

INTERVIEW WITH SEVIME GJINALI

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Duration: 63 minutes

Present:

1. Sevime Gjinali (Speaker)
2. Erëmirë Krasniqi (Interviewer)
3. Petrit Çeku (Interviewer)
4. Donjeta Berisha (Camera)
5. Venera Mehmetagaj Kajtazi (Sevime Gjinali's daughter)

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.

Part One

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you...

Petrit Çeku: Now, right?

Erëmirë Krasniqi:...your name and lastname? Can you please speak about your early childhood memories, the family and *rreth*¹ you grew up in?

Sevime Gjinali: I am Sevime Kabashi, Gjinali after marriage. I was born in Prizren in 1937 in an educated family. My mother knew how to read and write. And I spend my childhood in Prizren until 1954. Then I continued my studies in Belgrade.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What do you remember from that time, from your childhood? Do you...

Sevime Gjinali: As a child, I was loved as a child because I was the youngest. I was not that quiet. I constantly caused troubles, I was active. I loved music, because also my family, namely my father, they say that he wrote songs and had a beautiful voice...he was very dear to his friends. And they enrolled me in the elementary school when I was five. I knew how to read and write as a five-year-old, and I went to the *Bajram Curri* elementary school in Prizren, in the first grade. There were several classrooms with various teachers in that school. Nuri Sherifi was one of them, he played piano and had a piano in his classroom.

I had another teacher, he was from Albania, but once I found that teacher Nuri Sherifi plays the mandolin and piano, I left my class and went to his, and nobody knew about this. I don't know how I

¹ *Rreth* (circle) is the social circle, it includes not only the family but also the people with whom an individual is in contact. The opinion of the *rreth* is crucial in defining one's reputation.

did it, I was free and I thought that I could do that. My teacher had called my father and said, “Your daughter has done this, I just wanted to notify you.” “She did a very good thing, that’s a very smart move.”

And there, I was a very good student, I knew how to sing, I was excellent. I had some friends who were also excellent, we would compete. And after elementary school, as usual, there was the gymnasium² with three years, the *semi-matura*.³ I went to the gymnasium, yes...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: I wanted to ask you, when you went to school, was that the period when you were in Albania, ‘43? Which year was it...when did you start?

Sevime Gjinali: No, from ‘37, ‘8...in ‘41, ‘41 the time after the war. Yes, a very difficult time. It was not a time...under the occupation of...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Wasn’t this period under the occupation of Serbia...okay...

Sevime Gjinali: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You mentioned that you had a teacher from Albania?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, he lived in Prizren but his origin was from Albania. Otherwise, teachers at that time knew how to play at least one instrument, that’s how it was. It was part of the wide culture. During my education in the gymnasium, the elementary school of music was opened in Prizren. At that time, since my family were art lovers, I enrolled in the elementary school of music in Prizren. And right after the *semi-matura*, I enrolled in the first grade of middle school.

There I distinguished myself because of my talent, and at that time schooling was done by some unqualified teachers. Lorenc Antoni⁴ was the director as well as a teacher. So, Lorenc Antoni learned the music’s subjects together with us under the supervision of the professors from Belgrade, because they would constantly come to control and assess our knowledge and give advices on how to act. I distinguished myself there. They selected me, they said, “You will come to Belgrade to study.”

In 1954, I enrolled in the then Academy of Music in Belgrade with the recommendation of my solfeggio teacher to continue my studies there, but since I distinguished myself in playing the piano, I choose piano as my major and pedagogy as my minor.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can we go back to your family, Ms. Sevime?

² A European type of secondary school with emphasis on academic learning, different from vocational schools because it prepares students for university.

³ *Semimaturë* was the old set of examinations given to students after the fourth year of elementary school.

⁴ Lorenc Antoni (1909-1991) was a Kosovo Albanian composer, conductor, and ethnomusicologist.

Sevime Gjinali: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You mentioned that your sister was...

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, yes. My family....My family was a well-known patriotic family. The Kabashis, they are known for their patriotism. There are also folk songs about their bravery. They always fought for the rights of the Albanians in a way. My father didn't show that to his children, I mean, that education was kind of inherited, but the situation played a role as well. My older brother, Ruzhdi Kabashi, was, he had a vocation for radio, for radio technology, and at that time, that time was very difficult, they didn't allow him to become... he had created a radio station of his own in Prizren. That time was difficult, somebody spied on him and told about that. They said, "Ruzhdi is creating radio stations," and that was considered hostile and they imprisoned my brother. He was kept in the cell for two months, he slept on concrete. So, that is where he got the burning of the lungs from, then he died from tuberculosis.

