

The
V. Sarajishvili
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Centre for
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Ethnomusicological Life in Georgia (June-December, 2023)

Festivals, Conferences, Competitions, Master classes

20.05- 30.07.2023 – The “Festival of Georgian Regions” was held at restaurant “Tsiskvili“, within the framework of which traditional dishes, wines, folk songs and dances of Imereti, Samegrelo, Svaneti, Racha, Guria, Achara and Kakheti were presented along with wine-tasting, master class, exhibition and sale of Georgian products. The Festival saw the participation of regional and Tbilisi folk ensembles.

30.05-7.06.2023 – Tbilisi hosted “Toradze International Festival”, named after Lekso Toradze. Folk ensemble Basiani participated in the Festival.

10.06.2023 – Ensembles Sakhioba, Ialoni, Margaliti, Sagalobeli participated in the “Festival of Lechkhumian Wine” in the village of Tvishi, Lechkhumi.

12.06.2023 – Students Scientific Conference “Issues of Christian Theology and Musicology” dedicated to the memory of Manana Andriadze, was held at Giorgi Mtatsmindeli Higher Educational Institution of Ecclesiastical Chanting.

20-30.07.2023 – Regional and Tbilisi folk ensembles: Sakhioba, Didgori, Ialoni, Musikeli, Mapindzelo, Ksovrebli, Gordela, Eles, Usakhelouri, Berikatsi, Horoli; State ensemble of Folk Song and Dance of Abkhazia, Lela Tataraidze and ensemble Kesane participated in ArtGeni Folk Festival, at Tbilisi Open Air Ethnographic Museum.

17-28.07.2023 – Anaklia hosted traditional festival “Voices of the Future” of choirmasters’ schools.

29.07 - 20.08. 2023 – With the support of the Ministry of Culture of Georgia, festival of Georgian art and culture was held for Georgian emigrants and their descendants, with the participation of Tbilisi and regional folk ensembles at Leuville historic Estate (France).

18-22.09.2023 – With the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia and as organized by the Folklore State Centre, International Folklore Festival “Georgia” was held in Tbilisi and

Akhaltzikhe, with the participation of Tbilisi collectives along with the choirs of Georgian folk song from Great Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, Finland and Italy. Several master classes in singing were held parallel to the concerts.

4.10.2023-02.2024 – Folk ensembles Basiani, Didgori, Adilei; the Changelianis’ family ensemble and solo performers: Nino Nakeuri and Tina (Nargile) Mehtieva participated in the International Cultural Festival “Europalia Georgia” held in Belgium, with the patronage of the Kingdom of Belgium and the support of the Georgian Government.

9.10.2023 – Ensemble Ialoni conducted a master class on lullabies as part of the International conference “Presentation and Exchange of Psychosocial Approaches” organized by the “Bread for the world”.

10-11.10.2023 – Sachkhere Municipality Centre of Culture hosted All-Georgian 7th Competition-Festival “Georgian Hymns”.

20-23.10.2023 – Giorgi Garakanidze 18th International Festival and Conference of Folk and Church Music was held in Batumi.

9.11.2023 – Closing of the First Folk Festival of Children’s and Juvenile Choirs and the awarding ceremony of the participants took place at the Grand Hall of Tbilisi State Conservatoire.

10.11.2023 – Ensemble Sakhioba participated in the concert of Georgian hymns and ritual songs – “Didebata” as part of the “Tbilisi Baroque Festival” at Rustaveli Theatre.

19.11.2023 – Folk groups of Achara municipalities and ensemble Ialoni participated in the First Festival of Georgian Folk Songs named after Meliton Kulkhanidze, a renowned choirmaster, musician and public figure, in Batumi.

10.12.2023 – Opening of the Second Folk Festival of Children’s and Juvenile Choirs was held in the concert hall of the 1st building of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

Lectures, Presentations, Projects, Concerts, Evenings, Anniversaries

1-3.06.2023 – Within the framework of the exchange program of the choirmaster's schools of the Folklore State Centre, Lentekhi hosted the students of Sachkhere and Gori choirmasters' schools and the Folklore House of Alvani.

22.06.2023 - Giorgi Chitaia Tbilisi Ethnographic Museum held a performance "Only Georgian", performed by Anzor Erkomaishvili Georgian folk song ensemble Martve.

9.07-23.10.2023 –With the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia, ensemble Didgori implemented the "Singing Museum" project at Giorgi Chitaia Ethnographic Museum, holding folk concerts and master classes on folk songs, as part of the project.

10.07.2023 – Reporting concert of the students of Giorgi Mtatsmindeli Higher Educational Institution of Ecclesiastical Chanting was held in the hall of the Folklore State Centre.

11.07.2023 – Reporting concert of the Student folk choir of Ilia State University.

15.07.2023 – Presentation of ensemble Basiani's new web-album.

11.08.2023 – Within the framework of the Erasmus+ project "Network of UNESCO Cultural Spaces" and the European Union program "Culture moves Europe" ensemble Didgori participated in the folk concert at St. Michael Church in the city of Alsunga (Latvia).

9.10.2023 – Ethnomusicologist Tamaz Gabisonia delivered a lecture on the performance of Georgian traditional music and held a master class for Serbian students of ethnomusicology in Belgrade.

15.10.2023 –Within the framework of the project "Ashugh Traditions and Folk Life of the Azerbaijanis in Georgia" , an evening of traditional music of the Azerbaijanis in Georgia "I Swear on the Saz" was held in the hall of the Folklore State Centre.

25.10.2023 – Presentation of Gurgen Gurchiani's book "Svan Folk Music. Ethnomusical Aspects" and

ensemble Shgarida's concert at the hall of the Folklore State Centre.

2.11.2023 – Ensemble Ialoni's solo concert at the School of Political Studies.

5.12.2023 – Small Hall of Rustaveli Theatre hosted the anniversary concert of Murad Pirtskhelani, Ruslan Stepliani and Gulver Gerliani – three elderly members of Mestia Folk Song and dance ensemble Riho, with the participation of Tbilisi and regional folk ensembles.

7.12.2023 – Student choir of Ilia State University participated in the presentation of Tamaz Gabisonia's new music collection "100 Kokrochinas" in the foyer of Ilia State University theatre.

8.12.2023 – Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazeti conferred Laz ethnophore Lili Abdulishi the status "Best Artist of the Year".

14.12.2023 – A traditional Christmas event was held at Giorgi Mtatsmindeli Higher Educational Institution of Ecclesiastical Chanting. The students of the university performed various examples of "Alilo" from different parts of Georgia.

14.12.2023 – Presentation of Malkhaz Erkvanidze's book "Solfeggio-Harmony Guide to Georgian Traditional Musci" was held at the Recital Hall of the Conservatoire.

15.12.2023 – Tbilisi folk ensembles participated in the concert "Georgia's Road to Europe" dedicated to granting Georgia the candidate status for the EU membership, held in Freedom Square Tbilisi.

18.12.2023 – Ensemble Basiani's solo Christmas concert in Atoneli street, Tbilisi.

23.12.2023 – Ensemble Ialoni's concert "Folklore Meeting for Christmas" at the House of Culture in the village of Matani.

24.12.2023 – Ensemble Margaliti's solo concert in the Hall of the Folklore State Centre.

28.12.2023 – Presentation of "Abkhazia – 1970. Ochamchire and Gali Districts" the edition of Otari Chikvadze's expedition recordings of Georgian traditional music at the Recital Hall of Tbilisi State

Conservatoire with the participation of ensemble Adilei.

Concert tours

13-20.06.2023 – Ensemble Ialoni held a conference “Christian Liturgical Music in Contemporary Georgia“ and a master class in Georgian folk music .

22-25.06.2023 –Ensemble Adilei’s concert tour in Italy.

8-13.09.2023 – “Nanina” creative group of ethnomusicologists” held joint concerts and lecture - master classes, in four cities of Latvia – Jekabpils, Luznava, Daugavpils and Riga together with ensemble Saucejas of the Latvian Academy of Culture.

6-11.10.2023 – The student choir of Ilia State University, represented by 10 members, held concerts and master classes as part of the concert tour in Serbia.

4-5.11.2023 – Ensemble Adilei’s concerts and master classes of Georgian traditional music in the cities of Winksele and Chiny, Belgium.

