

INTERVIEW WITH SHAQIR HOTI

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Duration: 122 minutes

Present:

1. Shaqir Hoti (Speaker)
2. Jeta Rexha (Interviewer)
3. Kaltrina Krasniqi (Interviewer/Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of non-verbal communication:

() - emotional communication

{ } - the speaker explains something using gestures

Other transcription conventions:

[] - addition to the text to facilitate comprehension

Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names, or expressions.

Childhood

[Cut from the video interview: the interviewer asks the speaker about his childhood.]

Shaqir Hoti: Of course from what I remember, but there's also what's been told to me in the meantime by my parents and older brothers. So, I come from the village of Rugova in Has, I was born there, of course on the shore of the Drini i Bardhë River. Our childhood can't be compared to childhood today. It was a different time, different...I mean by other standards. So, our childhood could be summed up like this, I can tell you simply for information purposes. In those days we didn't have any kind of radio or transistor or television, we only had very basic technology. That's what my older brother told me (smiles), now I'm telling you this for the first time. My older brother is 95 years old and lives in Prizren. He says when I was small and still not talking, my father always played traditional instruments: the *kavall*,¹ the flute and others. If you heard dad playing, you ran [to his music] and "turned into a bug on the spot" [you stopped in your tracks], you simply stayed like a bug in front of the *kaval* until he finished playing the melodies. I mean, it seems that since childhood those sounds were imprinted with a kind of, simply a kind of... they were imprinted in my brain and I don't think they'll ever leave.

In this way as well, I was actually lucky compared to other children. Even compared to the neighbors' children, because I was the youngest spoiled child as we say, meaning I was the youngest child in the house, and it's normal that the youngest be spoiled in this way. In this regard, I was lucky because my brother Gani, may he rest in peace, he was a great master, and as a small child he built a small pipe from rye straw for the first time. And he started playing something, I quickly took it away from his mouth and I started analyzing it a little bit and I started playing a melody right away and the whole family was surprised. A child that still doesn't know how to talk well, and knows how to play! So, I was always lucky in that regard. Everything that was used or made at that time, my brother always made it. So as far as instruments were concerned I never had a problem. Whatever I wanted to use, and whatever I asked for, he made it for me.

So as we know, as children, the standard of living at that time was very low, we can easily see that the level of education was zero because illiteracy was at its peak. So, games were our only entertainment. In the beginning, when we were very young, how to say, very young, we played with the neighbors' children, we there. There were all sorts of games; we played games that were for the yard, and the field. But to be honest, all of them were competitive. Who can run the fastest to the handkerchief over there? We also called it our flag. Who can jump the farthest in one step, three steps, throwing a spear. We didn't have

¹ *Kavall* is a traditional woodwind instrument, common to the Balkans and Turkey.

spears, but there were sticks. So in this way, we had plenty of games, but we didn't have other games like today. You sit in the chair and surf the Internet and there are different games, they didn't exist back then.

This, this means that until around '43, 1943, my brother who was slightly older than I was, he went to school. I was ready for the first grade and was lucky to learn all the letters and the four mathematical functions from him. And now I was, to be honest, I was very curious when that day would come, when I would be registered for school because I was in the same school as my uncle's son, and we were inseparable in school. However we didn't have any fun there, because subjects were all [taught] in the rote method, meaning they were taught as prayers, they also taught us the Arabic alphabet which we never understood a word of, [recites the Arab alphabet], *te, enete, be, ene, be...* what are they saying, what's that? Well, there were a lot, strange verbalizations.

And we waited, in 1943 schools for us [Albanians] were supposed to be opened because others had them. And exactly, during the fall of 1943, you could smell World War II. And for this reason, we did not begin first grade until 1946, meaning after the war. And war like war, doesn't bring anything good. I mean you always had bad things, you had human losses, material losses, losses in... so, those days of war left us like that, to be honest, they left a...there were a lot of consequences for us. Those traumas showed for a long time because we lived through all that war.

And while running away from our homes through the mountains, sometimes through other villages, a few of us stayed. When our side [of the mountains] was calm, the other villages came to us, and it was like this until the war ended. It was as bad for us in our neighborhood, in our part, as it was for the *kulla*² of uncle Din, Din Godeni. He was a master, a laic orthopedist, well known in those parts. And a defense of sorts was organized in his *kulla* – the *Balli Kombëtar*,³ the *Ballists*,⁴ led by Qazim Bajraktari, I think that was his name, from the Malisheva area, over there somewhere.

That ambush lasted close to six weeks. During those weeks they could never break through, but they finally got in. But it looks like someone from...it was them I think, because they said they were the Fifth Partisan Brigade. I think they were injured during the fighting and then to take revenge they chose one of the...our neighbor, one of the best, he was a grown up youth between 30 and 40 years old. I say the best because he was rich, and also capable.

The *kulla* of uncle Din, it turned into what you call a castle, into a fortress that the partisans couldn't enter. They say that this last for about six weeks, and the *Balli Kombëtar* organized it, it was led by Qazim Bajraktari. I remember Qazim's name, I think his last name was also Bajraktar, from the Malisheva area. And then, when the war was over, the partisans chose one of, one of the best men from our neighborhood, named Zenun, he was also handsome and developed, an athletic type so to speak, but he was also capable. And that was also out of revenge and their zone was a connecting bridge to the school as well, now it's the old school, back then it was the only school.

² Literally tower, the Albanian traditional, rural, fortified stone house.

³ *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front) was an Albanian nationalist, anti-communist organization established in November 1942, an insurgency that fought against Nazi Germany and Yugoslav partisans. It was headed by Midhat Frashëri, and supported the unification of Albanian inhabited lands.

⁴ A *Ballist* or *Ballists* (plural), refers to members of the *Balli Kombëtar*.

From the old school they called the neighborhood, the whole neighborhood was supposed to come. Everyone was obliged to come. And my uncle's son and I secretly went and we got close and hid in some high grass, and saw and heard everything that was discussed. And they put him [Zenun] in front of the whole neighborhood that had gathered there and said he was a traitor to the nation, he collaborated and worked against us with the *Ballists* and the penalty was death and I don't know now when the ones who were shot were lined up. They didn't line them up where we were, but how...I don't know how many there were, about ten people, they shot them and killed them.

And then they asked, "Who is close to him? Who is his father?" Everyone was silent, my father approached. "I am," he said, "He is my son." He expressed his condolence and now he said, "According to your custom, you can bury him." I remember well how my father addressed him, he said, "You're killing a brother of yours, and sooner or later you will understand that you are very wrong." Because a few times during the speech the superior said that now we had brotherhood and unity. And he (smiles), "I can never become the brother of a Serb!" And that's how it was. However, as children, that really traumatized us greatly, we always remembered a scene like that, a terrible scene. And these were...always war, it never brings anything good, just loss, and some time had passed until we got into the routine of life and work so to speak. I say we had a childhood, but not a childhood as it should be, for example a comfortable youth, but always a war, and things like that.

And after 1946, in September when the school opened, our reading... because to be honest we were very hungry for knowledge at the time, the only knowledge we got was from the *kulla* and the *oda*,⁵ there were some...there were also some good speakers, I mean they were very good orators, and taught people like that. It was good that there was a place that supplemented our education a bit, but we didn't know how to read or write. And now when the school opened, our joy, we were really happy to go there. One teacher for four classes, there weren't [many] teachers. And I remember the first day. We were lined up in two classes, the first grade and the second in one classroom, the third and the fourth in the other class, because the school had only two classrooms. And they did the line up that way, the third and fourth went to school in the afternoon whereas the first and the second were in the morning. I mean, we were in one class, the second grade was in another class, and then in the afternoon there were the third and fourth grades.

Yes, the teacher's name was Salih Prizreni, and he quickly figured out that I knew the letters. And one day he said, "Come to me, come to the office." What office (smiles), I saw those buildings for the first time (smiles), they seemed like who knows what, to me. And he asks me, "But you know all the letters?" "Yes," I said, "I know how to read too." Because I started reading a bit at that time...I read Oso Kuka from Fishta and learned it by heart.⁶ So, when he saw that I also knew how to read, I said, "I also know the four mathematical functions." "Until what?" "Up to one thousand for sure." He was surprised, he was simply surprised and a few days later until the teacher came, a different teacher, I was the youngest teacher ever in the history of the school. He gave me the first grade, and he went to the second grade. Or the opposite would happen and I would go to the second grade, and he'd go to the first grade. And that's why we had an excellent time. Then, at some point, the teacher Viktore Sopi came, and of course she made our

⁵ Men's chamber in traditional Albanian society.