That tragedy... then my sister, influenced by the lack of rights for Albanians, got connected to *Balli Kombëtar*.⁵ An activist of *Balli Kombëtar*, she also worked for the court of Prizren... the court of Prizren. A very distinguished employer. She printed all the materials for that party, then some other came from her....Some others in that party were...we didn't know as children. Then she was soon imprisoned because of her activism. She was imprisoned by Serbs and was sentenced to eight years of prison. She did six years of prison, and two years under conditional release.

So, my family constantly had, how they say, the *posteqi*⁶ in prison (all laugh). The feeling of our sufferings, because of my brother, my sister, made us very careful even among our friends, and created a sort of psychological complex for the family, because it was very difficult to experience these things. And the *rreth* always somehow treated us as enemies. But we were a pretty well-known family for our education, we were all educated, my sisters, all of us.

There were no women teachers at that time. My sisters were the first women teachers. Nedime, the first woman teacher in the elementary school of Prizren, she also taught...there were courses for illiterate women at that time, she taught women. As a 13-year-old, at that time they transferred them whenever they wanted, they sent her to Zhur, she worked everywhere. She was engaged in music as well, she was in the *Shoqnia Amatore Agimi* [The Amateur Society *Agimi*].

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was the teaching done in Albanian at that time? Had it already started...

⁵ *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.

⁶ Old Albanian: *potaqi*, rug made out of animal fur.

Sevime Gjinali: The schooling was done in Albanian, but under the ruling, of course, of the occupier. In...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You mentioned that your father composed. Can you tell us something...?

Sevime Gjinali: My father...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us what kind of compositions?

Sevime Gjinali: My father....Look, there were no writings, no registering of music at that time, there were not even notebooks or pentagrams with musical notes. He was a rhapsode, sometimes he did the text and music on his own. But nobody wrote them, because he had no chance to record them at that time...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were they passed from a generation to another?

Sevime Gjinali: From generation...I mean, that became our family education. And he decided about my education, he decided that I become a musician, that I study music. Because at that time, there wasn't... it was something unusual for a woman to go to music school with a violin. People would throw stones at us when they saw us on the street, because I was going to the music school with a violin... it was unusual for me as a woman.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were there other women?

Sevime Gjinali: There were other women, there were talented women. Prizren is known as a city of talents, not only for music but also for drama, painting and... there is no need for me to mention people who came out of Prizren. Prizren has proven itself that it really is a city of arts.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What kind of public cultural activities did you have at that time?

Sevime Gjinali: Eh, the concerts of the *Shoqëria Agimi* were organized at that time. The concerts of the music school, as a student I participated in the school concerts. I would play the piano and violin, we had also established a small students orchestra where we would play music. The first records of Radio Pristina were with my sister, a duo of my sister and I, we recorded folkloric songs at Radio Pristina.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you mention names, when you say sister, mention their names as well so that we can have it as a reference.

Sevime Gjinali: Nedime Kabashi, as the first active teacher in the *Shoqëria Amatore Agimi*.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you go to Belgrade? Can you tell us about this part?

Sevime Gjinali: Belgrade... the destination was very important to me. I was young, 14 years old, I enrolled in the Academy. All my wishes could not become reality, because piano was my main instrument, but I had no material possibilities because that required me having a piano at home. I was living in the student dormitory, there was no room. I started paying a lady to rehearse at a private house, but I couldn't make it, I had no financial means.

At that time, my sister was in prison in Pozarevac. I was forced to sell my food coupon, lunch or dinner, in order to travel to visit my sister. We lived in very difficult conditions, so I was forced to not have piano as the main subject [major], but as a plan B [minor].

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was your main subject?

Sevime Gjinali: Educational Session of Pedagogy, the pedagogical subject was the main one for me. But I distinguished myself in subjects such as... especially in the subject of solfeggio, harmony....So, I graduated with composition of a toccata form, this is how they call it, fugue, inventions written by old composers... Bach... with excellent grades. I graduated on time after four years and I returned to Prizren right after that to continue working at the middle school of music.

Petrit Çeku: Do you remember the pedagogues in Belgrade?

Sevime Gjinali: Pedagogues...

Petrit Çeku: The professors?

Sevime Gjinali:... the most famous ones who were also composers, I was...because each professor had a maximum of ten students attending their class. In the main subjects, harmony and polyphony, Stanojev Rajčić was my professor, he is a well-known composer, Petar Bingulać, Aleksandar Obradović, Stefan Vuk... the young Mokanc...

Petrit Çeku: Mokranjac?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes. I was very loved by them, even the professor of my main subject called me, in Serbian, *čerko* [girl]. He would say, "Girl, I want you to remain here as my assistant." I didn't know the value of being an assistant professor back then, because we didn't have assistant professors back then, we only had professors who taught us music. I didn't take that seriously. During my studies, I was also an activist in a society of students there, we were together Albanian and Serbs...there were Croats as well as people from Bosnia...I had applied to Radio Belgrade, there was a call for an editor for serious [classical] music.