Expeditions

Ethnomusicologist Giorgi Kraveishvili was in expeditions:

14-24.07.2023 – to Chechnya-Ingushetia and Dagestan (led by Caucasiologist Tsira Baramidze).

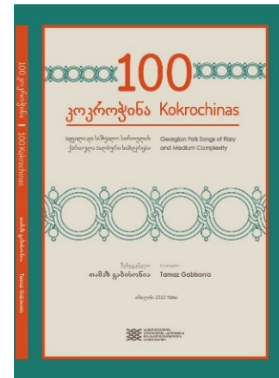
28.07-29.08.2023 – to Mohajir Lazs, Mohajir Klarjetians and Mohajir Abkhazians, together with Tamaz Kraveishvili and Choreoloist Khatuna Damchidze.

20-21.10 და 2.11.2023 – to the village of Sarpi, Hopa district (Turkey).

3-5.12.2023 – to the villages of Sarpi and Maakriali, Hopa district (Turkey).

Publications

Music collection “100 Kokrochinas. Georgian Folk Songs of Easy and Medium Complexity” compiled by Tamaz Gabisonia



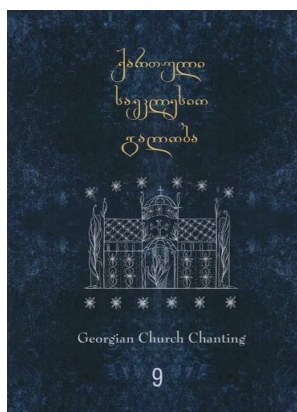
The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia published the music collection “Georgian Folk Instrumental Music”



Ensemble Basiani released a new web-album.



The Educational-Research Centre of the Georgian Patriarchate published "Georgian Church Hymn"
Volume IX.
(Compiler and musical editor: Malkhaz Erkvanidze)



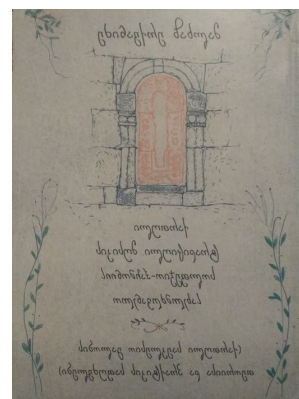
Ensemble "Shav nabada" released a teaching audio album of Christmas Chants



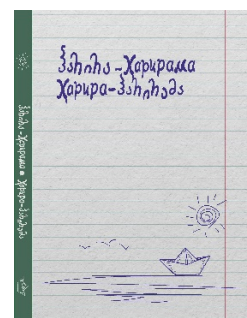
Tbilisi State Conservatoire published Expedition recordings of Georgian Traditional Music:
"Otar Chijavadze. Apkhazeti - 1970.
Ochamchire and Gali Districts"



The Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth of Georgia published Malkhaz Erkvanidze's book:
"Solfeggio-Harmony Guide to Georgian Traditional Music"



Ensemble Didgori released an audio album of Megrelian-Abkhazian songs "Harira-Харирама"



Movies

30 October, 2023 the program cycle "Our Europe" – Sarpi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEqVh7CHNHk>

Anaklia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoGPmlKEsg4&t=1273s>

Prepared by Maka Khardziani

The International Festival of Culture “Europalia Georgia”

On 4 October, 2023 – February, 2024, Belgium is hosting the International Festival of Culture “Europalia”. The Festival is biannual, and encompasses cultural and creative events, multidisciplinary and multinational projects representing the cultural heritage, traditional and contemporary art of the guest countries. This year Georgia is participating in the festival as a guest country for the first time. Accordingly, this year’s festival is referred to as “Europalia Georgia”. The event is truly unprecedented for our country among the recently-held international cultural events. “Europalia Georgia” is held under the patronage of the Kingdom of Belgium and with the support of the Georgian Government.



The poster of the Festival “Europalia Georgia”

Large-scale and diverse cultural events are held in Belgium and its neighbouring countries within the framework of the Festival. The guests have the opportunity to learn about Georgian traditional and contemporary art, as well as Georgia’s rich cultural heritage – the national treasure.

At the Festival, a special place has been attributed to traditional Georgian art – folklore. Many concerts of traditional music have been held and interesting projects implemented. In several cities of Belgium, folk ensembles presented themselves to a wide audience: these were Basiani, Didgori, Adilei, the Chamgelianis’ family ensemble, solo per-

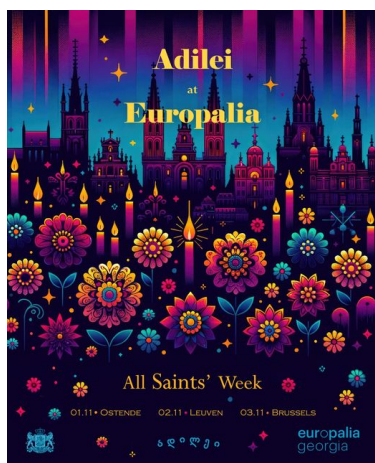
former Nino Nakeuri; Also, Georgian artist of Azerbaijani origin, performer of Azerbaijani folk music Tinati (Nargileh) Mehtiyeva, the only female ashugh in Georgia. She will hold two concerts in Brussels, as part of the festival.



Poster of Ensemble Basiani

Grand opening of “Europalia Georgia” took place on 4 October, 2023, at Bozar – one of the most prestigious concert venues in Brussels. 30-35 minutes were allotted to the concert part of the ceremony, where ensemble Basiani performed the selected examples of Georgian traditional polyphony. The official opening of the Festival was attended by the King and Queen of Belgium, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia and other honored guests. In addition to the grand opening ceremony Basiani also held concerts in other distinguished halls (in the cities of: Antwerp, Mons, Namur, Liège). Noteworthy is the joint concert of Basiani and the Chamgeliani sisters at Arsonic Theater in Mons, which was highly appreciated by the audience; at De Singel Theater in Antwerp, the showing of Megi Rustamova’s film and Bassiani’s concert took place in one evening.

In addition, Basiani held joint concerts with the State Chamber Choir (The Holy Trinity Cathedral Choir) and the Gori Women’s Choir in Belgium and Holland (Concertgebouw Bruges, Bozar Brussels, Amare Haag), and on 27 October, these choirs participated in the official opening ceremony of the Georgian exhibition in Brussels.



The poster of Ensemble Adilei

On the initiative and as organized by the Organization Jeunesses Musicales International, ensemble Didgori implemented an impressive project in the public schools of Wallonia, where they introduced Georgian folk music to the students of different ages. The master class-concerts were led by Zoé Perret – a French musician, excellent performer of Georgian folk songs. In the wake of the project, Didgori successfully held solo concerts in several cities of Belgium (Brussels, Namur, Liège, Dinant). One of the concerts in Brussels, where the Chamgeliani sisters and Zoé Perret performed several songs together with Didgori.

On 1-2 November, many European countries celebrate “All Saints’ Day” and “All Souls’ Day”. On these days, people remember their deceased loved ones and decorate their graves with flowers. Inspired by this tradition created was a performance-dialogue of "Georgian and European funeral songs" – “Ritual: The Songs for Our Deceased Loved Ones”, which was held at the cemeteries of the cities of Ostend and Leuven and with the participation of: ensemble Adilei, Nino Nakeuri, musicologist and performer Nana Mzhavanadze, Belgian soprano Lore Binon and local Georgian ensemble Mezoblebi.

A few days before the onset of the project, a Georgian-French collaboration between Nino Nakeuri and French organist and composer Alexis Paul took place at the Bozar exhibition space, where ensemble Adilei held a solo concert later.



The poster of one of the concerts

Parallel with the concerts, master classes and lecture-presentations on Georgian traditional music were held in different cities of Belgium and Holland, conducted by ethnomusicologist Nana Mzhavanadze, head of the International Relations Service of Anzor Erkomaishvili Folklore State Centre.

The concerts of Georgian performing groups held within the framework of “Europalia Georgia” were sold out, which once again convinced European community of the uniqueness of Georgian traditional music.