⁶ Oso Kuka (1820-1862) was an Albanian guard at the border of Montenegro and the Ottoman Empire who blew himself up with the tower he was defending. He is celebrated in Fishta's *Lahuta e Malcis*.

teaching work easier. Then, of course they worked in two shifts, meaning they worked double, in the morning and in the afternoon, both of them.

And this is how we reached the fourth grade. At that time, up until the fourth grade I only made Fives.⁷ At that time of course we were evaluated from Two to Five, we didn't have Ones back then. My uncle's son went to get our grades, our results, he went for me as well. Teacher Salih spoke very highly of me, and who knows what kind of praise he gave me, but in the end he said, "He makes excellent grades." My uncle comes back home, he tells my father, he says, "He spoke well of him, he didn't miss any classes, all is well, but he didn't do better than the others because the others were good or very good and he was [ex]cellent" (smiles). He didn't understand what excellent was, and also misheard it for 'cellent.

And now I leave with happiness, and I was also a *sugar*,⁸ I always had a very close relationship with him. And I enter the *oda*, and there I see him not in a good mood, my father with a pair of tongs, at the fireplace. "Here," he says, "Him! We never give him any work. The whole family did well and very well, and he is [ex]cellent." He said, "Why did he do this to us?" Anyway, parental rebuke began, I tried to tell them that I was better than the other students, but they wouldn't even let me talk. "No you're not better than them, you're [ex]cellent. That's not good!" Then my brother came from the field and I explained it to him. "No," he said, "he's actually better than them." And then they understood (smiles), it was kind of a good joke. Then more teachers were added, as well as classes on Saturdays, and we went up to the eighth grade, which at that time was called *semi-maturë*.⁹ I finished my *semi-maturë*.

Youth

[Cut portion of the video-interview: the interviewer asks the speaker about his youth.]

I made all Fives again. Now one of them said to me, "You absolutely have to go to the *Normale*.¹⁰ The other teacher...the one from the *Normale* insisted, it was Qamil Deda, one of the very good teachers from the *Normale*. Masar Luzha was also my head teacher, he said, "Absolutely," he said, "High school, because he's excellent in math." Leoran Stublla, another one, said, "No, he has an ear for music, he should definitely study music." And now I was in a dilemma about which direction to go. But one person prefers this and the others...at a certain point I came to a decision of my own. I said, "I'm getting my birth certificate," because I thought I needed a birth certificate and a school diploma, "and I'll go to Prizren and walk around. I'll register in the first school that has a sign that says High School."

I went to Prizren for the first time, of course we went on foot. It was a 25-kilometer trip but of course we woke up in the middle of the night to get there on time. And now, of course back then the kind of clothing we had, we had very poor clothing. And now we went there, I'm walking, I'm walking, I decided not to ask anyone. I walked until I found it myself, without asking anyone. And I went, I walked over a bridge and I saw another one, the Lumbardhi or Bistrica or whatever it's called now, it could be that the bubbling

⁷Grade A on an A-F scale (Five-0).

⁸The youngest in the family, also a bit more spoiled than other children.

⁹Old set of examinations formerly given to students after the fourth year of elementary school.

¹⁰ *Shkolla Normale*, School of Pedagogy, specialized in training teachers.

attracted me. And I was following the bubbling, at first to have fun with the water, and I had time, the day was long.

As I was going higher and higher, I saw a house with no characteristics above the road, like this. I stopped and looked at it, I stopped on the bank of the Bistrica and looked at that house. And someone passed...I asked, "Is this a private house?" "No," he said, "this is like a museum," he told me, he said, "This is where the League of Prizren was held." Oh, I had heard about that but that was the first time I saw it. And now, a little further away, about twenty more meters down, there was a beautiful building, it was new and it said in Serbian *Srednja Muzička Škola* (Music High School) and I didn't know a word of Serbian, I just knew I saw something about music, and school. I said to myself should I ask? I slowly entered, I didn't see, a fairly tall person emerged, he was [later] killed, Frank Koci, now I learned his name, he was Akil's brother in fact, Akil Koci. And he approached me and said, "What do you want, my boy?" I said, "I came to register, what kind of school is this?" "Yes, this is the music high school." Ha, that's what I was looking for (smiles). "Did you come here to register?" "Yes," I said. "You have to have completed your *semi-maturë*, then you can come here. It's not here..." I said, "I did it." "Ah, good. Wait here, the principal will come shortly." Very well then, I waited for the principal to come. I waited, waited, but the principal wasn't coming.

I heard an instrument for the first time in my life. So beautiful, I overheard a passage of quick notes and then I asked Frank, I said, "Excuse me, what instrument is that?" He said, "It's called a trumpet, the professor is practicing alone," he said, "In his practice room, he's practicing alone." And the whole time I was thinking, if I register as an individual instrumentalist I'll take up the trumpet, because it sounds like a good instrument. I waited as long as I waited and the director didn't come. At a certain point Frank came and said, "Go up the stairs, on the left, it says Principal, he's the vice-principal, he can help you." Very well, I went upstairs, I knocked, I heard something but...I opened the door and he asked me, he was a Serb and he asked me questions in Serbian. I looked at him, I didn't understand a word of what he was saying. And I was speechless, what could I do, at some point he asked me, "What's your name?" "*Kako se zovesh?*" Now I know Serbian, but "*Kako se zovesh?*" I said, "The trumpet!" because I thought he was asking me what instrument I wanted.

And then he started laughing, and here I was blushing and I was in a very bad position. As I was leaving the room, I encountered the principal face to face. The principal came, with glasses, I saw him for the first time. He said, "What did you come here for, boy?" He addressed me in Albanian. I was really happy, I said it's better now, I said, "I came here to register for school." Then they started talking in Serbian a bit and both of them starting laughing a bit, *gagaga* {imitates their laughter}. It could have been because of the trumpet (smiles). "Very well," he said "but did you complete your *semi-maturë*?" I said, "Yes I have." He said, "And your birth certificate?" "Yes, I have both." I took them out of my shirt, because back then we didn't even have pockets but they were under the shirt. When he looked at it, "Oh you're an excellent student. Come we'll test your ear." We walked down many stairs and I said to myself what will they do to my ear, what do they want with it? I didn't know how these things went.

He opened the door, and at that time it looked like a hall to me, it wasn't even that big, but to me it looked bigger than the *oda* in our *kulla*. And I saw a...for the first time I saw an instrument so big that it couldn't even fit into a wagon (smiles), on three legs, I opened it, I saw the keyboard, I mean it was a [grand] piano. Not a pianino, but a piano. "Look, I will play this, I'll play, you listen carefully, and you repeat it with La." Very well, and he hit [the piano] *dum* {imitates the sound of the keys}. And I hit the note

excellently. He touched a few keys, *tang, tang, tang* {imitates the sound of the keys} and it turned out excellently. “Au,” he said, “now listen, sing with a La, the note that you hear.” Then he started to play several notes at once, at the same time. Those were the chords.

I also hit those notes excellently, he got up, “Eh boy, you have a perfect pitch.” It was Lorenc Antoni. “You are accepted at this school and you are my student. Not for the trumpet, like you told him, but cello with me. And our school will give you a grant, meaning you are a grant recipient of the school.” And now I was happy, I went home, I could hardly wait for September to start school. I went to school, September came, I went there. He called me into the office again and gave me a letter and said, “Go to the boarding office, ask for this person,” his name was Kadri, “He’ll find you a place, that’s where you’ll eat, sleep, your boarding.”

Very well, I went to the boarding office, they found me a place, that was all good, but then other problems began. They started to create problems for me with a very, very undesirable position, a very bad one. Before I was used to having all Fives, and here in musical subjects I still had all Fives, but I was very weak in the general subjects because I didn’t understand the language at all. None of the teachers were Albanian, except for Gani Luboteni who taught us the Albanian language, the others were all Serbs. I mean, I didn’t understand anything that was said in history, methodology, those general subjects.

And now I started to really find myself in a bad position. I was used to always having Fives, and now from Fives I went to Twos, to Threes. The middle of the year came, I went to the principal and said, “Comrade,” then, “Comrade principal, I won’t be here for the second semester.” “No, why? No, no! Do you know how far you’ve come with the cello? You’ve almost finished the second grade.” Because he would give me an exercise, I would do three or four, I was very good at them. “No,” he said, “don’t worry, slowly everything will fall in place. “I said, “I can’t stand it, I’ve never had a grade Two in my life.” And I really didn’t go anymore.