As a young girl, I went to apply. And I was accepted. My friends would ask me, “Are you thinking about staying?” “No, *bre*,⁷” I said, “I only want to see what will happen.” I mean, I was accepted. But I returned to Prizren right after my studies as a teacher in the middle school of music.

Petrit Çeku: Do you remember the concerts life there? Concerts...?

Sevime Gjinali: During our studies, we were obliged to attend every musical event, the many concerts that came from abroad, the events that took places in Kolarceva, there was the University of Kolarc. The opera existed as well... so, they would give us free tickets and it was our obligation to go to every event, every opera show, philharmonic, solo concerts, recitals...Otherwise, there was nothing else...computer didn't exist at that time. And that's what kept us, and we developed a classical music culture, we knew the composers as well as the performers and various artists. That was a big plus for us as students to know such things, now...this is what they lack nowadays. And we took knowledge, we advanced, to us that was...

Petrit Çeku: Your colleagues at that time...

Sevime Gjinali: Yes...

Petrit Çeku...how, do you have any impression that...

Sevime Gjinali: Our impression was, we were a circle of four-five people who went there from Prizren, and we came out of the middle school as a family. The relations between colleagues and the care towards women at that time were very important, it was important for them not to leave us alone in order for us not to feel...because that was a total different world for us. Our colleagues were constantly my caretakers... my parents had even left an *amanet*⁸ to my older colleagues to take care of me. I was always pampered and spoiled, because I stood above them with success as well. When...

Petrit Çeku: When you said, “That was a total different world for us...”

Sevime Gjinali: Yes.

Petrit Çeku: Did you notice at that time that you were actually changing society?

Sevime Gjinali: We, that time was ours because we experienced great progress and as students, as the descendants of our culture, we contributed a lot to our country. It was a big pleasure for us

⁷ Colloquial: used to emphasize the sentence, it expresses strong emotion. *More* adds emphasis, like *bre*, similar to the English bro, brother.

⁸ *Amanet* is literally the last will, but in the Albanian oral tradition it has a sacred value. Here, it means solemn promise.

knowing that we would lift up our culture once we'd get back, we would contribute so that Kosovo would reach the same level as Belgrade or other metropolises.

Petrit Çeku: A lot...

Sevime Gjinali: We also had opportunities to go to cities such as Zagreb and...because they existed, festivals started from that time. But because we lacked financial means we were a bit constrained in our coming and going. Excursions were organized, group travels by train, to cities, for example Zagreb, in order to see an opera.

Petrit Çeku: Do you remember your previous education in Prizren before going to Belgrade? How substantial was it compared to the one in Belgrade?

Sevime Gjinali: Eh, that was very important. It is important to mention that we differed from those coming from Belgrade as far as success goes, they were...I had some colleagues who came to the University by cars. They were aristocratic families back then and they ranked higher. We were, I didn't even have shoes to wear back then, I would wear sandals. I would wear the shoes of my friends (laughs) when I went to concerts. Poverty right after the war, and the family situation brought us to such position. But we differed as far as success goes, we were on a higher level than those who lived in Belgrade, or those coming from Novi Sad or Niš. When students got together... we distinguished ourselves because of our success and talent. Otherwise, talent is what determines the success.

Petrit Çeku: What about the professors in Prizren, whom would you emphasize, from those before...

Sevime Gjinali: Well, among the professors of my generation I was the first to return, because my colleagues remained there [in Belgrade] for another year. Some began working there and some couldn't manage to graduate on time, there were three of us who returned from Belgrade to the music school in Prizren, Engjëll Berisha,⁹ Mark Kaçinari¹⁰ and I.

Then I worked in Prizren for three years, on the request of Radio Pristina because here [Pristina] was the capital...Radio Pristina started gathering professional staff for some news desks, for journalism, music. And the editor of Radio Pristina invited me to work for them at the news desk of serious [classical] music.

Petrit Çeku: I am interested to know a little more about Prizren at that time, in those three years...

Sevime Gjinali: In those three years, I was very engaged in teaching many subjects because there were no other professors. There were some who taught in Serbo-Croatian. We were the first ones who needed to translate musical subjects, the history of music, harmony in Albanian language, and our role there was to prepare lectures for children, for the students in their mother tongue. I took over the lecturing of five subjects right away, solfeggio as the main subject, piano, the reading of partitures,

⁹ Engjëll Berisha (1934-2015), Albanian musicologist.

¹⁰ Mark Kaçinari (1935-1985), Albanian composer.

contrapuntal, otherwise polyphony and Albanian musical folklore. The age difference between my students and I was around, they were two to three years younger than I.

Petrit Çeku: Can you mention some of...