Zurab Tskrialashvili
Director of ensemble Basiani

Ensemble Martve is 45

“Song is a spiritual mirror of a nation. This is a sound chronicle that reflects the historical process of nation’s centuries-old development. Nothing preserves the ancestral traditions and Georgian soul as a song does. A song is eternal when it follows generations, but dies when the youth forget it. If you want to preserve a folk song, you must teach it to children. If children learn and fall in love with folk songs from early age, this will follow them for the rest of their lives. This will contribute to the preservation of old traditions”.

Ensemble Martve’s 45-year history, imbued with the spirit of Anzor Erkomaishvili’s these words, actively continues, and instils the love to traditional music in Georgian children, giving them the opportunity to share it with the world.

The development of Georgian folk song was facilitated by the centuries-old tradition of family musicking. Martve united the members of such singing families, which significantly contributed to the dissemination of folk songs.

Until the 1970s, traditional music was performed only by regional ensembles; neither folk singing, nor playing the instruments was popular in the capital city, especially among children and teenagers, due to which the tradition faced the threat of being buried in oblivion. For this very reason, in 1978, Natela Jighauri – director of Tbilisi Centre of Children’s Artistic Upbringing, and Anzor Erkomaishvili – artistic director of ensemble Rustavi, decided to create a boys choir, which would perform Georgian folk songs. Selection of gifted children in schools started; the competition was also announced on television. At the first stage, about 30 boys aged 8-12 were selected. In January 1978, the first meeting took place in the concert hall of “Arto’s Garden”, and then the rehearsals started. Despite good musical abilities, the children did not have basic skills in mastering polyphonic songs. In order

to master the songs from different parts of Georgia, they were trained on the intonation phrases characteristic of a particular region. This method improved children’s hearing, it got them used to the intonation specifics, performance manner of the songs from different regions. In a short time, identified were the soloists suitable for the songs of these regions.



Ensemble Martve, 1978

After many rehearsals, when the children’s ears got used to three-voiced sound, they began to learn the songs. The first song was “Tsintsqaro” with Badri Karalashvili as a soloist. The repertoire gradually expanded with the songs from different parts of the country. At the rehearsals, the children learned the history, genre, content and character of the song, listened to the recordings of the best performers, this aroused their interest. Even though the children had been born and raised in Tbilisi, they sang the songs of their ancestors with suitable spirit. Apparently, the genetics came into play here. Therefore, the solos were performed mainly by the singers, who were originally from the appropriate region.

A problem arose when learning Gurian songs: there was no one to sing *krimanchuli*. It turned out that Maia, little daughter of the renowned singer Ramin Mikaberidze, could sing *krimanchuli* very well. Maia Mikaberidze is the only girl-soloist in the history of Martve; Ramin Mikaberidze was invited as the ensemble’s choirmaster. It should be men-

tioned, that several years of his work greatly contributed to Martve's further success.

In the early 1978, the ensemble already knew about 30 folk songs from different regions. On May 9 of the same year, the ensemble made its concert debut on television. Before the concert, Irakli Abashidze, poet-academician, gave a speech and presented the ensemble to the TV audience. At the end of the program, the presenter asked the audience to select a name for the group. The music editorial office of the Georgian Television received many letters. Davit Shakarishvili from Sagarejo wrote: The ensemble should be called Martve, as they are the fledglings (lit. *martve*, in Georgian) of the great eagles of singing. Thus, the boys' ensemble was named Martve. Its first performance received a great response throughout Georgia. Soon Martve became very popular. It participated in almost all events in Georgia, as well as radio and television programs, held interesting concerts and meetings in different parts of the country. This was followed by Martve's successful concert tours abroad. Following the ensemble's successful performance in Warsaw, on the initiative of famous Georgian composer Otar Takakishvili, the then Minister of Culture, choir-conducting department was opened for Martve in Tbilisi Music School #28, headed by Tamaz Andghuladze. This school did a great job. Martve's singers themselves conducted which had a stunning effect on the audience, especially foreigners. The foreign press unanimously noted high mastery of the little conductors. Martve's division, ensemble Bichebi was created in music school #28. Later, on the decision of the Government, Children's International Folklore Centre was created on the basis of Martve.

Undeniably impressive is the list of Martve's concert tours since 1979: Armenia, Belorussia, Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria, Italy, Germany, Holland, Spain, Switzerland, Austria, France, Japan, Thailand, USA.... Currently, Martve is preparing for the concert tour to Greece.

During 45 years since its creation Martve has held over 3000 concerts, has released more than 100 Georgian folk songs on LPs and CDs.



Ensemble Martve today

For fruitful concert activities in Georgia and abroad, ensemble Martve and its founder Anzor Erkomaishvili were awarded the State Prize by the Committee for the State Prizes in Literature, Art and Architecture under the President of Georgia on 27 December, 1996; in 2011, a star of Martve was opened in front of Tbilisi Great Concert Hall.

It can be said that it is largely thanks to Martve that there are many children's folk ensembles in Georgia today.

At different times, the choirmasters of Martve were: Anzor Erkomaishvili (the founder and artistic director of the ensemble); Ramin Mikaberidze, Kote Mshvidobadze, and gifted with exceptional talented, representatives of different generations of Martve. From 1995 Martve was headed by Varlam Kutidze, a representative of the first generation of Martve, who duly continued its traditions.

In April 2022, a resolution of the Georgian Government was issued on the creation of the LEPL Anzor Erkomaishvili Georgian folk song ensemble Martve. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia and the Minister, Thea Tsulukiani were the initiators and supporters of establishing the ensemble as a LEPL.

Ensemble Martve is supported by Anzor Erkomaishvili Folklore State Centre of Georgia.

Special thanks go to its director, Giorgi Donadze, for his particular support to the ensemble.

In 2022, Mikheil Javakhishvili, a graduate of the Martve school, former member of ensemble Bichebi, a singer of the state academic ensemble Rustavi, musician, conductor, was appointed to the position of artistic director of Martve.

Currently, the students of Martve are gaining knowledge in different fields: they learn Georgian folk songs, hymns, Georgian dances, playing Georgian folk instruments, theatrical art. Guitar study groups have also been opened. A girls' choir has been created. On the decision of the management, the teaching of musical subjects (folklore, elementary theory of music - solfeggio, piano, conducting) has been intensified. Over 500 students are enrolled in Martve today, which is a guarantee for the preservation of Georgian folk music traditions.

In 2023 Martve's 45th anniversary was celebrated with events throughout the country.

The management of Martve conveys gratitude and bows to the merits of everyone who created and contributed to the development and successful work of the ensemble, as well as those who continue activities in Martve today.

Mikheil Javakhishvili
Artistic director of Martve

Tbilisi Festival of Children's and Juvenile Folk Choirs

Fortunately, the number of children's and juvenile choirs singing Georgian folk songs has increased in Tbilisi. Many children are involved in this. Each choir boasts its own history of creation. Some started from a parochial school at the church, some were created by the students of old generation singers, many were created on the basis of private or public schools in Tbilisi... There are cases when there are several choirs in one school. Noteworthy are new small ensembles created by young choir-masters from choirmaster's schools or large choirs striving to occupy their own place in the folklore space.



The poster of the Festival

In this regard, the “Tbilisi Festival of Children's and Juvenile Folk Choirs” is a very timely and necessary initiative, which will contribute, on the one hand, to presenting the already-existing juvenile collectives united by love to folklore, and on the other hand, to increasing the interest of young generations in Georgian traditional music.

The establishment history of the Festival is as follows: at a business meeting, the deputy of Tbilisi City Council Kakha Labuchidze expressed a desire to support the folk groups from Tbilisi that do not have government funding. He shared this opinion with Davit Tsintsadze and Maia Mikaberidze who were also attending the meeting, after which it was decided to organize an annual festival of Tbilisi children's and juvenile choirs. This delighting initiative was supported by the Tbilisi City Hall, and on 6 November, 2022, the first festival was held on the territory

of Karvasla. Ten choirs took part in it: Mdzlevari, Erkvani, Alilo, Amer-Imeri, Binuli, Kirialesa, Perkhisa, Chokhosnebi, Sagalobeli and Shav nabada. The first Festival did not have a qualifying stage, as the festival organizers decided that the choirs had a long history and deserved such an honor.



Final Mravalzhamier

From then on, all choirs from Tbilisi who perform Georgian folk songs could participate in “Tbilisi Festival of Children’s and Juvenile Folk Choirs”. Following the announcement of the qualifying competition, the organizers will select ten participant collectives. The choir, which will not make it into the top ten, will definitely have the opportunity to participate in next year’s festival.

