

Olga Fečová's Museum: The Familial Soundscapes of a Romani Band Leader / Muzeum Olgy Fečové: Rodinné hudební světy romského primáše. 2022. Script and storyboard by Zuzana Jurková. URL: <https://muzeumolgyfecove.cz>

Review

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Olga Fečová's Museum: The Familial Soundscapes of a Romani Band Leader (<https://muzeumolgyfecove.cz>) is a multimedia exhibition in the artist's home turned museum and presents the musical, familial, and social heritage of one of the most prominent Romani musical lineages in the Czech Republic. The project and its online presence support community memory and foreground the participation of family and community members. It aligns with contemporary concepts of concerts, theatre, and exhibition in domestic or otherwise informal settings that operate outside galleries and museums and seek more direct engagement with their audiences. The museum was established in 2021–2022 within Charles University's Didaktikon initiative in collaboration with the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Arts, linking academic research with the education of children and young people.¹

The project's author and guarantor is the distinguished Czech ethnomusicologist Zuzana Jurková, Head of the Institute of Ethnomusicology at Charles University's Faculty of Humanities. Her long-standing research focuses on the music of minorities – particularly Romani music – and on urban soundscapes. Jurková's extensive experience in research, publishing, and project management provides this project with a robust scholarly framework.²

The virtual museum narrates the story of the Fečo family in written, audio, and visual form, with particular emphasis on intergenerational transmission. On the homepage, Olga Fečová acts as hostess and invites visitors via a short video to look

¹ See <https://muzeumolgyfecove.cz/en/o-projektu/> (accessed 30 January 2026).

² See <https://fhs.cuni.cz/FHS-2753.html> (accessed 30 January 2026).

around her home, a symbolic representation of her extended family, composed largely of musicians. In the virtual living room, visitors encounter her ancestors and learn about their Slovak roots. The texts are written in a lively colloquial register and include passages from Fečová's (2022) autobiographical book. The photographs and texts transport the viewer to a picturesque little village in eastern Slovakia, where she used to visit her grandparents and learnt that what matters in life are music and dancing, helping others, and sharing what one has. Her narrative conveys deep pride in her Romani heritage and admiration for the talent and dignity of her parents and forebears.

In the kitchen, which in Romani families is still the site where they sing and make music together, visitors meet current family members and gain insight into their musical lives. The family is headed by Jozef Fečo (1940–2013), a noted violinist, composer, and bandleader, who blended classical and Romani musical traditions and claimed to have created the “Fečo style,” which defies musical categorisation. His wife, Olga Fečová (1942–2022), was an influential community figure, teacher, writer, and advocate for the emancipation of Romani women. She also worked closely with disadvantaged Romani children, introducing them to music and theatre; they affectionately called her “Grandma.” Today, family members such as her grandson Josef Fečo still pursue a musical career, embodying generational continuity. Visitors to the museum can view family treasures in the gallery: preserved photographs, videos, manuscripts, and sheet music. Such a spatial metaphor makes it possible to merge personal items, memories, and audio recordings into a captivating whole that acts as the microhistory of the family.

To answer the question of who the project is primarily intended for, it is essential to keep in mind that it forms part of the broader Didaktikon framework. Didaktikon is Charles University's centre for educational outreach, established in 2022 in collaboration with the City of Prague to link results of university research with the education of students of primary and secondary schools. It operates as a platform for interdisciplinary interactive exhibitions, lectures, and workshops.³ This context clarifies that the museum is not an isolated “commemorative website” but part of Charles University's strategy to integrate academic (ethnomusicological and ethnological) research into public education.

The *Olga Fečová's Museum* project shifts the way Romani culture is presented in public spaces. Instead of stereotypical images, it offers a self-representation of the Fečo family, giving space to their voices, stories, photographs, and recordings. It portrays the life of a musical family not only through music but also through their domestic environment as a form of chamber ethnography that transforms the museum into a living family archive. The domestic exhibition concept is particularly apt for representing Romani musical life, which is often closely linked to household and extended family.

Musical families constitute one of the most enduring pillars of Romani culture in Central Europe, yet they remain insufficiently documented. *Olga Fečová's Museum* therefore carries significance beyond the individual family. Romani musical culture is inherently intergenerational, fundamentally anchored in families. In many Romani

³ See <https://didaktikon.cz/DIDAKT-24.html> (accessed 30 January 2026).

communities, children learn music by imitating the older family members; musical instruments are passed down, and musical skills are one of the main forms of livelihood and identity. Documenting a family means documenting an ecosystem of learning, tradition, and creativity.

The museum also contributes to dismantling stereotypes surrounding Romani musicians. Its individual stories portray family members as professionals, educators, innovators, parents, and artists whose repertoire encompasses classical, jazz, modern genres, and original compositions. Importantly, the project highlights the crucial role of women in musical families. Given that many Romani musical lineages preserve distinctive repertoires, styles, and performance schools undocumented in writing, the preservation and dissemination of valuable family recordings is especially important.

Oral history is a key documentation tool of intangible cultural heritage, i.e., of unwritten history. Particularly in Romani communities, where repertoire, playing style, and philosophy of music are transmitted orally, it becomes an essential source of gaining knowledge. This method is also applied in the *Olga Fečová's Museum* project, which makes it accessible to its primary audience – pupils and students – since the voices of witnesses are more vivid and more captivating than academic texts.

As suggested by its subtitle, the project may also be interpreted through the lens of *soundscape* studies, which foreground acoustic environments, auditory memory, and the social meanings of sound. The recorded songs, compositions, and interviews that form the project's core may be interpreted not only as isolated artefacts but as layers of sound connections, acting as live “soundscapes” of the Fečo family.

While the online format ensures broad accessibility, it inevitably lacks some of the tactile experience that a small domestic museum could offer. For lay visitors, more explanatory texts on historical and social context would be beneficial, particularly regarding the role of Romani musicians in the twentieth century or the post-war political situation in Czechoslovakia that prompted large-scale migration of Slovak Roma to Czechia. The project might also profit from a larger repository of recordings, more detailed biographical narratives, and more numerous and longer interviews, as visitors are likely to seek deeper engagement with individual family members.

It would be highly useful to apply this model as a pilot project to research on other Romani musical families, such as the Horváths, the Giňos (the lineage of the world-famous singer Věra Bílá), or the Bundas. Such family portraits could form a digital map of Romani musical heritage in the Czech Republic.

Olga Fečová's Museum represents a significant contribution to the public dissemination of research on Romani musicians. The documentation of Romani musical families is vital not only for preserving family history and community memory, but also for its broader social impact on education and intercultural understanding.

References

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Author Biography

Jana Belišová is the head of the Department of Musicology at the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University Bratislava and the director of the civic association Zudro. She has been dedicated to the music of the Roma in Slovakia for a long time and, in addition to ethnomusicological projects (e.g., “Phurikane gila,” “Neve gila,” “Karačoňa,” and “Šilalo paňori”), she is also a producer of documentary films (*Cigarettes and Songs, Bells of Happiness, Heavy Heart*).