Sevime Gjinali: They were, they are famous composers now, Zeqirja Ballata, an instrumentalist, Isak Muçolli, Reshat Randobrava, Musa Piperku and many others...Bahri Qela, Bahri Qela as the director. And I would go to classes so prepared. Let me tell you something that happened to me. Shaqir Hoti was a flautist...I went to my class, I was very strict but I also knew how to get the humor, and they were sitting near each other, Isak Muçolli with Shaqir Hoti, they laughed a little. I said, "What is funny?" "Ku-ku,¹¹ professor, if I only told you what he said about you." I said, "What did he say?" "Ku-ku bre, if we put the photograph of this professor in water bottles, we would sell all of them." (all laugh).

But they honored me very much, as far as I knew, I projected knowledge and they loved me very much. They would constantly listen behind the door when I played piano. I played Chopin's compositions with a lot of pleasure. And during the class, when I saw that they were not interested anymore, "Please professor, perform something." I would perform.

I started working for the radio after the music school, my contribution to Radio Pristina was very big because I advanced the news desk of serious music and I wrote...I told about all the compositions, I made formal analysis in order to provide the listener as well as every composer with information.

Petrit Çeku: This is very important...

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, because serious music wasn't presented much at that time, even though the philharmonic orchestra existed at that time with some international instrumentalists. I arranged the news desk of the serious music very beautifully, the comments, I wrote comments, I minimized the duration of operas...because operas last one hour and longer, I would minimize the duration with comments in Radio Pristina because it was 60 minutes long and who would listen to it for 60 minutes? So, I would give comments while the music was playing. So, it was good for me too, because I had a very great knowledge and I learned even more there.

When the director of Radio Pristina saw that I arranged the news desk of serious music very beautifully, they moved me to popular music. So, I was also a composer and I started creating for the needs of Radio Pristina. I created many songs in the spirit of popular music. I worked with a children's choir and wrote songs for it.

Petrit Çeku: Do you remember, when you were writing the texts, the explanations, I mean, the analysis of great works, what kind of audience were you thinking of?

¹¹ See: *bre*.

Sevime Gjinali: Look, that was very important, because radio phonics has its own laws, for example if you go in the morning, you should adapt the music you to the morning time. At lunchtime, you should play other music because it is a whole different atmosphere, then in the afternoon another, as well as in the evening. So, the time of classical music was usually in the evening. That is when you wouldn't have contacts with the listeners, but I received many appreciations. And the competitions of the shows of Radio Diffusion Department existed at that time, the competitions in Yugoslavia on which show was better, and we would always win with the Kosovo shows.

Then, after my work at the news desk of classical music was done, I started working on popular music. Popular music is very rich, but there are only few records of it. Together with popular music, there was the Albanian folklore and we started producing music based on folklore. And the session of music production opened. That is where the circle expanded. Composers such as Vincent Gjini, Lorenc Antoni, Rexho Mulliqi joined, and we started composing, and we were obliged to do ten compositions per month. That was what helped the music collection to get richer, with ten compositions.

Of course, only the best were selected to be broadcasted in shows. Then there were compliments, they became hits and were listened to. Then the *Festivali i Akordeve të Kosovës* [The Festival of Kosovo Chords] made it possible for the music collection to expand. That is where singers would appear, because how else would we be able to discover popular music singers? We organized a festival, *Kosovarja Këndon* [The Kosovar Sings]. For example, it was held in Ferizaj, and there we would select the singers for the radio recordings. These were all the projects, just like the projects nowadays, these were my projects at that time, a big collection got richer.

At that time when I was working at the radio I also continued working at the middle school of music as a piano teacher. So, I never stopped the pedagogical work.

Petrit Çeku: Do you remember *Akordet e Kosovës*, its beginning is interesting as a...

Sevime Gjinali: *Akordet*, yes. The festival was held once a year, and there were three genres: children's songs, songs in the spirit of popular music, and entertainment, back then it was called easy music. That was a party for Pristina.

Petrit Çeku: Where was it held?

Sevime Gjinali: In Pristina, at the National Theater, because there were no other appropriate halls back then. There are no halls even today. There was the Albanian, Serbian and Turkish music there, depending on the compositions. The commission would select the ones who would move forward and also who would win the first prize for the most beautiful song...it was similar to *Zambaku i Prizrenit* [The Prizren Lily] nowadays.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was there censure at that time?

Sevime Gjinali: Of course, of course there was! The censure cost me a lot. We know how the relations with Albania were at that time. We had songs from Albania in our collection as well, usually popular music. As a composer, I dedicated my first song to Pristina. Those were the days of liberation for

example, for the day of liberation, I dedicated my song to Pristina, with my text, and it was liked very much. At that time, there were Albanian people who worked for...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: The system?