In order to better get to know the choirs selected for participation in the festival, short videos will be made about them, showing their path and creative achievements. A few days before the opening of the Festival, these videos along with photos and biographies of the choirs and choirmasters will be uploaded on the joint social platform of the Festival, the City Council and the City Hall; at the opening concert, the performance of each group will be preceded by the video clip created about it. The finale of the Festival includes awarding of the choirs, and closing concert.

The closing of the 1st Festival in the Grand Hall of the Conservatoire on 9 November, 2023 was extremely impressive and inspiring, where all ten par-

ticipant choirs sang “Mravalzhamier” together, as the crowning number, and it was immediately decided that such a joint final number would become a tradition.

Although the festival does not have a competition format, it has a competent jury, whose members express their opinions after the performances of each choir. The Jury members of the 2022 Festival were: Davit Evgenidze, Teona Tsiramua and Nana Valishvili, presenter – Gia Baghashvili.

Ten choirs took part in the “2nd Tbilisi Festival of Children’s and Juvenile Folk Choirs”, which opened on 10 December, 2023. The ensembles were: Erkvani, Iakami, Iberia, Sixth Authorial School, Marula, Meydan, Ensemble of Armenian *duduk* players, Rezo Shanidze Studio, Pshavrobi and Shoda. It is important that among them there were representatives of ethnic minorities who are an integral part of Tbilisi history. Accordingly, along with the songs from different parts of Georgia, the examples of Armenian and Azerbaijan folklore were also performed at the concert.

Unlike the first festival, where the jury was limited to verbal evaluation of the ensembles, at the second festival, after the performance of each collective, the jury recorded their evaluations, which were later sent in written form to the choirmasters' e-mail addresses as recommendations.

Before the closing of the festival, planned in a few months, they should consider these recommendations and present a different repertoire at the closing ceremony; where they will be awarded diplomas, cash prizes and prizes with a commemorative inscription. Finally, the Festival will be closed by “Mravalzhamier” jointly sung by all choirs.

The Jury members of the 2nd Festival were: Teona Tsiramua (director of Gori Women’s Choir), Davit Shanidze (director of ensemble Rustavi) and Givi Chichinadze the soloist of ensemble Kartuli Khmebi; presenter – Davit Tsintsadze. The concert was attended by the representatives of Tbilisi City Hall and City Council.



Prizes for the participants

In the future, it is planned to sign a memorandum of collaboration between the organizers of the Tbilisi Festival of Children's and Juvenile Folk Choirs and children's festivals of Czech Republic, within the framework of which Tbilisi ensembles will participate in Czech Festival.

The "Tbilisi Festival of Children's and Juvenile Folk Choirs" aims at encouraging choirs, both with monetary rewards, prizes and certificates of honor; and also introducing relatively lesser-known groups to the audience and strengthening friendly or professional relations between them.

Anano Khijakadze

Main Producer of the Festival

Foreigners about Georgian Traditional Music
**"The Network of UNESCO
 Recognised Values" –
 Erasmus+, Program, that
 Connected me with Georgia**

I come from a special place in the Western part of Latvia near the Baltic Sea – Alsunga, which stands out in Latvia with its traditional Suiti traditional culture. Here, as a result of historical events, since the 17th century, local community preserved Catholic faith as a kind of socially isolated island in the surrounding Lutheran Kurzeme region.

This isolation together with the synthesis of pre-Christian traditions and religious rituals has created a unique blend of intangible cultural heritage (henceforth – ICH) in the Suiti community. So unique that since 2009 Suiti Cultural Space with its many elements as a whole (traditional music and dance, crafts, cuisine, dialect etc.) has been included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In the same list, which also includes, for example, Georgian polyphonic singing and ancient wine-making traditions.



Māra Rozentāle

Project Coordinator

While I was working in local municipality, as well as in several NGOs, which aim to preserve and popularize the Suiti culture, the idea of implementing international activities gradually crystallized. The first cooperation projects with the Setu and Kihnu communities in Estonia led to the conclusion that in today's global era there are more pros than cons (if any) of active, purposeful cooperation with like-minded communities and ICH practitioners abroad. It has a number of practical benefits, as sharing of practices, approaches and methods but, in my opinion, the most important one is the impact it has on ICH practitioners, promoting their self-identity and pride in their cultural heritage which is the basis for its existence.



Ensemble of Suii at Batumi Festival

Looking at the values included in the UNESCO ICH list, I was inspired to implement a larger-scale cooperation project of the Erasmus+ program - in a sub-program that focuses directly on experience exchange activities. Three cooperation partners, including an association from Georgia - Georgian Arts and Culture Centre, were found in this list, and Estonian partner from Kihnu island - from the previous cooperation. The Latvian partner in the project was Ethnic Culture Centre Suii Foundation. Another partner was from North Macedonia. Thus, from 2018 to 2020, the project "The Network of UNESCO Recognised Values" with a total budget

of 107, 714 euros was successfully implemented with the support of countless associate partners - including the associated partners in Georgia: The Folklore State Centre of Georgia, International Research Centre for Traditional Polyphony and others. In order to exchange methods and best practices among participating organizations and countries in the field of ICH, four Short-term joint staff training events were organised in all partner countries plus several outputs created. And it was really a great luck to finish the project in February 2020 - right before the Covid pandemic.

All partners were, of course, interested in continuing and expanding the network - thus, with the addition of several partners from the island of Sardinia in Italy, Portugal, Croatia and one more NGO from Estonia, from 2020 to 2023, the second cooperation partnership project of the Erasmus+ program of similar content was implemented "Network of UNESCO Cultural Spaces" with a total budget of 250, 472 Euros.

My personal involvement and interest in playing the bagpipes prompted the idea to create cooperation in such a specific field as well. The project was supported, and from 2022 my NGO Suii Cultural Heritage Foundation together with partners from Croatia, Italy, Spain, Slovakia and Georgia (Tbilisi State Conservatoire - International Research Centre for Traditional Polyphony) are implementing Erasmus+ program cooperation project "The Network of European Bagpipers" with a total budget of 120, 000 euros - exchange of methods and approaches, creation of educational materials for practitioners etc.

Even though I had never been to Georgia before these projects, even then I was especially happy about the involvement of this country, because I had a feeling that this country must have a special cultural heritage. Since Georgia is not an EU member state or a candidate country, its participation in this type of projects must be specifically justified - with

its authentic cultural heritage and living traditions that are still widely practiced at home.



Māra Rozentāle – player on the bag-pipe

And my intuition did not disappoint – the project partners really found a lot of special things in Georgia, very authentic and unspoiled by modern culture. For me personally even more - the first time I came, I fell in love with the country. The common history of our countries, which has left its traces and evidence both in cultural heritage and in people, is probably also of great importance.

Since the first time in Georgia in the fall of 2019, I have been coming back here regularly – in a couple of cases also bringing Suiti folklore ensembles to participate in festivals. The rose-colored glasses have fallen and real life has been seen. But the love remained - probably truer and stronger. And the desire to share the unique cultural heritage of Georgia with other countries, which can gain and learn a lot from it, remains undiminished.

In this way, to raise the self-confidence and pride of the sincere Georgian people for their cultural heritage preserved from their ancestors. There are already concrete plans for further cooperation in the fields of traditional crafts, music and work with youth.

I look forward to the EU candidate status for Georgia, as I see several specific cultural programs in which Georgian organizations will be able to participate.

A huge thank you to all my Georgian friends and cooperation partners for their support and love!

Information about Suiti Cultural Space in UNESCO ICH website:

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/suiti-cultural-space-00314>

More information about the project "The Network of UNESCO Recognised Values" is available here:

<https://suiti.lv/erasmus-projekts-unesco-network/>

More information about the project "Network of UNESCO Cultural Spaces" is available here:

<https://suiti.lv/unesco-kulturtelpu-tikls/>

More information about the project "The Network of European Bagpipers" is available here:

<https://suitunovads.lv/erasmus-program-cooperation-partnerships-in-adult-education-project-the-network-of-european-bagpipers-agreement-nr-2022-1-lv01-ka220-adu-000087403/>

Māra Rozentāle

*Chairman of the Board/ Project Coordinator
Suiti Cultural Heritage Foundation*

One Regional Ensemble

Folk Ensemble Vakhtanguri from Ozurgeti

Singing is an integral part of daily life for the Gurians, this is evidenced by the abundance of Gurian song ensembles in all the municipalities of this region. In this regard, Ozurgeti municipality is no exception, where one of the most distinguished among many others is ensemble Vakhtanguri of the Centre of Culture. Here is an interview with the director of choir Mamia Rusidze

M.G. – Batono Mamia, when was ensemble Vakhtanguri created and who was it directed by?