And now it comes, the next fall comes, the next September. The municipality was right there, I went to the head of the municipality, he was named Din Hoti. I said, “I’ve written a request, I submitted it here, for a grant again because I learned a little Serbian in six months, I’ll go to music school again.” “No grant, but you’re going to go as a teacher!” “What kind of teacher am I? I’m a child.” “A teacher,” he said. “It’s a Central Committee’s order, everyone who knows how to read and write, a teacher, to eradicate illiteracy. In Damian we’re in great need, you’re going to be a teacher this year in Damian. Next year you’ll get the municipality’s grant.” I wanted a grant, he wanted a teacher, and they really sent me to teach in Damian.

And now imagine, I was a child, a child to teach children, and without any experience, none. But regardless, the school principal at the time was a man named Demrush Malaj. He researched all the teachers, the five or six of us who became teachers at the time. “You,” he said, “with this behavior of yours, with this attitude you will teach the first grade.” I said, “Comrade principal, I’ve heard from others that the first grade requires a teacher with experience, not a beginner like me who has never seen a day planner before. I saw from other teachers, but...” He said, “You’ll take the first grade.” And in fact I somehow managed to be a very good teacher, I had an excellent time with them, so much so that regardless of how much time has passed, I would remember those children.

It was a great pleasure to work with children, a great pleasure. And that’s how the years passed, year after year. I went again and registered for the second year at the beginning. Of course, the whole time I was in

Damian I practiced Serbian. I found a few dictionaries, I found a few people who knew Serbian well and I tried talking to them on purpose, talking to them in the Serbian language in order to learn the language as much as possible. And then I went to the music school again, but of course now I was a bit more prepared.

But then they started a bit, teachers also started to come. Rexho came, Rexho Mulliqi¹¹ even though he didn't know Albanian, he understood it. Later on, later we were overjoyed, we were in the third grade, in the third year three Albanian professors came. Not only me, but all of us who were Albanian were happy because it's different when it's your language it's a little bit different, and we understood things. And Engjëll Berisha,¹² Kris Leka and Sevime Xhenali.

In the second year of cello as I said earlier I was excellent, but a friend whom I call a classmate, he wasn't my friend, a classmate, practiced the flute with a professor. He was a Serb, his name was Barošić. And now I was in the schoolyard, he was in the lobby before the professor came in, practicing the flute. And I heard that sound, and it sounded a lot like the *kaval*. And to be honest, I wasn't that confused, I went down and said, "Excuse me, can you give that instrument to me a bit to try it, the flute?" "But of course, take it." he said. And I saw how you place it near your mouth, where the sound comes from. I took it and investigated {mimics positioning the flute} the sound, I took it out right away, the sound was very good. I lined up my fingers and I played a very old pastoral melody for the *kaval*. I thought it was good, the professor heard me. He was inside and came out in glasses, in Serbian, "Who played the flute?" The flute was in my hand, I had to tell him but, telling him meant being expelled from school because we couldn't play what wasn't in the notes, not in the scores, we couldn't, we were prohibited. "You played the flute?" "Yes." "Come with me!" "Hah," I said, "Trouble!" (smiles).

And now we went up the stairs, to the principal, Lorenc. He said to him in Serbian, now I understood what he said, "He absolutely has to transfer to the flute. I heard him playing an unusually beautiful dance tune on the flute, his [tempo] is organized, he has to transfer to the flute." Lorenc said to him, "He's excellent with me, on the cello. Why should he transfer?" "Yes," he said, "he was excellent on the flute," and he turned to me, "Go over there and get the flute." I went down, I took it. "Come into the office." Lorenc said, "Come, play what you were playing down there," and I started playing. Lorenc watches {raises tone of voice}, "But why didn't you tell me? Why didn't you tell me that you have a flute at home? Whom did you practice with?" "No," I said, "I saw it here for the first time, but it's very similar to the *kaval*." I said, "I've been playing the *kaval* since I was a child. When I was very young I played, and that's why I said...and after he heard it himself, he said, "You know what? I feel sorry that you have to go, you're one of the best students I have," that was the case for individual instruments. He said, "but you absolutely have to transfer to the flute." And then I transferred to the flute.

But I mean for those two years, during the third and fourth year, I managed to finish the Platonov - a very comprehensive course of study, it's quite broad, I finished it for the flute. But in the meantime, around the second year, I had just transferred to the flute, when Lorenc met Anton Pashku. And he said, "Go to this place because that boy is an excellent woodwind instrumentalist." He went, he found a weekend like these

¹¹ Rexho Mulliqi (1923-1982) was an important Albanian composer from Kosovo, responsible for Kosovo's earliest classical orchestral and choral pieces. He was also an educator and a longstanding producer of Radio Pristina's music programming.

¹² Engjëll Berisha (1934-) is an Albanian academic from Kosovo, an educator and professor at the University of Pristina, specializing in musical history. He was a member of the Kosovo's Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Saturdays and he came to me to my home in Rugova. We received him according to our custom, and he said, "I've heard this..." he told me directly and he said, "Lorenc sent me here, you have a good mastery of the instruments." I said, "Yes, whatever is traditional, I've grown up with them. But I've also mastered the flute very well." "Please first play the traditional *kaval*."

I played the *kaval* and the flute and these things, I had the flute with me. And when he heard the flute, he wrote an excellent article in *Rilindja*, I think it was the year 1957, but unfortunately I don't have it. I had saved everything, but this last war took many things from me. They're gone! Now maybe they can be found in the archive, but since I don't know the date, I don't know the month, I know the year, it's been bugging me, it was written very beautifully. At that time I was still a student, in '57 Lorenc went to Radio Pristina, as a producer, as a producer.

And one Saturday he came to me in Rugova by car, I saw a car for the first time like that in the yard. "Come," he said, "take the *kaval*, come get into the car." "What happened?" "Eh, straight to Pristina." And he brought me to the studio in Pristina, where I recorded some original dance tunes on the *kaval*, those dance tunes until the war, meaning up until very recently were Radio Pristina jingles. They always opened the morning with those dance tunes, very good.

I was lucky there that day, when we went to the studio, in the studio where the recordings were done, a man named Ymer Riza was in the recording room with his group. And they finished, they left, and now they listened to the songs, I was constantly looking at his *sharkia*.¹³ I noticed it, I counted the strings and I left, I took a position where the strings were shining, and I counted the strings, there were eight. Then, to be convinced, I started counting the tuning pegs from both sides, where the strings are tightened, and counted eight again. Ok, ok, ok, later on with Qamili i Vogel, we worked together, we worked together like this. I said, "Qamil, do you remember when we were in the studio?" "Yes." "When you left the studio, did Ymer Riza leave the *sharkia*?" "Yes." I said, "I counted eight strings not twelve strings. It's not 'My *sharkia* with twelve strings!'" "Eh," he said, "twelve thousand people weren't exactly killed in Diber." I mean, these were our jokes (smiles). This was interesting.

Ymer Riza, honestly, when he heard me playing the *kavall*, and I was very young, he was just pleasantly surprised and hugged me. "Hey boy, I've never seen a person this young play the *kavall* so well. Where did you learn?" Then I told him, I said this, this, "I learned from my father," but our mentality, of that time, I mean, didn't let a father and son go to the *oda* together, because the other would immediately start teasing him.

Then I played with a relative, without mentioning that, he was called Din, Din Hot...Din Godeni. He was also an excellent master...like a self-taught orthopedist. I played with him at weddings, at parties, everywhere. But, it was very interesting, especially on Mondays, not all of them, some of them, he went to Gjakova. The master who made *kavals* at the time, he always went on a bridge, a bridge that connected the squares - the big square with the small square, he was there on the bridge. And now we went to him, we took two *kavals*, that uncle Din, almost an old man, I was very young almost...a child. And then we both took them. So many people gathered on that bridge, we blocked the bridge. It was a problem to cross the bridge. It was very interesting (smiles). We played with uncle Din in *odas*, but not with dad. I

¹³ Albanian: *Çallgi*, *Sharki*, is a plucked, fretted long necked chordophone used in the folk music of various Balkan countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Albania, Kosovo and Serbia.

played with my father mostly in secret at home, but not in the *oda*. As I said that was the mentality of the time.