Sevime Gjinali: To stop, to stop Albanians from moving forward. A colleague came to me at the news desk and said, "You have copied the song of Tirana that is sung in Albania, you made it as if it was for Pristina." Because they were amateurs. I said, "How come you think that I have copied the text?" "No, but it is similar to the song of Tirana." I said, "Do you know the musical notes?" "No, but I've listened to it, you have recorded it."

So, that obstacle was eliminated because we played both songs. That made no sense at all, but the fact that I dedicated the song, that was similar. And I became like an enemy there. But that was eliminated and my colleagues there denied it, it has nothing to do with that...They both were original. Otherwise, my own style was similar to old songs, of course with elements of our popular music.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What...

Sevime Gjinali: We always had many obstacle, we always had many obstacles, but with a great desire and commitment we managed to keep our opinions and we succeeded. After working at Radio Pristina and at the middle school by correspondence, the High Pedagogical School was opened with working groups of music. I started working as regular staff there from 1970. I left Radio Pristina. I worked in the session of music, there was dramatic art, painting and music.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: This is before the University was founded, right? Only the High School?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, the High Pedagogical School was before the University in 1975. Eh, in the High School I was also in charge for too many subjects, the subject of solfeggio, piano, reading of partitures, because there were no qualified people. In...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was this mainly a Western culture, I mean, part of the Western musical traditions...

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, of course. Look, music is the same everywhere. It has its own basis. It cannot be for example... it is with national basis, but classical music is international. And those are laws that every subject had...just like you have them in justice, justice is the same in laws (laughs), is it true? Music also has its own laws that were written based on something and were established long ago by scientists and wise people.

Part Two

Petrit Çeku: How was concerts life in Pristina during the '70s and '80s?

Sevime Gjinali: Concerts life in Pristina was relatively poor, because there were no halls except the National Theatre and the Philharmony that existed within Radio Pristina. There was some classical

music in *Akordet e Kosovës* played by students, but that was not enough. Together with professors and students we organized concerts at the High Pedagogical School. Professors would present themselves with their best students in certain instruments. In 1974, '75, the High School advanced and it became the Faculty of Music. I automatically started working there in those subjects which we would teach to two groups in both languages, Albanian and Serbo-Croatian.

There is even an event, some guests came, the collaboration with Albania had just started, some of them came...there were many professors from Albania working for the University of Pristina at that time. They came as guests to see what level was the Faculty of Arts of Music at. Here were two women, they would usually come in groups of two and they said, "Sevime, do you have any class now?" "Yes," I said, "I have a class in a Serbian classroom," because I taught Albanians as well as Serbs. "But, how?" "Serbian classroom? You teach Serbs?" "Yes," I said, "To me it is a plus that I am able to teach Serbs as well, we have gotten to the point of even teaching Serbs." We took lessons in Belgrade in Serbian, but now we can teach Serbs. And we had students from all around Yugoslavia.

And they had come not because of lower standards but because we were on the same level. I told them that my students had competed in competitions of my subjects, solfeggio, and they had won the first prizes at the center of Belgrade as well as Zagreb.

And then that time was, because there were political directions as well...As a woman, they thought to send me to *Shota*. *Shota* was a professional institution of songs and dances. "But," I said, "My place is here, I am a professor and they need me...I want to give my contribution in pedagogy." "No, in order to make it better, professionals are needed in such institutions." I said, "No, no, no, no." "Yes, you have to go," those were political orders...Back then it was necessary for one to become a member of the party in order to become a director or a professor (coughs), anyway...

And they appointed me the director of the Folklore Ensemble *Shota*. And my colleagues who were members of the party convinced me to accept it. Looks like I am bragging about it now, but the *Shota* Ensemble had its artistical blossom at that time. Even though it was forbidden, I connected it with choreographers from Albania right away. Panajot Kanaçi...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Kanaçi...

Sevime Gjinali:... he was famous, a choreograph coming from Albania, we contacted him and I managed to bring Panajot Kanaçi to play the *Vallja e Shqipeve* [The Dance of the Albanians]. And the dance started being played, but we only managed to have one show because then they forbid it. It was forbidden and it was a big deal for the audience to go to the concerts of *Shota* and see the *Vallja e Shqipeve*. While working there, I wasn't working at the Faculty of Arts. I didn't like being the director [of *Shota*], that is why I started working at the Faculty of Arts again.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Was there any punishment because of the show of the *Vallja e Shqipeve*?

Sevime Gjinali: No, no, no, no. There were no punishment, but there was censure to our programs constantly, because they would set the percentage of shows in Albanian, Serbian and Turkish. We

even had a show in Tirana, with a mixed program, I mean in Serbian as well. They would constantly say, “Why put the Turkish in the program as well?” “But this is our system, there is nothing we can do.” Even though music is music. The singers were excellent, dancers as well.