M.R. – Vakhtanguri was created in 2005 with great determination and leadership of Reverend Ioseb (Soso Nakaidze, as a layman); Tristan Sikharulidze, who was the choirmaster, taught us Gurian songs (I was a member of the ensemble then), and Rebuli Mzhavanadze taught us *saghighino* and Megrelian songs. The members were: father Ioseb, Tristan Sikharulidze, Guri Sikharulidze, Rebuli Mzhavanadze, Merab Kalandadze, Mamia Rusidze, Lasha Rusidze, Gela Lomjaria, Levan Ninidze and Rezo Makharadze.



Mamia Rusidze - Director of the Ensemble Vakhtanguri

M.G. – Who selected the name for the ensemble and why Vakhtanguri?

M. R. – Rev. Ioseb selected the name. Vakhtanguri is a song to be performed by a trio and a choir when receiving guests for the Royal feast. It is one of the most frequently performed songs in our ensemble.

M.G. – When did you take over directing the ensemble?

M.R. – After Tristan Sikharulidze left the ensemble, I was offered to direct the group. It was in 2012.

M.G. – How did the ensemble members accept you as a leader?

M.R. – My leadership was decided at the desire of the ensemble members. I was embarrassed when I saw Guri Sikharulidze – this great singer, sitting among the members at the rehearsal. He was a very modest person: he told me, don't be embarrassed, son, I prefer to be where I am ... If I have something to say, I won't hesitate to tell you.

M.G. – As far as I know, the ensemble was replenished with new members. Who were they?

M. R. – Only Guri Sikharulidze, my son – Lasha Rusidze and I remained from the old choir. We were joined by: Gela and Gia Shovnadze, Lasha Gogotishvili, Gela Tavdumadze, Zero Doborjginidze, Goga Makharadze, Avto Chelidze, Gela Tsetskhladze, Zaza Simonishvili, Paata Mzhavanadze and Giorgi Chanukvadze. Later Giorgi Akobidze, Davit Kavjaradze and Nini Makharadze joined in.

M.G. – I want to ask you about Nini Makharadze: how did it happen that she joined a male ensemble?

M.R. – Nini was a student at Ozurgeti choirmaster's School when I met her. She was my student learning to play the *chonguri*. In addition to *chonguri*, I also led a *krimanchuli* class at that time. Nini tried this too and it worked great for her. First, she tried at one of the concerts, and then I took her in the ensemble without hesitation.

M.G. – Please, tell us about the repertoire

M. R. – Of course, a large part of the repertoire consists of Gurian songs: "Vakhtanguri", "Perad Shindi", "Shvidkatsa", "Iaramasha", "Ierishi", "Orira", "Guruli Perkhuli", "Guruli Mgzavruli", "Burtis Gamarjveba", *naduri* song "Shemokmedura" and many others. We

also sing Imeretian, Acharan, Kakhetian, Megrelian and Svan songs. One of the first songs we started in the ensemble was “Burtis Gamarjveba”, then we refined the song “Vakhtanguri”, we also have sacred hymns: “Mertskhalo Mshveniero”, Gurian and Kakhetian “Shen Khar Venakhi”; “Jvarsa Shensa”, “Dghes Saghvroman Madlman” and “Tsmidao Ghmerto”.

M.G. – Do you seek for and restore old songs and instruments?

M. R. – We are in constant search, looking for old songs and giving new life to them in the ensemble. For instance, we recollected and restored “Zarzmis alilo”; we also sing some songs accompanied by old instrument – *soinari*.

M.G. – Which singing style of Gurian singers do you like?

M.R. – I have greatest respect for the Erkomaishvilis. When listening to Ladime Berdzenishvili's bass, warmth pours into my heart, however, if I know anything, that is Varlam Simonishvili's variants. I myself was Giorgi Salukvadze's student. Salukvadze taught us in Simonishvili's style and I also follow his path.

M.G. – Do you improvise when singing?

M.R. – Yes, yes, I like novelties, I don't like stamped variants. For example, in “Guruli perkhuli”, I added *krimanchuli* at the end and thus it is sung by 4 voices. In some songs, I added 5th stanza to the existing 4, etc.

M.G. – Are you working on a new repertoire?

M.R. – We have decided to enrich our repertoire with urban songs and the examples from other regions, we are already working and think that listeners will like it.

M.G. – Have you had any concerts outside Guria?

M.R. – Not outside the country, but we had concerts in different parts of Georgia, participated in several festivals.

M.G. – Have you tried to revive songs in household environment?

M.R. – We participated in the project “What it is Guria” financed by the European Union, as part of which, we hoed a corn-field for a family in the village of Goraberezhoulis, and sang a *naduri*. Other neighbors were saddened: if we had known that they would hoe the corn-field, we would have agreed to film in our field.



Ensemble Vakhtanguri

M.G. – What are your future plans?

M. R. – We want to record our songs and release an audio album; Also, to enrich the repertoire with new songs and hold a solo concert.

M.G. – Thank you very much batono Mamia for the interview. I want to wish success and creative progress to you and your ensemble.

*Interviewed by ethnomusicologist
Maia Gelashvili*

Georgian singing in Finland

Part I

In recent years the awareness of Georgian singing has increased considerably in Finland.

Right now there are at least three ensembles of Georgian song in Finland. These are: Dzveli pepela, Sakanela and Tevri. The first was created in 2012. But there have been people interested in Georgian singing long time before. Some of them made strong efforts to bring that awareness to the Fins too. For example a Finnish composer, guitarist, conductor and basist Ilpo Saastamoinen had travelled to Georgia in 1983 with the aim to listen to Georgian music and to get to know e.g. Tbilisi Radio and the activities of the Georgian Folk Music Institute. His purpose was to make a radio program in Finland about Georgian folk music. Saastamoinen also visited Tbilisi Conservatoire. Saastamoinen was a member of the well-known band called Piirpauke.

Saastamoinen mentions on his home-page related to his memories from the trip to Georgia that one of the most unforgettable musical experiences of his life was when he and his friend Mika were invited by old men (veteranes from the First World War) to join them in singing. He describes how the singer of the bass voice put their heads together and so it continued– „I was listening to the voice-part he was singing and joined in“.



The poster of Ensemble Iberia for the Charity concert (2014)

Saastamoinen who had the chance to follow the rehearsals of Gordela and Rustavi made transcriptions of the polyphonic recordings of these vocal ensembles. The transcriptions were published later in the 1980's in a book with sheet notes „Kansat soittavat“ among other songs from different countries.

If people travelled to Georgia in the 1980s sometimes bringing C-cassettes and LPs from there, it seems that from the 1990s there started a long period when people travelled there more rarely.

I think it was in the 2001 or 2002 when I heard ensemble „äijät“ in Helsinki Kieku-club. It was singing polyphonic songs from different countries and among them Georgian (Megrelian) song „Kuchkhi bedineri“.

On the CD of Piirpauke entitled „Kalabalik“ released in 2006 a jazz version of Georgian song „Sartpialo“ was included along with the examples from all around the world. One may recognize the theme of „Khokhbis qelivit“ in this track. In 2010 that Kassandra choir (that I used to sing with as well and Kiehinä (conducted both by Veera Voima) was performing Acharian song „Gogov Gogov Patsiao“ and next year Kassandra had laz song „Ela Komokhti Ela“ in their repertoire. If I remember correctly the choir leader had learned the song at the workshop of some international choir-festival. The latter one was taught by Turkish choir member and Veera arranged the song.

