On the first mention of the coastal town of Budva, most people think of a summer holiday, walks along the Adriatic Sea coast, spacious beaches facing a small rocky island (the Isle of Sveti Nikola), clear turquoise blue sea water refracting the sun's rays... This is a scene similar to those we usually see in picture postcards with the message: Greetings from...
Someone will “enrich” this postcard with thoughts and recollections of the scent of wind mixed with the scent of sea and coastal vegetation, while someone will “smell” fish, homemade wine, olives or cheese in oil from Budva’s kitchens.

Someone also “hears” a murmur of afternoon sea waves, the romanized and rhapsodic language of villagers and the sound of steps on the smooth, stone-paved streets of Budva...

Those who are interested in the musical tradition add to this picture the well-known sounds of coastal music in the style of Budva citizens: love lyrics with rhapsodic Mediterranean melodies sung in two, three or more parts... Little by little this postcard from the “mind” acquires its acoustic dimension.

However, the music part of this special postcard from Budva municipality is not complete. In order to be ‘sent’, an illustration should be added of a completely different, but also traditional style of musical performance by people from villages surrounding this coastal town.

At first, this quality of being different is confusing, since it refers to settlements close to Budva, therefore one should expect that the music played is similar to the coastal music. But if some other aspects which influenced the life in village settlements in Budva municipality are considered, many things including the reasons for the different manner of playing music become clearer.

People inhabiting the villages of Budva municipality mostly come from the continental parts of Montenegro. Their ancestors (the so-called “settlers of Dinaric race”) are believed to have started populating these coastal areas even before the 15th century.
In the new, ethnically stable climate, the population was still loyal to the tradition-bound village way of life. Therefore the musical tradition of the aforementioned settlements originates in the customs and practical rituals passed on orally, and as a sacrosanct knowledge imprinted on each following generation.

This musical tradition is characterized by a village style of playing in its acoustic features (by using melodic models at comparatively closer range, mostly with a syllabic metro-rhythmic base, loudly performed, etc.). However, notwithstanding the fact that the music tradition of the above mentioned settlements originates at one “source”, it became more stratified in time.

This was in the first place due to the historic past of these settlements. Therefore these settlements have recently been included in the Budva municipality administration, and from the time of populating these areas also due to three separate districts (the village of Prijevor and hamlet of Svinjište represent the district known under the name of Grbalj; the other Grbalj villages belong to the Kotor municipality; the settlements of Maine, Pobori and Brajići are mentioned in many documents as three principalities; and finally, twenty villages belong to the area known under the name of Paštrovići).
Montenegrin folk dance
During past centuries such traditional affiliations influenced the creation of three mutually very close, but different ethnomusical dialects of village style musical performance (the styles of Grbalj, the three principalities and the area of Paštrovići).

In a nutshell, we can distinguish the melody models common to all three areas at the studied area, as well as melody models specific to each particular village area, as a part of the tradition passed down from the ancient homeland.

In the second place, the geographic diffusion also influenced the different music performances of the villages in the Budva Municipality. Because of this, not three but two layers of the village style of performance can distinguished in the villages of the Budva Municipality: the first layer refers to settlements in the highlands, and the second layer refers to settlements on the seacoast itself.

This quality of being multi-layered is recognizable both in melodic characteristics and in some characteristics of song lyrics in the area studied.

From the point of view of the melodies, the songs of village settlements of the Budva Municipality are based on one, mostly diatonic tonal line, with a semitone between the second and third tone with respect to the final tone of the melody.

This tonal line is:
1. In the settlements in the hinterland (in the Grbalj villages, as well as in Maine, Pobori and Brajići) of closer range (f⁵g⁶a⁷b⁸, the final tone of melody is g⁹);
2. In the settlements on the seacoast itself (in Paštrovići) of wider range (f′g′a′b′c′d′, the final tone of melody is also g′).

From the point of view of the texts:

1. when speaking of the settlements in the hinterland (Prijevor, Svinjište, Maine, Pobori and Brajići), the song lyrics are songs of occasion; that is why we have lyrics which depict in the best way not only the customs and ritual practices of people from these areas, but the way they think and live;

2. when speaking of the settlements mostly at the seacoast itself (Paštrovići), there are song lyrics which are distinguished both by their length and their specific poetic quality; we can recognize in these songs a description of seduction by a female, e.g., a fairy, but also a description of infidelity; certain songs from Paštrovići depict the freedom of a coastal woman to choose her hero; she is so self-confident and proud of her beauty that she boldly challenges Alil-Beg to a duel.