There was Jordan Nikolić, a very good singer and performer, he would sing in Albanian. Many Serbian singers would sing in Albanian then they started warning them, “Why do you sing in Albanian, aren’t you a Serb?” And it became a mess. I returned to the faculty before my mandate as a director was done, I returned to the Faculty of Arts. In the meantime, the Television of Pristina needed a manager. They invited me to work there, but I only stayed there for one or two years, less than two years. I finally returned to the Faculty of Arts as a pedagogue, after...

Venera Mehmetagaj – Kajtazi: You were a director there as well.

Sevime Gjinali: Since I showed success in my other workplaces, I was constantly committed to my work. I only have one daughter, Venera. She is a famous flautist now, and I didn’t have other children because I had a lot of work to do. We always had that feeling even in my family, to serve to someone, to serve our country for the best. I returned to the Faculty of Arts, where they appointed me dean. I was the first Albanian dean.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: How did you organize the departments there?

Sevime Gjinali: Departments... yes, as a dean. Let me return to the Radio Television of Pristina. There I managed to establish the professional choir, the professional choir led by Rafet Rudi, a composer. The choir still exists within the Philharmonic Orchestra. We travelled all around Europe, the choir was highly valued for its professional performances. I gave my contribution here. At the Faculty of Arts, we opened some departments that hadn’t existed before. We took professors from abroad, in the session of piano, flute, violin, there were famous professors, especially the pianists.

As a dean, I served for a shortened mandate, because the time came when the changes and disorders begun. I reached 35 years of service in 1990, no, I mean 30 years of service. At that time women retired after 35 years, but there was early retirement as well. I retired in order to avoid these events because some unpleasant things began to happen. After the retirement, not that...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Please, can we talk more about the people you composed for and how was your life as a composer because...

Sevime Gjinali: My compositions were active equally to my active life. They were as food to me. I had begun with songs for children, songs that I dedicated to children and Venera was like my...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Model.

Sevime Gjinali:...model, not a model but she would sing my songs in the *Akordet e Kosovës*. There was the *Pioneri* [Pioneer] magazine, I constantly wrote for *Pioneri*, they would publish my songs and my compositions every week. Then, I wrote songs in the spirit of popular music, which were sung by the famous Nexhmije Pagarusha in a duet with me.

Then, other singers began, Shahindere Bërlajolli, Liliana Çavolli, Ismet Peja and many others, I don't have to count them now. My choir songs were performed by children's choirs, music, songs for voice and piano were performed by Nexhmije Pagarusha, I would follow her, Jordan Nikolić would sing, tenor, usually in Albanian, and so on....There were some pianistic miniatures that were played in eight-years musical schools. I also published professional books of solfeggio for eight-year schools. I also have the book of the solfeggio subject for the Faculty of Arts.

At the same time, during my activity, earlier when the musical culture started to develop, there was a group, Anton Çetta, Engjëll Berisha, we went to the field to collect Albanian folklore from its source in order to publish it in books then interpret it. We had recorded them on old tape recorders. We went to several regions and villages because back then it was unusual for a woman to sing to men. As a woman, it was easier for me to go to girls' *oda* and make them sing and then interpret them. Those were published in some volumes of professor Anton Çetta by the Institute of Albanology in the Books of Albanian Folklore.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Do you have any story from the work in the field? Any anecdote?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, it was very difficult. It was difficult because the time was no good...girls found it hard to decide to sing. I was more like a man and I would go and record both, the songs of men as well as the ones of women, and so...I have no anecdotes, but Anton Çetta was the one who brought them together and would tell the stories that were based on folklore.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you in Drenica as well?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, Drenica, Serbica, now Skenderaj, right? Eh, we went to these regions. The folklore there was really rich. And they were all published, they were recorded and transcribed, but some of them remained. A student of mine, Bahtir Sheholli, continued. He is a folklorist who continued the tradition of the collection of folklore. Rexhep Mulliqi, a folklorist as well, he was also my student in the middle school. I was the one who motivated them to create, all the students I had in the middle school of music., I taught them how to make the form of a song through musical, professional explanations, and they all composed... then they became famous... Isak Muçolli, Reshat Randobrava with entertaining music, Shaqir Hoti, Musa Piperku, very famous for the songs he wrote for Sabri Fejzullahu (laughs)... those were really impressive songs which still exist.

Petrit Çeku: The recording process, do you remember the quality of the tools in Radio Kosovo? Very shortly...

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, the tools were mainly borrowed from Radio Pristina, because somehow, they would borrow them and give them back. We had one studio. That studio served for everything, for soloists, orchestra and for all. Of course, the quality was not high, but that's how it was everywhere, I mean in every center of the region. Then, only later did we start receiving the tools. We were furnished from I don't know where, because there was the Radio Diffusion Department where they would merge

all the requests and then they would come from abroad. We had the chance to take, for example San Remo of Italy, Radio Pristina was the first to broadcast the songs of San Remo.