A choir called *Hämäläisen osakunnan laulajat* performed Georgian polyphonic songs at their Christmas concert in 2010. Their CD entitled „Alilo –lauluja seimen ääreltä“ that was released in 2011 included „Alilo“ from Racha and „Shen Khar Venakhi“. It was a suggestion of composer Matthew Whittall who had been in co-operation with the choir to have Georgian songs in the repertoire. He had found sheet notes from internet and shared them with the choir. Whittall had been, for a while, interested in traditions and techniques different from the Western, and one of those was Georgian.

First workshops of Georgian singing in Finland

The first workshop of Georgian singing in Finland seems to have taken place in 2004. The key role in organizing the first workshop of Georgian singing in Finland was played by pianist Minna Pöllänen. She made the initiative for inviting Mzetamze to Finland in order to hold a workshop at Sibelius Academy. It all started when Minna heard Mzetamze performing in Holland. Minna was teaching at Sibelius Academy which provided the workshop venue for the students of the Academy. The workshop held at the Academy in Helsinki, was conducted by Nino Makharadze. Mzetamze also performed in one of the “Virtaa clubs” as organized by Pöllänen. The concert included songs related to everyday life, to daily chores, harvest, changing weather, religious customs, life and death. In the same event there was a short Georgian film „Farm in the mountains“ directed by Lia Eliava.

In June 2011 a workshop of Georgian chanting was held in Joensuu, the University of East Finland. The workshop was included in the program of the 4th International Conference of Orthodox Church Music organized by the International Society for Orthodox Church Music (ISOCM).

Workshop was run by John A. Graham. I remember Ekaterine Diasamidze-Graham and David Shugliashvili teaching as well. In the liturgies that took place at the end of the conference Georgian chants were chanted by the symposium participants conducted by Graham, Diasamidze-Graham and Shugliashvili. Each of them also delivered a paper at the conference and there also was a concert of Georgian polyphonic songs at the Lutheran Church of Joensuu. I had the chance to participate the Conference even though I didn't deliver the paper, as I was a volunteer worker there.

Singing and learning together

In the autumn 2011 I and father Damaskinos (Jaakko Olkinuora, as a layman) who was also one of the organizers of the conference started to practice together Georgian folk songs and hymns. Most of

them were from the workshop held at the Conference (for example Delivo and Erekle's Mravalzhamier), but also some others that we had heard from CDs or on Youtube. Damaskinos who was preparing his Master in Music. Soon he introduced some Georgian songs to his colleagues and students. Some of them sing on the CD “IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROSARY GARDEN - SONGS OF THE PILGRIM” released in 2014. We were both planning to create a Georgian singing ensemble. I had also started to teach some Georgian songs to my friends and later on some of them joined Iberia created in 2012.

Damaskinos travelled to Georgia in the summer of 2012 to learn the language in an intensive language education program and he also learned Georgian chanting with David Shugliashvili and Anchiskhati; Nana Valishvili he learned folk songs and playing the *panduri* (traditional one).



The poster of Ensemble Dzveli pepela (2019)

I had possibility to learn new Georgian songs and basics of *panduri* (modern one) in Athens when visiting “Caucasus” the Centre of Georgian culture (with Professor Avtandil Mikaberidze as Chairman). In December 2012 it was my fourth time in Georgia and by that time I had made the decision to start studies in a program of Georgian Folk music for foreigners at the International Research Centre for

Traditional Polyphony at Tbilisi State Conservatoire. **Iberia** was created in the spring 2012 and it functioned until 2017. There were usually 5 members in the group. In the beginning Iberia's repertoire consisted mainly of traditional Georgian polyphony, Georgian pop-folk songs and hymns. Iberia's significant co-operator was a charity society „Mapa ry“ which organized charity concerts with Iberia aimed at raising funds for the families in fragile life conditions in Georgia. Including the refugees from Abkhazia. In the concerts and at supras organized by „Mapa ry“ (Chairman Tarja Rantala) people heard information about Georgia and could taste Georgian food too. All this also contributed to the awareness about Georgia and its singing. Another charity society was „Filoksenia ry“ that organized charity concerts with Iberia at the Orthodox cathedral in Helsinki, Uspenski Cathedral (in 2012 and 2013). Iberia performed at the Choir Festival Art goes Kapakka, on private occasions (birthdays, graduation parties, etc), and also organized concerts by itself. Iberia was heard on the National Radio of Finland, in a Russian –language program hosted by Georgian Levan Tvaltvadze and in Lähiradio by Aspe & Co hosted by one of the Iberia members. Georgian Elene Saginashvili whom we had met through Finland-Georgia Friendship Society performed in the first concerts together with Iberia too.



Ensemble Tevri (2022)

Finland-Georgia Society and Konstantine Ioseliani then-Chargé d'Affaires of Georgia in Finland were present supporting and promoting.

Ioseliani's suggestion was to ask visual artist Soili Mustapää to present photos at Iberia's first performances that took place in late May 2012 at the Cultural centre of Caisa in Helsinki. Later we found out that Soili had already been to Georgia and attended workshops of Georgian singing.

Georgian songs in different ensembles

In one of the charity concerts organized by Mapa, a Chechen-Dagestani singer Liza Umarova performed „Sakartvelo lamazo“. Some of the Iberia members co-operated with her later on and Liza Umarova included more Georgian songs in her repertoire that she performed in the band Kavkaz that she created in 2015. Through Liza Umarova I met Natalia Kobakhidze a good singer of Georgian songs who had been actively promoting Georgian songs on her social media pages and also organizing feasts with Georgian food and songs. It would be a subject for another article to discuss the maintenance of the awareness of Georgian music and culture among the Georgians, as well as among other Caucasians and immigrants from the lands of the previous Soviet Union in Finland. There are several skillful Georgian singers musicians also working as teachers in Finland (mostly classical and jazz-musicians).

Other ensembles that had Georgian songs, in one part of the repertoire were Emännät functioning in 2015-2020 and Kismet which functioned in 2014-2016. Later some of the singers from Emännät joined Tevri and Sakanela. Emännät had some members from Ukraine, Russia and Estonia along with the Finns and Kismet had members from Turkey and Finland.

In 2013 Damaskinos completed his arrangement of a Georgian liturgy in Finnish and it was for the first time performed at the Church of Prophet Elijah in Helsinki in 2014.

Damaskinos, PhD-student of theology, and Maria Takala-Roszczenkos, professor of Orthodox church music, published „Pyhiinvaeltajan lauluja“ („Songs of the Pilgrim“). The publication is a collection of folk songs from different orthodox countries

including several from Georgia. There are actually two books. One is for single voice and the other for several voices. The book includes several songs from Georgia. Before "Pyhiinvaeltajan lauluja" was published there had already been several workshops "Yhteen ääneen » (with single voice) conducted by the authors of the book. Those workshops were organized by Finnish-Byzantine Music Society and included Byzantine, Znameni and Georgian tunes in Finnish, Church Slavonic and Georgian languages. Later on the workshops continued both online and in zoom.

One of the choirs that participated in one of the „Yhteen ääneen“ workshops was Molitva choir in Kuopio. Yhteen ääneen workshops were held in different parts of Finland and in november 2013, in Kuopio. Molitva choir specialized in singing old church songs from the traditions mentioned above.

Psaltikon, which functioned in 2016-2019 was a male choir led by Damaskinos, had Georgian hymns and paraliturgical songs in their repertoire.

The album entitled „IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROSARY GARDEN - SONGS OF THE PILGRIM“ (CD) based on the Pilgrim Songbook (PSHV 2014), was released in 2015 ; it included a selection of spiritual songs from the rich folk tradition of Eastern Christendom. The content includes Balkan, East Slavic and Georgian songs. Damaskinos was responsible for the musical design, and Gaudior ry – for the production.

Dzveli pepela (2013) was created by Sauli Heikkilä, editor-in-chief of the folk music magazine (Kansanmusiikki), in 2013. Sauli, a teacher and specialist in Tuva throat singing had been intrested in Georgian singing for many years. He invited me to join the group and be a trainer for the 3 male singers. All of them had experience of singing in groups or choirs as well as solo singing. Right now there are four members in Dzveli pepela. Most of the time the number of members has been 5 including the tutor. During the years of existence Dzveli pepela has performed together with other ensembles and artists in

Georgian restaurants, cultural centres, at churches and private celebrations such as birthdays and supras. Dzveli pepela has organized its own concerts. The repertoire includes work, calendar, urban songs, lullabies ; love and ritual songs. The repertoire has consisted mainly of the songs taught by the tutor in Georgia as well as the songs learned at Nana's workshops in Helsinki. Some songs have been learned from Youtube, or CDs.