I'll start again from the beginning, there, in the village I remember we were a very small family, seven people. My oldest sister got married and we were left with six people. So we were a very small family. There were much bigger families in the villages at that time. But at a certain point while growing up, the oldest got married, the second oldest, the third oldest, and at some point even me the youngest one, we became a big family. Then I moved to Pristina, as we know a child is holy to the family. And the children came as well...I have four boys and one girl, all of them are married. Grandsons, granddaughters, lots of them...counting my daughter's as well, I have 16 grandsons and granddaughters. Yes, lots and lots, each one of them has their own job, they work. I have one who is in the Diaspora, in Norway, they visit, I was also there for a short time. Even though I had three months, that's how long the Norwegians gave me the visa, I could only stay two months. I had obligations at the theater, I had to return. So I have four boys and one girl.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: And your wife?

Shaqir Hoti: Aah my wife passed away, she passed away young. It's interesting, she was a mountain woman as they say, from the mountain, and healthy, with no problems at all. She got sick all of a sudden with acute cancer, leukemia and even though we intervened a lot, but however, the disease did not spare her. They say that some, some [survive it] but she left early, she died and left. So I was left only with the daughters in law, with sons and with grandsons.

Professional Life

[Cut from the video interview: the interviewer asks the speaker about his professional life.]

Shaqir Hoti: In the 60's it was like something had changed...earlier during our youth, we were a bit more ahead, but not that much more ahead. We finished high school and now, to be honest, I had a moral obligation to return to my village, to offer some sort of contribution there. Not because I got the grant, but because I wanted to work for a while there, especially to try to enliven it culturally and work with children because, to be honest with you, the first grade of the village where I was, in Damian, that always remained in my memory. And now I started working.

So I returned to my village in Rugova, of course there my profession was music, musical subjects. I took the subject of music, but because not a lot of time was reserved to musical education, I was teaching fewer classes. To fill in my time, I was teaching a skill-based subject or handiwork or something else like this. However, because of the lack of teachers there was always a class without a teacher, and I always preferred the second graders. Because at that time there was no longer the system of hiring one teacher for first to the fourth grades. But, to put it simply, as they say, it was a matter of chance (smiles): the class you got was the class you taught.

I always got the second grade. I studied the program well, and I worked to be successful with those children, and it really went well. With music only, as far as music class was concerned, I was very, very easy with those children because we didn't have any instruments. I mean, an instrument that could be

tuned, for example, if I were to have a piano, a pianino, something...but there was simply nothing, apart from my professional flute. However, a flute like a flute has a sound, it's heard. But when two senses interact, meaning you hear the note and you see it as you hit the key, it's a bit easier to grasp. So with music I wasn't very happy, even though I'd managed to read notes very well. Meaning I was very good in *solfeggio*.

Then the school gradually started getting equipment, to buy the instruments slowly. I remember the first instrument well, it was a mandolin, there was a special excitement for that instrument. Gradually one more, and one more, then there were three or four mandolins, later on a violin, *prim*, *bas prim*.¹⁴ Later on there was an accordion, it was the best when the accordion came because now I was much more able to develop the course. But with the kind of instruments I had there, I checked out the teachers a bit, a bit someone else, and we created a small group like this.

Back then there were performances, public appearances. I'd get the students ready, sometimes with individual songs, sometimes choral, for small choirs, not big ones. And to be honest, cultural life was positively enlivened there. We'd often hold performances in the village, but also around the village. So, the instruments that were brought to me in the school, without ever having played them, I only needed a short amount of time to practice the sounds and I very quickly mastered each of those mandolins, *prim*, *bas prim*, the violin. Of course the violin, I played it very beautifully, but I'm not a violinist. Because a violinist needs...there are certain positions, of course I only played the first position there, for the purpose of supporting our [albanian tune] melodic line.

So, life started now, to be honest, just the most important part in all my life. So, it was a youthful life and of all the times of my life, it was the best. Because I organized, we organized different parties, different excursions to cities, to villages, and elsewhere. We were, in short, very free, very...That time of my life in the village lasted seven years. It will always be one of the happiest times of my life. We were really very good friends and we organized these parties, these concerts. That was our life in the village.

Yes, but later on around '63 or '64...no it was '61, Lorenc Antoni came with...I think it was the ethnographer or ethnomusicologist Nikola Hercigonja from Zagreb. He was a researcher, he came to me in Rugova, to the village. I mean, it was the first year I was teaching. And he said, "Take the instruments you have and you'll play a bit and Nikola Hercigonja will listen." "Good." I took them and played all of them. He was simply amazed by these instruments, with that request and he addressed Lorenc right away and said, "So, here you have something a bit more valuable than gold. He simply needs to be used and worked, to get the best out of him. This talent absolutely needs to be used." Then it was his responsibility, he put it upon himself to also research singers in Gjakova and Peja...and he asked me to accompany him the entire time. "And you must take an instrument with you." "Why, which?" "Only the *kaval* interests me!" And then I took it [the *kaval*], we went and would stay with different singers, Mazllum Mizini and all the Gjakovars and in Peja. And we returned, we slept at the Hotel Pashtrik in Gjakova.

¹⁴*Prim* is an instrument similar to *çiftelia*, which is a two-string traditional Albanian instrument with a long neck. *Prim* is also developed to be tuned for bass sounds, as such it is called *bas prim*.

And now there, in the bedroom, “Come,” he said, “take the *kaval* for a little bit and play some melodies.” He simply said, “I hear a very noble sound here. But I hear a sound that’s behind, behind there is the real soul of the instrument. Because of this, please take it with you.” So, I really left a good impression there.

And so later on, Lorenc came to Rugova several times and said, “You absolutely have to go to Pristina because we don’t have a flutist in the traditional orchestra.” [He came] once, twice or three times. I said, “I think I hear the flute in your orchestra.” He said, “Yes, it’s the flute, but that flute only knows the scores.” He told me, he said, “The flutist is not of our nationality, there’s no soul. The instrument is there, but the instrument has no soul. Since you know traditional songs, original songs, you absolutely must move to Pristina.” But I was in the midst of a big dilemma: to go to Pristina, to leave, to leave my birthplace, to leave the children I’d become very close to, seven years aren’t few. I had a big dilemma.

Later on, Esat Muçolli, who directed the orchestra at the time, visited quite often. He was also a former classmate, we had always been good friends and he said, “You absolutely must come. We absolutely need you to give color to the orchestra, we’re missing you.” “It’s done, we have a composer,” that’s how he said it. “You come for two to three years. If you don’t like it, go back.” And to be honest, “Good,” is what I said. I agreed, I gave my word. “In September we start working,” because they also had the summer, the whole summer, August off, “In September we start working, we have to start together.” “Good.”

I came to Pristina, the formalities of the recruitment were complete, the hiring. I was accepted and it was a permanent decision, it was called a permanent decision at the time, we had a year-long contracts, but they were permanent. And now we began to work with the orchestra. My mind was always with the children and my friends and so on. However, the time gradually passed and I kind of adapted to the environment here, I made good friends here as well, from the school but also new ones I made here.

I gradually acclimatized, or how do they say...there’s a folktale about this, it really plays a role - a villager with a horse and wood go to Prizren, to sell...there was a baker, bakers bought the wood. And when the horse sees the fountain flowing, runs to it to drink water, the villager doesn’t let it. There were usually silversmiths around, and they begged him, “Let the horse drink water.” “No,” he said, “because if he drinks this water, he won’t come back with me to the village” (laughs). And I came here to Pristina, I stayed as long as I stayed, I adapted, I came for one year, two, maximum three, but I stayed the whole time because I really found a place in the orchestra...a really suitable job.

I had significantly fewer obligations compared to what I did in the village, because in the village my obligations were more like a school teacher’s. I was always the deputy principal. While I lived in Rugova, I was the deputy principal for seven years. There, we had so many required school activities, only we know, we had to work on them at night as well. We were busy and obliged to work with the Youth League, with the Party League, with the Socialist League. There, we never had a break, except those nights when we organized parties.

Whereas here, I found something completely...a job that doesn’t compare to that. I only had obligations to my instrument. There wasn’t a Youth League, or a Socialist one, nothing. To be honest, I started working here in the orchestra as a flutist, I settled well from the beginning. Unfortunately, I complain a lot that there wasn’t a good instrument at the time. You found here a very dilapidated orchestra. I played, but I played with difficulty. A good instrument doesn’t need to have its keys well tightened, they’re lightly touched, but I was obliged to push them and to draw out a sound (laughs). So I always feel bad when I

hear the *Baresha* [song that we recorded. I had a very worn out flute, and it was difficult to draw out sound. Even today when I hear Nexhmije¹⁵ singing *Baresha*¹⁶ [The Shepherdess] I'm bothered by the flute, because I didn't have a better flute at the time!