Therefore the folk music of the first layer might be seen as very close to the village style of music and characteristic of areas in which the ancestors of today’s population originate (i.e. the musical performance of the continental parts of Montenegro); cherished on the mountain slopes of the hinterlands, it has remained in a way closed and has changed very little.

The folk music of the second layer is also in the village style, but in time, due to the coastal way of life (in this context, the sea as a conveyor of different cultures without boundaries), it became open and closed to the coastal way of seeing music in a special way.

That is why, most probably, the folk music of the second layer is characterized by numerous custom and ritual songs with a wider tonal line and lyrics the sense of which is not strictly dependent on the traditional Dinaric way of thinking.
The folk music of these village settlements of the Budva Municipality is articulated through singing, playing and singing accompanied by a music instrument.

This will all be demonstrated through special occasions throughout the calendar year and the common life cycle.

Songs are sung on Christmas Eve in the whole village area within the municipality of Budva, while Yule logs are burnt at the hearth, as well as on Christmas, immediately after midnight. Then patriotic songs are sung which, as villagers say, may be sung “whenever people are gathered together” (i.e. in any other occasion).

Songs may be sung on Christmas Eve and Christmas accompanied by gusle (a string music instrument producing tones by the drawing of a bow across one string). These songs sung by gusle players are sung within the studied area on various occasions.

There are records of greetings composed for Christmas Eve and Christmas in Maine, by the singing of couplets for the occasion.

Processions take place on days of church holidays such as Easter, Holy Trinity and Spasovdan, on votive days and prislužnice, as well as during the periods of long summer droughts in the studied areas. Special folk songs, prayers with a Christianized text, are performed on that occasion. Depending on the feast, the textual pattern changes (for example, on church holidays people sing songs such as They bear Crosses, Pray to God and Ask for Mercy From God, Paštrovići), while, depending on the area, this text of occasion is sung using a melodic model characteristic for that area.

As an illustration, the prayer for rain in Paštrovići is performed using the melodic model which is usually used for performing Paštrovići songs originating in customs and rituals.
Icon of St. Nicholas in silver, 19th Century, Praskvica Monastery
Church of St. Nicholas, Praskvica Monastery
Blind Montenegrin Guzla Player, Jaroslav Čermak

Specially selected traditional words are sung in honour of bees. Oral tradition tells us that a beekeeper whistles while bees are swarming around a honey-bearing plant. The beekeeper whistles (a special hiding of the voice), and then performs an occasional text using a recitative melody made of several tones. These and similar bee-keeper song texts are believed to be one of the oldest forms of lyrical poetry and, along with the melodies, they still have many characteristics which originate in the ancient past.

Village threshing floors used to be a favourite gathering place during summer and autumn. The occasion for these gatherings was usually a church holiday which was celebrated by the whole village (in Paštrovići, for example, for the Vračevi, Petrodan, Ilindan Holy Days...). In addition, people used to gather at threshing floors without a special occasion for the purpose of entertainment, calling these gatherings sit-togethers or sittings.

Whatever the occasions for the gatherings, love songs were usually sung at the threshing floors, with descriptions of the girl's fidelity, or with descriptions of the difference between the comfortable life of a girl in a parental home and the hard life of a married woman in a new home.

The youth used to dance to these songs, often singing texts of amusing content.

Flautists used to perform in the breaks between songs and dances.

They used to perform different melodies on a twin-reed shepherd's flute (a wind musical instrument of clarinet type made of two interconnected tubes where the tones are produced by closing the holes in pairs). In Grbalj and Maine this instrument is known as the shepherd's "ponti".

Such a term originates in the fact that a twin-reed flute was used by shepherds who played this instrument in order to shorten the long days spent on the pastures of Grbalj, Maine, Pobori, Brajići and Paštrovići.
It is also said that:

"... When a shepherd wants to play a twin-reed flute, whoever works in the field should stop working and have a rest..." (Maine)

There were flautists also in Grbalj and Maine. Nowadays they do not play the flute in pastures but in different public gatherings for the purpose of entertainment.

Songs of different genres were sung at sits-together, and accompanied by gusle. When celebrating Christmas, these songs had epic content (Paštrovići, Grbalj) but also funny content (Paštrovići) or lyrical content (Maine).

Oral traditions tell us that while performing lyrical songs a gusle player, though playing continuously, was not the only performer, as was usual when performing epic songs. He would sing the first melodic verse of a song and then other singers would repeat it literally and antiphonally.