The songs have been learned both by ear and from sheet music.

Over the years Georgia as an country with its different attractions, history and culture became more familiar to the Finns. Books and TV-serials concerning Georgia were presented and new restaurants were opened. Dzveli pepela and Tevri have also performed there. (Especially Georgian house). Dzveli pepela performed at the presentation of the book „Löytöretkiä Georgiaan“ („*Discovery trips to Georgia*“), which was edited by Berglund Krista - Ikonen Susan - Laitila Teuvo - Ropponen Ville) at a new Georgian restaurant Purpur. Purpur was opened by famous actor Ville Haapasalo who had been a guide in TV-serial „Kaukasia 30 päivässä“ („Caucasia in 30 days“) and has advanced the interest towards Georgia in Finland. More and more often one could hear about someone to travelled to Georgia.

In 2017 a Finnish Ethnomusicological magazine „Musiikin suunta“ published an article entitled „Introduction to Georgian polyphony“.

It is obvious that Georgian choirs and dance groups visiting Finland over the years have also advanced the awareness and popularity of Georgian singing in Finland. Last concert with a Georgian choir performing in Finland was last may (2023) when Basiani had a concert at the famous Rock church of Helsinki.

Meri-Sofia Lakos
Student of Musicology
Helsinki, Finland

Beneficents of Georgian Song

Varlam Simonishvili

(1884-1950)

2024 marks the 140th anniversary from the birth of Varlam Simonishvili, a renowned singer and choirmaster, honoured artist.

For the lovers of Georgian folk music, Varlam Simonishvili's name is associated with the performance of Gurian traditional songs and hymns. With his creative work the brilliant singer and famed choirmaster played a great role in the cultural life of Guria. He brought to light the pearls of Gurian folk music, created unique, Simonishvili's variants of individual voice-parts of this or that song, and brought the singing heritage inherited from the ancestors to a particular height. Of the folk examples introduced by Varlam Simonishvili in folk performance especially noteworthy are: Khelkhavi, Vakhtanguri, Brevalo, Khasanbegura, Mtsvanesa da ukudosa, Burtis gamarjveba, Dzveli abadelia, Datvma lkhini gadikhada, Indi-mindi, Tsamokruli...



Varlam Sominishvili

Abundance of small groups and large choirs created by Varlam Simonishvili speaks of his thorough knowledge of choral work and organizational

talent. They were engaged in active concert work and performed with equal success for both Georgian and non-Georgian listeners during the so-called heyday of stage folklore (implying Soviet Olympiads, inspections). These groups or collectives did their best to preserve traditional performance principles of Georgian folk songs; much significance was attributed to dances, round dances, and instrumental music; they did everything possible to preserve the unique hue of their native region.

Varlam Simonishvili is known to have compiled a list of ancient Georgian rituals and dances and made efforts to preserve them. All his concerts were embellished with pearls of folk choreography such as "Perkhuli", "Khorumi", "Qolsama". Simonishvili, who had an excellent physique and rare appearance, was a good dancer himself. He had an unusual step, different from others. The audience was amazed by his aerial movement. From others he also strictly demanded refined manners and noble behaviour, care for appearance. Well-built, staid, broad-shouldered, humble, philanthropist, amiable, always smiling, smooth-spoken, eloquent, hospitable person was a standard of manhood for his friends. He was often visited by: Rema Shelegia, Mikheil Gabelia, Hasan Tsetskhladze, Kitsi Gegechkori, Kirile Pachkoria, Kote Potskhverashvili and others. Simonishvili often met with Dimitri Patarava, Artem Erkomashvili. These meetings usually turned into unforgettable evenings of singing and chanting. At Gigo Erkomashvili's funeral, the funeral hymns were performed by this very trio. Simonishvili also sang with other luminaries of Gurian song; such as: the Chavleishvilis, the Berdzenishvilis, Melkisedek Nakashidze, Giorgi Babilodze, Giorgi Yobishvili, Ivliane Kechaqmadze, Ivane Chkhaidze, Iliko Khomeriki, Ruben Vasadze, Davit Mdinaradze, Shalva Siamashvili, Toma Mujiri, Samuel Chkhikvishvili, Besarion Intskirveli, Galaktion Talakvadze, Gigo Mgелadze, Ladiko Dolidze, Akaki Basilashvili, Iliko Morchiladze and others.

Varlam Simonishvili raised a whole pleiad of wonderful singers who continued the path of the eminent teacher and graced many choirs. His students included: Shermadin Chkuaseli, Domenti Karchava, Varlam Vashalomidze, Ese Chanishvili, Mikheil Shavishvili, Ilarion Sikharulidze, Tele Yobishvili, Ilarion Intskirveli, Apolon Chavlesvili, Vasil Abashmadze, Solomon Chanuqvadze, Toma Mujiri, Valerian Kavtaradze, Kote Papava, Pavle Kavzharadze, Diomide Mdinaradze, Ivane Akhvlediani, Teimuraz Kvirkvelia, Gedeon Mzhavanadze, Karlo Urushadze.

Simonishvili shared masterpieces of Gurian polyphony with his students from Achara, Imereti, Samegrelo, and Abkhazia. His students toured in Spain, France, Poland, Holland, England, Germany and many other countries. There is hardly any ensemble in Georgia that does not have Varlam Simonishvili's songs in its repertoire.

Tristan Sikharulidze recalls that Varlam Simonishvili persistently asked his singers to preserve the habits of folk performance, and to follow traditional manner of articulation. Particularly noteworthy is Simonishvili's merit in the popularization of Gurian songs with chonguri accompaniment. He played this instrument masterly and, as a representative of folk professionalism, he himself composed beautiful lyrical songs.

Fortunately, the singer's voice has been recorded, and posterity has the opportunity to appreciate his velvety timbre, sophisticated technique, amazing ability to improvise, extraordinary lightness and flexibility, the fieriness and tenderness so characteristic of Gurian songs, high performance skills, stage artistry, thanks to which Varlam Simonishvili occupies an honorary place in the Pantheon of great folk song masters.

Simonishvili was known to have thorough knowledge of all the voice-parts of Gurian (and not only Gurian) songs, but when performing in front of the audience, he sang only bass part. According to famous singer Dimitri Imedaishvili, Varlam's flexible

bass "went up like a falcon." In most complex polyphonic songs, the bass sung by him is truly incomparable, and the trio – composed of Samuel Chavleishvili, Aleksandre Makharadze and Varlam Simonishvili – is still considered one of the best in Guria.

Artem Erkomaishvili considered Varlam Simonishvili, to be an outstanding singer and the last connoisseur of Gurian hymns along with Dimitri Patarava.



Varlam Simonishvili's Choir (1920)

Simonishvili learned chanting from Anton Dumbadze, who raised up to 5000 chanters in Guria, Imereti and Samegrelo. According to one of Simonishvili's descendants, one day, when Varlam was returning from school singing a song, David Dumbadze (Anton's son) asked him who he was and took him with. At that time, hymns were chanted mainly by the nobility, and the clergy were indignant when Simonishvili was brought to the church – why should a peasant's son chant a hymn? But Davit Dumbadze's decision was unshakable, and for four or five years, Simonishvili received deep knowledge of sacred music from the Dumbadzes. As he mentioned later, Anton Dumbadze's teaching course included 3750 hymns. After having learned them, Varlam passed the exam at Ozurgeti district theological seminary, with Pilimon Koridze, who had just re-

turned from Italy. Koridze immediately noticed the talent of the 14-year-old boy, taught him the musical alphabet and deepened his musical education. On Anton's instructions, it was Pilimon Koridze who recorded the hymns that Varlam had learned from the Dumbadzes.

Varlam Simonishvili passed away on 23 March, 1950, at the age of 66. He is interred in the courtyard of the Shemokmedi Monastery.

"We experienced the loss of our dear teacher painfully... Long time after Varlam's passing, we, his students, were still bound by his love. When we met each other at parties or in families, we performed Varlam's songs, which were recorded several times by the television and radio... these songs still ease my troubles", Mikheil Gogotishvili tells.