I mean, the first year was excellent, the *Akordet* [Chord of Kosovo] festivals started, I participated in them also as a...I was busier in the orchestra, but I also participated in compositions. I competed in them with Adem Ejupi, with Shahindere Bërlajolli, an ensemble that I created here called Azem Bejta. With that ensemble I even won first place in 1972 with the lyrics of...the lyrics of our well know poet Rexhep Hoxha, *Ah Hyrije* [Oh Hyrije], it was a very beautiful text. And the members of the ensemble sang it, the interpretation was really excellent, I won first place. So, I only won the Golden Ocarina in 1972.

I was talking about Nexhmije and *Baresha*, I'll come back to this. In 1969 it so happened, we won first prize for all [Yugoslavia]...it was called a Federation then. And now we represented Yugoslavia in an international festival in West Berlin. And I got on a plane for the first time, the plane landed in East Berlin, there they took us to the wall, the famous wall that divided Berlin, with three wagon-like taxis. A German driver, he told us, we didn't know the language but we understood, he said, "Around boom, boom, mines. There are mines all around," and we saw the very high barbed wire. And as we approached the border, we got out, we took our instruments. We walked past the wall, the Berlin Wall, it was a kind of labyrinth...you could not walk straight but it was a zigzag, to get to West Berlin. That zigzagging corridor wasn't even very wide, it fit a person with two bags, more...And when we came out there, there was a big difference between the buildings, the parks, so much that it can't be described. It was simply paradise there. Over there [East Berlin] you could see dark houses, you could see the poverty, everything - darkness and light over there, I don't know how to describe the huge difference (smiles).

Anyway, we went there, after a two-day break, to the general rehearsal. When we went to the general rehearsal we left the rehearsal really disappointed because the orchestras of the other countries were very big orchestras, symphonic orchestras, choirs with 50 to 60 people, meaning a complete orchestra, violas and all. We only had six members in the orchestra, only six people, Nexhmije was the seventh. I mean we filled the stage with seven people, whereas they had over a hundred. And we were disappointed, what could we do, what should we do now, how can we compete. It wasn't really comprehensible, but the time came.

A presenter, a beauty whom we had never seen anywhere else...she came to us time after time because she made mistakes with Nexhmije's name. She said {imitates the presenter} "Nexh...Nexhm...Nexhmije, Nexhmije Pagarusha!" "No, not Nemxhije, but Nexhmije," [we said] a few times until we taught her. We finally taught her, "Nexhmije." When she went on stage she got it wrong again, she announced her, "Nemxhije." Anyway, finally we were up, the first song was *Bijnë tup*...[The Drums Beat]. Nexhmije sang three songs in the festival, I accompanied the first song, *Bijnë tupanat n'katër anët* [The Drums Beat on All Four Sides] with a *çiftelia*.¹⁷ There was great interest in the *çiftelia*. The second song was, *Sytë për ty i kam të njomë* [Because of You My Eyes Are Wet]. Both songs were composed by Isak Muçolli. I accompanied again *Sytë për ty i kam të njomë* with the *çiftelia*, there we were well received by the audience, we had

¹⁵ Nexhmije Pagarusha (1933-) is one of Kosovo's first classically trained singers. Her repertoire covers classical Albanian music and folk songs. She is known as the "Nightingale of Kosovo."

¹⁶ *Baresha* or The Shepherdess is one of Pagarusha's most celebrated songs. It describes the life of a mountain shepherdess. The song was composed by her husband, Rexho Mulliqi. The lyrics were written by author Rifat Kukaj.

¹⁷ Two-string traditional Albanian instrument with a long neck.

something. But regardless, when we compared ourselves to those big orchestras...And the last one was *Baresha*.

With *Baresha* we just heard applause, we never heard a clapping that lasted that long in our lives, it became frenetic. But, we got off the stage, Nexhmije had to go out and take a bow and we went to the hotel. We didn't know what happened. We knew we were successful, but not that much, no one officially told us anything. The Yugoslav Consulate in Germany came the next day. They came to congratulate us, to congratulate us, eh now...I mean, we won first prize there, we had great success.

We went there by plane, we returned by train, to be honest we came back more *serbez*,¹⁸ a bit proud. [I imagined] we'll go to Pristina, they'll ask us about our success, the newspapers will write about it. There was the *Rilindja* newspaper back then, another newspaper...We came back, a week passed, then two weeks, then a month and ten months and now it's been almost 50 years, it was '69 and no one wrote a single word about that event. And this is our worst fault. Our achievement should have been more openly recognized. It was really more our success than a success that belonged to Yugoslavia because we went in national costume, Nexhmije was also in national costume, and all the songs were Albanian. I mean, that was a very bad thing that happened, luckily Nexhmije had the German newspaper, where it's written, I think it's two pages or three pages, the fourth I forgot and she looks beautiful in the photo. These were those moments.

Now, we fulfilled our obligation, apart from our obligations at the Radio's studio, we were only obligated to folk songs. The older singers had been accepted to the radio, I mean back then there was a criterion. Whereas the new singers, they had to go to auditions. Auditions were organized once a week, new singers would come, they'd sing. The committee would get together and would evaluate them, well, they'd listen to the predispositions of that singer, what kind of intonation, what kind of diction, what kind of color the vocals have, what is their breathing like, these are all the elements that a singer has. So here there were evaluations, and only if a singer fulfilled all the conditions then that singer would come occasionally and record.

Apart from our obligations to record two songs twice a week, meaning four songs, we were also obliged to perform in concerts in Kosovo and outside of Kosovo and in other republics, but also in other countries. We had an especially great time in Western countries, and usually in those countries there were more Albanians because they started after the 70's, the Albanians began going there to work. Then in those places...twice a year, once a year, usually during the holidays in November and May.

Of course, we also traveled through, and outside Europe. We also went to the U.S. twice, all of us. So there was all of that, those concerts, those simply, those [political] parades I will call them, they were all organized. We missed a little bit, not a lot, but we missed our freedom. We went as an orchestra, as singers, but we always had a written repertoire, stamped with three stamps and we couldn't deviate from those songs. And if there were requests, because people were hungry for their homeland, there were some and many who had run away from here [Kosovo], they asked for a bigger program, for more songs. But, instead of singing another song we would repeat a line, or two or more because more was not allowed.

¹⁸ Turkish term for relaxed.

And another thing we felt was lacking, was that all the songs were “*lale-lule*”¹⁹ songs as we say. Or all of the songs were more like love songs, and not poetic songs because they had a national character, heroic songs ...no, no love songs. Sometimes, sometimes they’d let us have a song about some brave act against the Turks. That was allowed, whereas these others weren’t allowed. That was our biggest deficiency, it was this...we would go, but not willingly. This was the professional work that we started at the radio.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: When did you start going to Albania? What was your relationship with Albania?

Shaqir Hoti: Yes, yes.

Kaltrina Krasniqi: When did you start working together?

Shaqir Hoti: Well, as part of our job, we started and we worked until the violent measures began. We had there, in ‘71 it happened accidentally during a wedding, an Albanian person organized it, and invited us to Belgrade. There was a wedding, his daughter was getting married, the wedding was held at the Belgrade Hotel. And we went, we performed the entire night, it was a beautiful party. The next day, I mean we were all sleep-deprived, we were like, let’s have a bit of breakfast and go back to Pristina. And behind me I heard about three people speaking Albanian so beautifully, so fluently, it had been a long time since I heard something that beautiful. And I told my friends, “Oh brother, they’re talking in Albanian, I’ll say good morning to them.” “No, no because we don’t know...” “Whoever they are, I can’t stand it.” And I turned around and said “Men, good morning!” “Oh, good morning! Come, let’s sit together, let’s stay!” But now, we didn’t know who these men were. They came, they sat there, the first person introduced himself and said, “I’m the Ambassador...the Secretary of the Albanian Embassy, Hajrullah Kuploja,” and he gave me his name, uh yes. And the other and the other one were working at the Embassy.

