

*Marija Makarovič, Kmečka abeceda (Peasant Alphabet), Ljubljana, Mladinska knjiga 1979, 50 pages, ill.*

Ethnological books which have dealt with chiefly peasant life style almost up to the present day very seldom reach children to broaden their knowledge about the world in which they live. The publication of this book is therefore a cheerful event which will fill up a gap in our literary market.

This useful task was fulfilled by Marija Marakovič, an authoress who has on numerous occasions called the attention of the Slovene ethnological circles to the problem of publishing the more intimate data and taking advantage of the time and behaviour of people for scientific use for books which do not come into touch with the widest circle of readers. Known for her immediate contact with the environment in which she works and with the people she meets, she was capable of finding contact with young readers as well, and wrote an attractive and useful book for which — together with the book entitled "Peasant Economy" — she received this year's Levstik award for juvenile literature.

Since Slovene alphabet contains twenty-five letters, each letter in the book corresponds to an object taken from the Slovene peasant culture and is represented by a short text. The choice of these objects was extremely good. All of them played an indispensable part in the peasant culture in the past, yet today's children and adults often do not know even their names, let alone their shape or function. The book starts with a chapter on woman's head-covering called "avbà" and is followed by descriptions of harrow, clogs, gourd, boucan house, wine measures, toys, etc. It ends with the texts on shepherd's flute and cradle.

The texts reflect a vast knowledge about peasant culture, but do not follow a scientific system or didactics which could bore a young reader. As a witty participant of the research, the author leads children from one object to another, thus enabling them to broaden their imagination capacities, and incidentally adds data which will interest juvenile and adult readers alike.

The author found an equally able collaborator in illustrator Lidija Osterc who provided the peasant world with humour and a great sense for attractive details.

Mojca Ravnik

*Mirko Ramovš, Plesat me pelji (Let Me Dance), Dance Tradition in Slovenia. Published by Cankarjeva založba, Ljubljana 1980, 415 pages.*

Up to this time Slovenia has not had a book which would deal with folk dance art of the whole Slovene ethnic area. Only three volumes of regional dances (from Upper Carniola, Carinthia and Prekmurje) have been published by the Institute of Ethnomusicology up to now, having started in 1958. The present collection which contains a survey of dances from the whole of Slovenia was written by Mirko Ramovš, a folk dance specialist at the Ethnomusicological Section of the Slovene Academy of Arts and Sciences who carries out collection and research in the field of folk dance within the Section. Most of the dances presented in this extensive scientific study were recorded by the author during his field research trips.

We get acquainted with our folk dances through various folk group appearances, but these are mostly only standard and more attractive dances, many of which are doubtfully choreographed and can not present the real image of dance expression of Slovene people in the past. This collection, however, accurately reveals the part of the so-called spiritual culture which is otherwise close to us and yet not familiar enough.

The book contains descriptions of 116 dances from all Slovenia. They are not arranged according to geographic distribution, but rather according to their chronology and single stylistic characteristics. Thus the book starts with group and child dances and dances for pairs, beginning with the earliest and continuing up to the most modern. Each dance is preceded by a short text followed by musical notations which are in fact taken from a transcript of the field sound recordings. Next is an extensive verbal description of a dance, supplemented by a kinetogram (international dance notation). On one hand this book is written in a very popular manner because it describes the dance material in an universally understandable way which will certainly be of great value to amateurs and folk group lovers. Yet this collection is much more than just a handbook for amateurs; it is a scientifically designed anthology which will serve experts since it contains all the archival and bibliographical references and comments in addition to kinetograms. The book, designed in such a popular and yet scientific manner, will be of great interest to foreigners as well because it contains an extensive English resumé about Slovene folk dances.

The records of folk dances are as communicative as the records of folk songs; yet the author was aware that the sole description of a dance is not enough for it does not reveal anything about the real "life" of this part of folk art and about its bearers. Anything that may interest a reader beside the dance description, Ramovš expertly discussed in the supplementing study. First he described the concept of folk dance, its origin and history. The central chapter of the study is dedicated to various kinds of dances and their distribution and to characteristics of our folk dances in comparison to dances of other nations. A special chapter deals with various dance forms and the accompanying music — namely the songs and their lyrics. Ramovš further discusses dance expression — which is an important novelty compared to similar studies. A different name for the same type of dance is used in almost every part of Slovenia, but certain characteristics are common to all. Next chapter deals with the role of dance in a man's life and provides a scientific evaluation of the subject since it is clear that no cultural phenomena can be set apart from life; every manifestation — folk culture as well — is closely connected to man, his knowledge about things around him and his life style. This discussion is not a superfluous "expertise", but a logical conclusion which accompanies the published field material. Final chapter of the study is a survey of all previous researches of folk dances. The author confirmed his broad scientific knowledge and research work which is more than necessary if we take into account many monuments of folk culture which are sometimes depreciatively called folklore. But if this folklore is or wants to become a part of us, a part of our life and our cultural and historical knowledge, then this book is more than welcome.

Marko Terseglav