Today, when celebrating a family Patron Saint’s Day, people sing less than in the past, or they don’t sing at all. The tellers themselves say that during a Patron Saint’s Day “people used to rejoice more, because they used to sing and play gusle more”. They used to play music more in the evening hours, while at the guest of honour’s home, not only regular guests used to gather (cousins and close friends) but other villagers as well.

Songs performed on that occasion were mostly of patriotic content or were textually designed in such a manner to make a toast to the host on this special day.

A wedding celebration is one of the most preserved customs in the area studied. It is a folk celebration which takes place traditionally, with the participants stating openly that they do not want any departures from customs they learned in their childhood. The villagers of Grbalj, Paštrovići, as well as the villagers of Maine, Pobori and Brajići consider the wedding celebration as one of the most sacred of celebrations.

In addition to the bride and bridegroom, their family and relatives, a major part of the villagers attend the wedding celebration. They follow the whole process in relation to contracting a marriage, starting with the request for the girl’s hand and the presentation of the ring, through the three main wedding days, and ending with the first visit of the married couple to the bride’s family.
By their wedding activities, people in these areas do not hide a wish during the wedding celebration in order to provide a strong bond between a bride and a bridegroom, to provide them happiness and a respectful marriage, children, but also, in a secret way, to protect the married couple from bad luck. That is why the sequential flow of the wedding celebration is strictly defined and must not change.

It also refers to the performance of wedding songs in which the most important participants are the subjects of the song (known as acts); the joy of the bride’s and bridegroom’s parents at hosting the wedding guests; the departure of the wedding guests to collect the bride; the weaving of the bride’s wreath; the moments when the bride spots the wedding guests who arrive to her home and she must secretly count them; the grief of the mother at her daughter’s departure; the taking of the bride from her parental home; the welcoming of the guests with the bride in her new home; the moments at the table in the bridegroom’s home after bringing in the bride, when different songs are sung at the top of one’s voice; but also the songs known as honouring songs.

The wedding guests make special toasts at the wedding table at the bridegroom’s home, which are in Paštrovići, for example, followed by special songs (after the fifth toast the song Pearl Chin, Silver Glass, etc.).

Nursery rhymes are also performed using the melody models used for singing the songs of different genres. Apart from the above mentioned nursery songs there are also nursery-prayers which are performed in an almost recitative manner, with a Christianized content dedicated to the child’s protection.

Nursery rhymes in the studied areas are known by men and women equally. While a small child is being rocked, a song is sung in which the main protagonist is a cock (a cock is given a great significance in our national mythology, since it is believed to be a friend of people and enemy to demons).
According to the tradition which villagers strictly comply with, a deceased person must not be mourned after the very act of mourning. For this reason, we could not record any acoustic example of this custom. Even data on mourning customs were hard to obtain. However, all the recorders know that mourning songs mourn a deceased person (Paštrovići), i.e. women cry loudly (derkaju) (Grbalj), weep, (dekaju) (Maini, Pobori, Brajići), lament, mourn (Paštrovići) or count (i.e. state all known ancestors while lamenting).

Men in the studied area wail (i.e. mourn in a special way using special words) but only for a man. This performance is of a recitative quality and may not be assigned to a vocal tradition.

The folk music in the studied village settlements has been losing its ritual character lately, and the inherited texts of songs are more and more replaced by themes from modern life. This was mostly influenced by two important historic events: the introduction of a new social system after 1945 and the earthquake in 1979.

Therefore in the second part of the 20th century people left their home villages and moved to towns (Budva and Kotor). Younger generations are not so interested in the music heritage which is particularly specific for Maine, Pobori, Brajići and Paštrovići. This is also shown by the fact that those who sang, played and spoke of their music tradition were mostly older men, aware of the fact that their inherited knowledge belonged to the past. Or, as they say, “This used to be nice, but it has passed”.

Inspired by a noticeable change from the old to a new way of life, a gusle player from Maine gave his opinion of the new fashions, and not only of the musical.

He performs a text linked to motifs of a family life along the traditional melody, with the main theme being the difference between the way of thinking of a girl who was brought up in the first part of the 20th century and that of a girl brought up several years ago.

This would complete that postcard from the “mind” mentioned at the beginning of this illustration, and it seems that its sending from these coastal areas will depend exclusively on its authors - that is, on the citizens of the Budva Municipality.