It was...there was a very good festival in Albania called *Dekada e Majit* [The Decade of May]. It was close because we were always eager to visit Albania. And we said to the Secretary, “The festival is approaching, we would really like...is there a way for us to join the festival?” “But of course, it’s very, very possible. So one of you take your passports, not all of you, just one, I’ll give you a visa, now you’ll go.” And we sent a friend of ours to Belgrade...Zef Tupeci. Now the poor man is dead. He went and got the visas, he came back. He came back, he gave them to us, without us asking anyone. And now what do we do? We have the visas, but we don’t have permission. And we went to the general director Kemal Deva, we went to the office, when he saw us even he was surprised, “Ha, what happened? Why is the whole orchestra here?” And we told him this, and this, “We started this almost accidentally, but it really happened. We have the visas, we don’t have permission, what do we do?” First we went to the radio to get leave from work. “You,” he said, “absolutely have to go! You have permission from the radio station, I’ll try to get permission everywhere it’s required, I’ll take care of it, you have to go.”

And they really did let us, we went there, but we only got permission to stay a week at the festival, it lasted two weeks. When the week ended, we got our bags ready to return, a festival organizer named Lirije Çeli called us. “Where are you going?” “We’re going because this is all the time for which we have permission.” At that moment our general director called. “You have permission to stay for the other week as well. Until the festival is over you don’t move.”

¹⁹ Albanian expression for kitsch.

It was a reception that was, it was indescribable, a very, very warm reception for that time. But understandably the times were like that, we couldn't go anywhere without a minder. And that was, we noticed this, we saw the good and the bad. It seemed good because at that time, there wasn't a single person without work, but it started looking bad when we went to stores. You could see, there were no goods, there weren't...and then the people were dressed very poorly. And, even the tan on their faces was paler than ours. And then when we came back and people asked us, the ones close to us, and we told them honestly, we had a kind of dilemma whether to tell them honestly what we saw, that there was good and bad. They would have called us spies a little bit (laughs). So we were in a bad situation. Memories of life sometimes come out (laughs).

Kaltrina Krasniqi: You worked at the radio until when?

Shaqir Hoti: I started working at the radio when I came. I came, as I said in 1967 until the violent measures began, meaning until '89, understandably that moment, the entire world also saw how they invaded. From that day on we left the radio and nobody asked about it. Later, after the war, Radio Kosovo was created, but many of us did not join this Radio. Almost all of us actually did not join. And everybody took care of themselves as best they could, some are...some simply remained at home.

Our activities, you know, they were always connected to our work, I mean, not to our other activities with the orchestra. But from '72 on, it seemed like we were a bit freer. It seemed like something changed in the repertoire of the songs, we were in a better position. Even though we went abroad to those organized concerts, with those real tours, we were a bit better. But, in 1981, that's when everything began happening, such as censorship, but it was more than censorship. A song couldn't be recorded because of one single word. Especially in the 80's, like from '81 onwards censorship began, a song could be refused because of a single word. It became harder and harder as a radio orchestra to secure basic work conditions. And, to be honest, this was the norm of work that we had, because it would either be refused for a single word, or, if it was approved by chance, it could only be written on paper, but the second time it wouldn't...it wouldn't get through. And we had a sort of metal cabinet, and the songs were put in that cabinet that was called "Embargo."

It happened to me, when I wrote a song and it was performed only once in its entirety, *Malësore*,²⁰ which was sung by Adem Ejupi. "Oh my mountain girl, oh Albanian, shining like a fiery star from the mountain," these were the first words. And now it was taken to the "Embargo" cabinet and in general I was asked, "Whom are you singing to? What does that mountain girl mean, a brave Albanian from...? You wanted to hide something!" "Oh no *bre*,²¹ that text isn't mine at all. I only did the melody," but only because of that I had a big problem. Meaning, the worst was always assumed. Every day, every demonstration, it got worse not only here for us, but the situation everywhere. Things continued to get worse and worse until the violent measures began, the violent measures.

²⁰ Literally, a mountain girl, but it can also be used to refer to girls from *Malësia*. *Malësi e Madhe*, (literally Great Highlands) is a region largely inhabited by Albanian speaking people, which lies to the East of Podgorica in modern day Montenegro, along the Lake of Shkodra in modern day Albania, next to Kosovo.

²¹ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

Our orchestra was on holiday, annual holiday. Many times, almost every year, we had an annual holiday of two months. One month leave was given to us because we always had long shifts, whereas we earned another month with the additional work we did, with festivals, with concerts, with those things. That's why I said we weren't paid well, but we got holidays. And we were on holiday when the violent measures were introduced, after the entire world saw that violence, that...And from then until now, all of us and the orchestra, and the others, however, they were able to take care of themselves, some of them went abroad, some remained at home, some... To be honest, I was engaged in other activities that I always kept close to my heart. I never stopped regardless of all the other obligations that I had. Even in education, even here, here in the radio, I never deviated from traditional instruments.

I earlier worked a little bit on every traditional instrument that fell into my hands, maybe I intervened in regards to its tuning, a note I didn't exactly like, I either had to put it down or work on it in order to get the sound that I needed. I worked like this, I worked alone on some simple things, some pipes, made some repairs that [the instrument] needed in that moment, and I dealt with this stuff...But I always intended to study these instruments a bit when I retired. But I always intended to advance this instrument, to preserve it in three ways: to interpret it in the best way possible, so that it can be accessible to every ear; to work alone and through my work to research which wood is best, which metal, what kind of plastic, I mean there are much more possibilities for these developments; and third, the third is I wanted to write about each instrument individually.

I wrote about each and every instrument, especially traditional instruments, the possibilities of working with it, I mean the technology of working with it... the skill of playing it is, very honestly, here one needs to be careful, especially when playing, because instruments have their own sound. I'll take the flute as an example that has different names: flute, whistle, nightingale and others, there's the *fancik*,²² it has many different names in different parts. It has its own sound, and everyone can play it, you put it to your mouth and blow. While our instrument really must be much older, even though its origin is lost somewhere in the darkness of antiquity, we can't know, but it is believed according to all musicologists, it is believed that it's very old, *fyelli i shokës*.²³ It doesn't have a voice that needs to be formed through the musician's lips. So, one needs to be careful there, to read it well. How can it be read, I believe anyone who takes it in his hands, very quickly develops *embouchure* with it. *Fyelli i shokës* is also unique because you can also hear breath in its sound. The breath really helps one understand the instrument, that instrument is very noble. Behind this instrument you really see a person, a human, so it's the only instrument [that can achieve that.]

And, first of all I started interpreting every genre. I never ignored any of them or said, "No, I don't want to go here," but I explored every genre, just so that the traditional instrument would be heard. When it started later on, meaning after the war, when rap also started, rock was introduced widely as well, it was like I wanted to avoid that genre and I was with my professor who I was really very close with, we were with Engjëll Berisha. And I said, "It's best not to explore this genre, what do you think?" "No, on the contrary, I order you as your professor, and as the friend of yours I've become. You have to go everywhere. Let that sound be heard by someone's ear, at some point maybe someone who hears it will like it, because that instrument becomes closer to them." And in this way I didn't ignore any genre of songs. I always played for films, meaning the film *Kukumë* [...] *Rojet e Mjegullës* [...] and others. In the theater, in the

²² Another Albanian local name for the flute.

²³ *Shokë* is a traditional Albanian male belt, made of woolen material, knitted using a loom. *Fyelli i shokës*, refers to a smaller flute that could comfortably fit in the belt. Something like a pocket flute.

theater, I also participated in serious music, meaning I performed very well in every genre and was well liked. To this day, there have been no complaints about this, and I am personally satisfied.

Then I started working with each instrument by myself. During my work I also researched, as I said earlier, the timber, the development of that instrument as well, because many of them, for example the *bishnica*,²⁴ or the *gajde*,²⁵ which are well known around the entire world, today the *bishnica* has many names. Every region gives it its own name, *bishnicë*, *mishnicë*, *meshnicë*, *tërçuk*, there are *kacek* and others. I mean the *gajde* is well known throughout the world. It's very well liked; it has a very nasal sound, but a very pleasant one. However, its musical scale is very limited because it only has five notes...six notes. Five openings release six notes. Whatever number of openings a musical instrument has, it always has an additional sound.

And after the war, I worked with the ensemble that I had. I formed "Azem Bejta" when I came to Pristina. At that time I put out a lot of records with them, gramophone records. I did many recordings in Radio Pristina that the music library of Radio Kosovo now houses, they have them, they have them in its music library. I took them now, I re-activated them and after the war we performed occasionally, we rehearsed, we practiced. We released an album, the other one is ready. Maybe we could also record that somewhere, [the money doesn't fall from the sky] the sky is mean {rubs fingers} (smiles). It still needs...the studio time needs to be paid for, but we'll find a donor. I'm also close to finishing a second album with the ensemble. Even though they're old, they've returned to the music beautifully, because as we know everything goes with...youth has a different kind of élan, a different force...they're different. But in rehearsals we gave it to the maximum, at least to give...to say "Good, good," somehow you want to do justice to the song, good, they're good, they've practiced some songs.