Petrit Çeku: Interesting.

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, because Skender Gjinali was the music editor at that time. He would go, because he spoke Italian fluently, he would go directly to San Remo and take the recordings. And then Belgrade, Zagreb, Skopje and all the other stations would take them from us.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Were you influenced by the songs of...I mean, what were you influenced from in music? I mean, it seems like you looked at San Remo a lot, I mean?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What else did you look at and were you influenced...did it have any cultural influence?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, of course. That was a kind of *yrnek*¹² for us to see where we were and how we should act. However, Italian music always held the lead as the best and most listened to music...But the Albanian music is not too far away from the Italian one, they are close to each other.

Petrit Çeku: One question, I want to return back. Do you remember your first contact with classical music in general, the first moment? Do you remember it?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, we had, as every house, we had our own radio, but at that time, as children, we didn't manage to touch the radio, because my parents, my father would listen to the radio stations...because of the events that were taking place, so they listened to it. We didn't care much about it. Then, we had the television, that is where all our contacts began, otherwise we had no other opportunities.

Petrit Çeku: So, let's say you listened to Beethoven for the first time on the radio?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, yes, of course. But, even the foreign radio stations barely played that kind of music, but...

Petrit Çeku: Yes.

Sevime Gjinali: Not many people listened to that kind of music to...Then, with the beginning of the music school, we got active, we looked for those stations ourselves in order to see how a piece of

¹² *Yrnek*, a sample, a model.

Chopin, Brahms and Beethoven was played. That started becoming more dynamic, everything at its own time.

Petrit Çeku: Let's return to the '80s when you became the dean of the Faculty.

Sevime Gjinali: Yes.

Petrit Çeku: I mean, how was the atmosphere in those years, did the issue of students protests have any impact?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, yes, of course. That was a big pressure. We had, the deans had constant contacts with the rector in order to tell how many Albanian students we were going to register and how many Serbs. As a dean, it was problematic to me to tell the percentage of Albanian and Serbian students. And in one case, I said, I don't know the percentage of Albanians, and there are zero percent Serbians. And, then they went mad, "How come, what does that mean, how can zero exist?" "Yes," I said, "we need students."

Because the number of Albanian students was limited, because there could not be more than ten students in a class... that is a professional requirement, one professor [mentor] per student. There were no opportunities for more classes because we didn't have enough qualified professors to cover all those lectures. The rector was a professor, a Serbian doctor, and he started warning me, "You cannot say zero percent." "Alright, well," I said, "What's the matter with that?" To me, that was not an issue, but I said, "You are bothering yourself, you seem too inferior with your question, why zero percent. This year there can be zero percent, but next year there can be students." Of course, the disagreements had their impact. But...

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Did your students attend the protests of '81? I mean, were they...

Sevime Gjinali: They all did. They all did. The protests were...because the anger exploded at that time, even though it calmed down in a way...just like the ashes of a fire that stay like that, they burn within themselves.

Petrit Çeku: In the meantime, did you continue creating?

Sevime Gjinali: I continued less at that time then... I didn't want to go to the Radio, to impose myself on them... because I had other things and...

Petrit Çeku: Yes, they changed...

Sevime Gjinali:... The pedagogical work, the work as a leader, constantly in the *pleqësi*,¹³ forums, within the Faculty, I was constantly engaged there, so didn't even have time to have children (all laugh).

Erëmirë Krasniqi: You actually retired in the beginning of the '90s, right? When it began to...

Sevime Gjinali: Yes. In the '90s, I took my first pension in the '91. My pension... my salary was one million dinars, while my pension was 990 dinars.

Petrit Çeku: With inflation?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: What was this change from one million?

Sevime Gjinali: Yes, they were 400 marks, yes. But at that time the change of currencies just began, the exchange for example. And from 400, I fell to 80 euros until last year, from last year my pension is 230 euros. Eh, I forgot to tell you another thing, you know the events that took place after my retirement, the war, and there were no activities for ten years. There were, the others organized home-schooling,¹⁴ but I wasn't part of it. Later in 2000-2001, they invited me to continue my pedagogical work in the Faculty of Arts, to teach my subject because the Master's was just opened at that time. And I continued working there for ten years.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Really?

Sevime Gjinali: I worked there for ten year, because the law was approved, according to the rules of the University, professors are allowed to give their contribution until the age of 70. And until the age of 70, 81, I worked there and then they were closed. I felt able to work again, not that...Otherwise, in Europe, in music and other arts, one can work for as long as one is able to give their contribution. They shortened it for us with that law. Now, I don't know, I guess the last term for them to give their contribution is the age of 70.

