

Over time, the mandolin became central to the city's musical identity, earning Gjakova the title "City of Mandolins." Cultural-artistic societies such as SHKA "Gajreti" and SHKA "Bajram Curri," along with the Ymer Riza society, incorporated the instrument into traditional "aheng" ensembles. The Normal School of Gjakova institutionalized mandolin education, forming orchestras that performed both Albanian and classical repertoires. Beyond formal institutions, the mandolin shaped family gatherings, serenade traditions, and youth initiatives. Groups such as AVI "Skofiarët," AVI "Ashikët," and AVI "Rilindja" demonstrate the continuity and revitalization of this tradition across generations. The mandolin in Gjakova represents not merely an instrument, but a living symbol of cultural memory and urban musical heritage.

Keywords

Mandolin

Gjakova

Aheng

Cultural heritage

Urban music tradition