Ocarina

[An excerpt cut from the video-interview: the speaker talks specifically about the ocarina.]

Shaqir Hoti: What's always been for me truly and very, very enigmatic for me for a very long time has been - the original Illyrian ocarina. It was found around the beginning of the 70's, I think around '67 or '68 in the village of Orenik, it's close to Skenderaj. Our archeologists found it and just by hearing of it, I wanted to have it in my hand. What kind of instrument is it? A musical instrument was found, I didn't know what kind of instrument. When that instrument was found I was very curious, an Illyrian musical instrument, I mean, I created a belief that that instrument, we should be proud of it because it's...we know its roots, we know the place where it was found.

Initially I tried getting my hands on it, but at first they told me it was being cleaned and it happened to us... [incomprehensible]. And I really looked for it, I went to the museum, I looked for the instrument. The director at the time, he said to me, "Yes you can take the instrument only with an official request, only [with permission] from the institute, otherwise it's now hermetically sealed in silicon and it cannot be opened for an individual request, but a request..." I begged the ethnomusicologists, "Can you open it for me?" "Yes, we'll open it..."

²⁴ A traditional woodwind instrument.

²⁵ A traditional bagpipe, found throughout the Balkans and Southeastern Europe.

So, the curiosity was always there, the more time passed, the more my curiosity grew, and especially from the year 1972 to the present when I got the first prize “Okarina e Artë” [Golden Ocarina]. And, we were never able to organize an official request, to take that instrument and research it, what sounds it makes, what does it have. And, the war came as war does. We know that war never brings anything good, but only bad. So I had many instruments available to me, not that I worked on them myself, but they came from everywhere, and I myself have...have travelled around the world, I’ve bought one, two, three. But when we came back, I didn’t find anything here, I tell you I didn’t even find the scores of my songs that I did before [the war], I didn’t find them. I had to...listen to them again and transcribe my songs.

And, this is why after the war I was more convinced than ever that our people would unseal the instrument and I would research it a bit. I came and the instrument wasn’t there, along with other objects, it was taken somewhere, its fate is unknown. It’s possible it fell into bad hands. It wasn’t in the museum in Belgrade. I verified that, it’s not in Belgrade. And, my curiosity has never let me be. What would it do? How will I hear that sound? What kind of instrument is it?

I got a lot of help from Edi Shukriu²⁶ and the ethnomusicologist Rexhep Munishi, because both of them had held it in their hands. And I begged Edi, I said, “You gave me the dimensions, I know the dimensions from the book, but I beg of you, is the form completely cylindrical, completely round or does it happen to be pressed down anywhere?” Because, instruments like this were found before but they were a little bit compressed. And their shapes were also a little, especially in the east, they had a different shape, they were a bit pressed down and had four openings. While the Latin American [ocarina] had animal shapes, bird shapes, shapes...but our Illyrian ocarina has a very unique shape in the entire world. At the top it is almost entirely cylindrical but then it goes down {gestures with hands}, almost from zero, it expands to six...that Si as we call it, up to six centimeters, and goes to zero again {improvises the upper part of the instrument with hands}. It has a very unique shape in the entire world. It has two openings total to play and it has a slightly larger opening in the middle right, in the middle where the sound from the lips is made, because we put our lips there and bring out the sound.

At first, I made one [okarina] out of wood, with the exact measurements described to me by Edi, and as described to me by Rexhep Munishi, I worked on it. Wood, as it is the case with wood, the sound that emerged [from it] was excellent, a good sound, but wood as wood, I thought to myself, is a different material. I started making it out of clay, at first this was great fun because never in my life had I seen how one works with clay (smiles). And, I couldn’t even get close to shaping it, I could never give a form to that instrument until I got in touch with these sculptors and asked them, “How is it made? How...?” And they guided me. And gradually I got the hang of it and started working with clay, and I was right that the sound was different, wood as wood is a different material. Clay is much more compact and brings out a different sound.

Now it’s very interesting, at first I took it, put it to my lips and found the [instrument’s] voice, a voice really emerged from it like...those of us in music called it a rounded voice, a full voice. I created an opening, I opened another one, now the intervals. The interval of the fourth and the minor sixth, when brought

²⁶ Edi Shukriu (1950 -) is a renowned Kosovo archeologist, teaches Archeology and Ancient History at the University of Pristina. She has served in the Kosovar Parliament, as a diplomat in the Foreign Ministry, and as a member of the presidency of the Democratic League of Kosova (LDK).

together at the same time they make a what we call [*kuart*] *sektakord*.²⁷ Or simply in solfège: Mi, La, Do, as we say.

And now I thought to myself, what use did this have, was it an instrument for a ritual, or was it a toy for children, or...? However, when you look at it, if you look at it a bit longer, it starts looking a bit like a human head, like the head of a goddess with a chin, it looks a bit like a UFO. And gradually researching day after day, I saw that it doesn't have only three notes, it has six excellent notes. And they give a natural minor and a harmonic minor, excellent. Of course one needs to have *embouchure*, it needs to be held a bit longer, practiced a bit more, in order to have clean notes emerge. So, there was a time, five thousand years ago, when this instrument was created and excellent melodies emerged from two openings, this instrument must be taken and studied because it's... They [similar instruments] were found all over the world, as I said, but they have their own specific sound. But, this one [ocarina], you have to define the sound on your own (smiles) basically, by combining the sounds. Simply, you put half of the sound this way, half that way and an excellent sound is gained.

For now, I managed to properly create an ocarina with measurements given to me by archeologists, especially Edi Shukriu. I had a problem with firing them, because it has to be fired at nine hundred degrees Celsius. And we don't have an kiln like that here, I looked at all the ovens of these bakers, they don't reach that gradation. So I was lucky to have a friend at a brick maker's in Landovica, there... His name is Naser, and I'm very thankful to him. He received me well, he fired them for me a few times, even though I felt bad to beg him so many times, he happily fired them for me. So there was only the problem of firing, I got the hang of it, I made them. The last Minister [of Culture] treated me well, now I'll see the former Minister (smiles) Memli [Krasniqi], he really chose people with merit and gave them presents, people who really know the value and so on, while this other still hasn't... still hasn't knocked on, as they say, my door (smiles).

{Holds an instrument in his hands and describes it} The length of the Illyrian ocarina is eight centimeters, whereas here in this part where it's wider it's six centimeters. It has two openings, now, I did a measurement that's very precise now, I drilled a hole here at the mouthpiece - this is called the mouthpiece because we have to blow in here... our lips meet - until the opening... I'm calling this the first opening {touches opening}, it has 4.4, meaning 44 millimeters, while this other one {touches the other opening} is 42 millimeters, this is a bit higher, while the distance between the two openings is 38 millimeters.

There are two openings that give us three notes. These are the original notes of the Illyrian ocarina {plays the ocarina}. These are original, I mean, maybe something rhythmic can be done with these three notes, on the basis of rhythm. However, we can't develop melodies, unless they're opened. But by combining them [sounds], good melodies emerge, especially from our traditional music. I'll try this a little bit {plays on the ocarina}, or a very well-known melody from our traditional music {continues to play}. Therefore, these are the sounds that can be combined and that can be played. And it can accompany many of our songs, especially the traditional ones, because folk songs in the orchestra are fabricated, this is much more developed, it often catches beyond the octave. And this, somewhere in the *sektakord*, a lot can be enveloped in the midst of the six notes, many of our traditional songs. A very simple instrument, but a very good sound, it has a soft sound, it's not harsh like this... a soft sound.

²⁷ Second inversion of a chord.

So, this is the ocarina of which we know the origins. It's from sometime around the mid-Neolithic period, specifically the Starčev period,²⁸ and according to the archeologist Edi Shukriu, it appears at exactly the time the heavenly goddesses were sculpted. In the beginning the heavenly goddesses were of even smaller dimensions, they started becoming bigger later on, while this instrument remains [small] (smiles)...but the only instrument was found in Orenik, and unfortunately we don't have the original. But I tried to recreate it according to the measurements that they gave me and I worked on it in clay. This is that ocarina.

War

[Cut from the video-interview: the interviewer asks the speaker about the period of the war, and how he experienced it.]