Petrit Çeku: Yes, I guess that's how it is.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Can you tell us about the war, how did you spend it?

Sevime Gjinali: The war, very badly. The war came...even though we wanted something to happen, something for us to be liberated because as a family we fought even without a war. We thought that the war would end very quickly. And it happened that we fled our homes. We escaped...

¹³ Alb: *pleqësi*, traditionally known as the Council of Elders.

¹⁴ By 1991, after Slobodan Milošević's legislation making Serbian the official language of Kosovo and the removal of all Albanians from public service, Albanians were excluded from schools as well. The reaction of Albanians was to create a parallel system of education hosted mostly by private homes.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Where were you, in Prizren?

Sevime Gjinali:... We decided to go to Turkey. To Turkey, to the house of my daughter, of my son-in-law. And we decided to go, in the end we decided to go by car, everyone had gone, we were the last ones. The police stopped us at the Macedonian border. I was with my husband. He said, "Where are you going? Get back!" We had passed the stop sign that was put there...we didn't even see it because we were distracted. My husband got late because he had to take the insurance or I don't know what...Everybody escaped. He sent us back and said, "You will stay there until tomorrow." We stayed there like poor people, I said, "Skender *bre*, do you want me to go to the policeman and ask him whether we can pass or what is going to happen to us?" "Alright, go."

I went there, got closer. "Šta ćeš?" [What do you want?] He said. I said, "Come on, *bre*, *pusti nas* [let us go]," then they let us pass. "But," He said, "Didn't you see the sign Stop there?" I said, "No, my husband didn't see it." "Why aren't you driving then?" "But," I said, "I am blind, I cannot drive." "Go," he said." We went (laughs), we went, we passed. We met our daughter, our family, our grandchildren on our way and we arrived in Turkey. They welcomed us very warmly in Turkey. They started giving us aids. My husband was...Izmir was his birthplace.

There were many Kosovars, we gathered in a resort place, a summer town, this is how they called it. They would say, "Skender, please Skender go to the radio and talk about yourself because you are from Izmir. I swear to God they will welcome you very warmly. You can even get a pension." (laughs), Otherwise, my father-in-law, the father of my husband, was a collaborator of Fan Noli.¹⁵ Fan Noli's origin is from that place, Şarköy is Fan Noli's birthplace.

Petrit Çeku: Şarköy.

Sevime Gjinali: And when they left, because they lived in Albania, they were punished by Zog¹⁶ and escaped to Albania. Fan Noli made it possible for them, for the father of Skender, to go to Turkey. He travelled, he was a patriot too, from a place called Canakkale, Canakkale is known, that is where his daughter Myzafere was born, she is among the first teachers in Kosovo, and Skender was born in Izmir. He was a soldier of Kemal Ataturk at that time when the big change to democracy took place, he was there. He fought and got injured there. After that time, he returned to Albania again. He had a lot of wealth in Albania, but the birthplace of the father of my husband, of my father-in-law, was Prizren.

Gjinoll, they were Gjinolls...but my husband was engaged in sports, he was a distinguished sportsman, he played football for the *Tirana* team as well as for *Shkodra*, he also played for the

¹⁵ Theofan Stilian Noli, known as Fan Noli (1882-1965) was an Albanian writer, scholar, diplomat, politician, historian, orator and founder of the Orthodox Church of Albania as well as a Bishop, who served as Prime Minister and regent of Albania in 1924 during the June Revolution.

¹⁶ Zog I, King of the Albanians, born Ahmet Muhtar Zogolli, (1895-1961) taking the surname Zogu in 1922, was in power from 1922 to 1939. He first served as Prime Minister of Albania, then as President, and finally as King.

Italians...he changed the lastname a little, he made it Gjinali, because Gjinolli means *gjin* [humans]. But Gjinolls still exist in Prizren, the Gjinolli family.

While the life in...during our escape to Turkey...we lived there for six months. They started giving us aids, they helped us a lot. We had close cousins who didn't let us down. But we couldn't wait to return to Kosovo. They said, "Stay here and get employed here." They found me a job, they found a job for Venera as well in the formation of the Faculty...

Venera Mehmetagaj Kajtazi: The Conservatory in Edrene.

Sevime Gjinali: The Conservatory in Edrene. She also had the chance to remain in France when she was there for post-graduate certification. She even told me, "What should I do, they want to keep me here." I said, "If you plan on staying there, keep in mind that you will never return to Kosovo again." "No, then, I will return." And that's what she did. I didn't stay in Turkey, neither did she stay in France. We returned to Kosovo after the liberation. I don't think we made a mistake by returning to Kosovo. It is what it is.

Erëmirë Krasniqi: Thank you very much!

Sevime Gjinali: *È finito?* [it. Is it over]?

Erëmirë Krasniqi: *Finito* [it is over].