Shaqir Hoti: As I said, war like all wars always brings bad things. It hit people, the biggest loss which cannot be compensated is human loss, loss in goods, trauma victims, that's just one kind of victim...So we, at that time during the war, I mean, before we left our houses, as you also know {addresses the interviewers}, you've lived through this last one. At this time...at that time we had absolutely no information because it was blocked from all sides. With a radio here and there we could figure something out and anyway when the NATO bombing started, I think two to three days or four days, I don't know how long it lasted, it...I mean, some militia came to our neighborhood from above, they weren't police. They were all masked and their faces were painted with black paint. The colors they wore were the same as their souls. And they came here to the house. Someone came right to the front door, and said "[you'll have to leave] Either dead, or alive, you choose!" "Ili živi, ili mrtav, biraj!"

Then we had to leave without touching anything in the house. At that moment, had we known a little bit earlier, we would have at least taken some stuff in our pockets, but we left like that. They gathered people on the street, they kept us there for about half an hour, and some hoped a bit, some words were said like, "No they'll let us return home again." We got a bit happy, but no... they hurried us to the train station there, we spent the whole day there, nobody knew, who...no one said anything. At some point a train came at three, sometime in the afternoon and it was overflowing, not just filled, but as many people as possible entered through doors and also through windows. No one could get close to the train. That train left. At some point in the middle of the night another train came. Now those of us who were left there got on that train, I remember it well, I was the last one there to hop on, in that railway coach or whatever it is called...through a window, some people helped me. In that compartment of the train, as they were called, there were certainly more than 50 people. Everyone on top of each other, you could barely breathe, or if you just got sleepy you couldn't sleep because people wouldn't let you fall to the ground.

And like this, slowly, sometimes going and sometimes stopped, the train was stationary more than moving, at around seven we arrived at Bllace, on the border with Macedonia. We got off the train, we were now stuck there between the two borders with a...close by there...there was a small river, we were stuck

²⁸ Starčevo is a town located in the Pančevo municipality, in the South Banat District of Serbia. The Starčevo Culture, an ancient civilization on the Danube river which dates back to 6000 BC, is named after this town because of archaeological excavations carried out there. The Starčevo culture ceased to exist around 4200 BC with the invasions of the Pelasgians.

there for one week, I could easily say one century. For us it was one century. I noticed, I had a watch, I noticed that the seconds went tock-tock, but the hour never moved, it seemed like time wasn't moving at all, that time was difficult for us. And unfortunately we were also exposed to a light rain, it never stopped, and it was cold.

At some point after two or three days, humanitarian organizations sent some aid from Macedonia, Albanians had organized the aid. They brought us some blankets, but they couldn't protect us from the rain, we simply, we spent one week there. After a week some buses came, who knows how many people were there...I know there were thousands, but I don't know how many thousands. But many buses were filled, some went in that direction, they went to Albania. When we approached Struga near the border some, two young men got on the train...there on the bus, they had a big argument with the Macedonians, they said, "We absolutely made room for them, we have permission," who knows where they got permission for. I heard them talking in Macedonian a bit. And he said, "The village will take this people, they...Veleshta." And there were three buses, and all three of them went to Veleshta.

So we, we spent that time in Veleshta. And the people of Veleshta received us, of course, as if we were brothers. Their hospitality was very, very, much more than just solidarity, it was very good. But, to be honest that spiritual emptiness, always followed us, wherever we went, whatever hospitality we received, whatever...However, for us it was something unique, a spiritual emptiness, what will happen to us, what happened to those of us left behind, because we heard that some, especially in *Kodra e Diellit* [Sunny Hill] were left in Pristina. We had some of our friends, many of our friends there, will we find them...So, this was it, as far as houses were concerned we knew we wouldn't find our houses, that they'd burn them and that's how those three months passed. There, to be honest, one could maybe count even three years, or thirty years or because...the day wouldn't pass. Always thinking about where this storm would leave us.

And then we returned, to be honest, not only my home, but the entire neighborhood, we only found bits and pieces of our homes. We found nothing in the house, absolutely nothing, and with everything, furniture, doors, everything broken...This [the workshop] was the emptiest, they took everything from here. I didn't find a single instrument. Flutes, I had silver ones, they were very expensive, that didn't hurt as much as the two *kavals* that had their own history. Every instrument has its own history, as I said about the ocarina. It has its own history because it is known, its origins are known. And they were very precious in my field, and I didn't find them. Out of everything they took from this house, those two *kavals* hurt the most. So this is what it is, it...

Then when we returned, we thought we'd start working at the radio with the orchestra again. We went there a few times, there was nothing, and the folk orchestra too was transformed. The Turkish orchestra was part of the radio, that was also transformed. There was also an entertainment orchestra at the time. I mean, the radio station had three orchestras, and somehow it [the entertainment orchestra] was better established. They...some of them remained in that orchestra, the rest of us went wherever we could (laughs). To be honest, I was done with these types of performances. I performed with every singer there was, especially the traditional ones. And one could see that some of them loved their genre of music, they love their instrument.

I'll take Ilir Shaqiri as an example, there is no instrument, no kind of instrument that he hasn't used in his song repertoire. And they're very interesting, starting from the pipe, I mean, one of the simplest instruments that exists, to the *kaval*. And that's what's special about his songs, that's why I singled him

out. In his songs he tried to find the best place for [those instruments] within the song, not only as accompaniment, but he used them in the song, and you find [each instrument] in the most appropriate place for that instrument. So, other singers have also used them. I'm very convinced also that this will develop over time with the youth, the youth as well - even though I don't belong to that genre, because to be honest, I've been raised with folk and traditional music -, many youths have also taken up these instruments and used them in their songs.

Dreams

[Cut from the video-interview: the interviewer asks the speaker about the dreams he had when he was young, and to what extent he fulfilled them.]

Shaqir Hoti: To be honest, when you're young, as youth you always wander through those dreams and the desires of one's dreams, how to put it, one dreams in many directions. But always as a young man, I mean, before I finished high school and the Professional High School in Prizren, I always thought only of studying instruments. In this regard, I was determined, I don't know why, maybe from childhood my brain just absorbed those sounds, I was always trying to study an instrument. But, when I came to the radio with the flute, I talked to Rexho, Rexho Mulliqi, since he led our orchestra for four to five years. And I said I didn't know where to go. I don't have any place where I can study, I'd have to go...Belgrade was far, there weren't any in Skopje yet, let's not even talk about Ljubljana. He told me this, "You were my student, you were one of...harmonically you were the best, in *solfeggio* we know, you had a perfect ear and everything. Your place in academia is only as a composer, in composition you could [go to school], otherwise I'd say no for instruments." "Why?" "You have an instrument in your hand all day long, one is in your hand every day. And what are you doing? Is this not studying? Therefore as far as that's concerned, no. But I would ask you..." We shared the same appreciation for *kaval*, "I ask you never to neglect traditional instruments. Always keep them near."

He was interested in transcribing old traditional dance songs. And, he said, "I'll take this recording of so-and-so, or of two dances and I'll watch them at home." He took them home, he listened to them, he came back. We worked in Veternik at that time, in the studio, we had it up in Veternik, over there. There he said, "You know what? You need to transcribe these songs. You are," he said, "the one who played these dance songs, you know them better than I do. You served as a model even in *solfeggio*." Anyway, he said, "Try" he said, he gave me the dance, he said, "Transcribe this and we'll see." I went home, I transcribed it, there were, it was *triler*,²⁹ meaning I wrote the musical signs. And I sent it to him, he took it and looked at it, "No! I can also do this," "And what to do?" "Only work with the 32's."³⁰ Then I took the dance song again, it was definitely a bit more difficult, but I did it and I sent it to him. "I," I said, "I'm not happy." "Why?" "It's much more difficult to read it." "Let whoever has the skill read it" (smiles). "You," he said, "do the transcription like this."

And that's how it remained, for a long time we didn't mention it. Now after...it hasn't been more than four or five years that I have been reminded of this, and I've gotten into old traditional dance songs and I've transcribed them. I've only transcribed the old dance songs I've found. However, the ones I composed

²⁹ Trill, musical ornament.

³⁰ Demisemiquaver, a note value in music notation.

ones, the ones that are mine, I've separated the ones that are only for the *kaval*, for the *fyelli i shokës* and the *bishnica*. While these others, as I said earlier, the straight flute and the beak flute, I'm not very interested in transcribing them because they're very common across the world, and they're not all...there are no special dances that go with them. While these are kind of special instruments. I've done transcriptions of them, maybe one day they'll be found and they will be seen. Maybe I should publish them somewhere. The important thing is that they're ready (smiles).