After the teacher's passing, on Varlam Vashalomidze's initiative his students Gedeon Mzhavanadze, Domenti Karchava, Ilarion Sikharulidze, and Apolon Chavleishvili, created ensemble Dila which decently continued the performing traditions of Varlam Simonishvili's school.

In 1984 memorial-house of the great beneficent of Gurian song was opened in Shemokmedi. Nestor, Varlam's son, made a great contribution to the collection and preservation of documents. The exposition depicted Simonishvili's life and work in stages. Unique, relict material was discovered in the funds, city archives and private collections in St. Petersburg, Moscow, Tbilisi and other cities. Over his fifty-year teaching career, Varlam Simonishvili raised over 2,000 students!

Varlam Simonishvili is an undeniably outstanding and special figure among the Gurian choirmasters of the first half of the 20th century. It can boldly be said, that he is one of the most authoritative and prolific figures of Gurian School of Singing.

Nino Kalandadze, Lela Urushadze

The material is adapted from the book „Masters of Georgian Folk Song“. Guria. Vol. 1

Latvian History of Nanina

7-14 September, 2023 – were the happy days in the creative life of Nanina creative group of ethnomusicologists when we had another opportunity to go on tour to Latvia, and meet our beloved ensemble Saucejas, to share Georgian traditional musical culture with Latvian listeners, and get to know better and experience the uniqueness of their musical art.



The poster of Latvian Tour

It was through the initiative and efforts of Saucejas to implement the project aimed at holding joint concerts and lecture-master classes in four cities of Latvia – Jekabpils, Lūznava, Daugavpils and Riga. We had the chance to meet with this ensemble many times before, both in Georgia and Latvia. Over the years, the members of both groups, along with a wealth of experience in creative interaction, have accumulated a lot of emotions, warmth and love for each other. As is typical of friendship, we found a lot in common – female membership, the same year of ensemble creation (2003) and therefore the 20th anniversary in 2023, the abundance of mothers of many children in both ensembles and children raised in rehearsals and much more... However, main reason for this connection is similar values, in particular, a special attitude towards traditional culture: tender protection of folklore roots, which we consider to be main valuable task. It was precisely thanks to this that we met and discovered each

other. Therefore, there, in this foreign country with a different culture, we felt in a very close, homely environment.



After the joint concert in Daugavpils

We divided the concerts into blocks and structured them in a kind of dialogue form, where we responded to any theme or genre of Latvian tradition with the examples of Georgian folklore on the same theme. Thus, cult-ritual, labor, love, humorous songs and dances of female repertoire alternated. Presenting folk music of the two countries in a single space and context via such an alternation turned out to be very impressive and informative. The similarity between Georgian and Latvian songs of the same genre became easily perceptible, despite their different geographical or cultural areas; in addition, emphasized was the individuality and identity of both people's musical thinking. Most of the songs in the repertoire of ensemble Saucejas are polyphonic, and our "responses" also polyphonic, with Georgian sound, made this musical dialogue very interesting.

We had the idea to perform lullabies together, where every Georgian "lullaby" would be responded by a Latvian one. This is how our joint singing bound as chain, in which the audience listened to the tenderest performance, charged with maternal feelings, and some even had tears in their eyes. The idea to make a joint collage of "Lullabies" as a separate video came up spontaneously, but under the busy pre-planned tour program it would be difficult

to realize. However, when so many people are fired up by one idea, all resistance recedes. In the last minutes before departure, we still managed to shoot a video of Latvian-Georgian "Lullabies". We could not have wished for a better environment! A beautiful, old wooden house and a family relic – the cradle in which many children, including all six children of our hostess, were raised.

We had other joint numbers in the concert program. You should have seen with what awe and inner responsibility they sang Imeretian "Sabodisho" together with us. And we joined in Latvian humorous couplets and, according to the estimates, we did not at all do badly.



After the concert in Jekabpils

We experienced many more precious moments and emotions together with the audience. One such was our performance of the Latvian song "Put, Vejini" in voices, with unusual chords for them, which caused a feeling of surprise. From the very first bars, we could see how special warmth flowed into the hearts of the listeners. At first cautiously, here and there, then more boldly, the voices from the hall joined in, with each new stanza, the entire space was gradually, filled with a strong, unified sound and an amazing emotional charge. On the last chord of the song, everyone – both performers and the audience – were standing and beaming a happy smile.

“The Museum Singing” together with Ensemble Didgori

Another, this time, a world-famous Georgian song, was followed by a similar reaction. No matter where we were – at a concert or in a social situation, in the capital city or in the outlying region, “Suliko” always had a magical effect on the Latvians. I remember many times from previous tours when, having recognized the melody, everyone would stand up and join us in singing the really beautiful melodies of the song. There were also cases when the Latvians continued subsequent verses of “Suliko” in their mother tongue.

The lecture and master-class part of the meetings went on impressively. Master classes were held by Victoria Samsonadze and Maia Gelashvili, but lectures were delivered by Maka Khardziani. We shared our knowledge and experience with the listeners from all four cities: introduced important features of Georgian folk music, presented lively illustrative material, we made the Latvians sing in Georgian, and performed round dances together. When sharing their impressions, everyone noted that they felt a greater desire to come to Georgia.

I would like to note, that for each new concert, we – both ensembles significantly changed the repertoire in order to arouse greater interest and better know each other’s musical traditions. With each new meeting, we felt the roots of our friendship grew stronger and the foundation was laid to the idea of implementing further joint projects. The future joint plan of Nanina – Saucejas has already been set.

Next stop – Georgia.

Victoria Samsonadze
*Ethnomusicologist, co-founder and
member of Nanina group*

On the initiative of chanter-singers choir Didgori and with the support of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth of Georgia, the “Singing Museum” project was implemented at Giorgi Chitaia Tbilisi Ethnographic Museum.

Within the framework of the project, many interesting events were held at the open-air museum from July to October.



The poster of Megrelian Concert

In Megrelian, Gurian and Kakhetian courtyards Didgori held 3 solo concerts of the folk music examples from these regions. They also performed in three joint concerts together with ensembles Lalkhor, Perkhisa and Margaliti; the project also included master classes of Georgian folk songs, which Didgori conducted together with choirmasters – Lika Liparteliani, Beka and Gocha Bidzinashvili. In addition to the concert and educational activities, 5 Christmas songs/hymns were prepared and recorded as part of the project. The audio-recording took place in the courtyards of the Ethnographic Museum. The video clips were posted on the social media pages of Didgori and the museum in the pre-Christmas period.

The “Singing museum” is the most important project for us. It can be said that the project breathed a new life to Didgori. The ethnographic museum is an ideal environment for presenting our creative

work, which was felt throughout the entire project. Along with Georgian listeners there were many foreign guests among the audience. Very impressive were the lessons of folk singing on the beautiful balcony of the house brought from the village of Khani, Baghdati municipality. As a rule, such master classes are attended mainly by foreigners. A large number of Georgian participants was a pleasant surprise for everyone. It is always important for Didgori to involve friendly ensembles in their events. Joint concerts leave unforgettable impression on listeners.



The poster of the joint master class of Didgori and Lika Liparteliani

I would like to thank the ensembles: Lalkhor, Perkhisa and Margaliti; Also, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for such support of and Giorgi Chitaia Ethnographic Museum for hosting. This is an excellent support for the self-acting ensembles...

2024 is an anniversary year for Didgori – 20 years from its creation; accordingly, we promise many interesting activities to our listeners and lovers of Georgian folklore.

Givi Abesadze
Soloist of Ensemble Didgori

Foreign Polyphony

Serbian Old-style Secondal Two-part Singing

In Serbia, two-part singing is quite a common phenomenon. Particularly interesting is secondal polyphony, clear examples of which are encountered in many parts of the country.

The songs of old layer are mostly encountered in the songs of travelling, harvesting, weaving, wedding, saints', pastoral genres. They are distinguished in their archaic mode, which includes non-tempered intervals; Also, in richly ornamented melody, with a sort of "playful" coloring.

This type of two-part singing is usually performed by three men or women. This style, in turn, includes various performance techniques, which are determined by their function. Here, disseminated are the following kinds of two-part singing: a) heterophonic; 2) heterophonic-bourdon; 3) Boudon two-part singing.

Heterophony is characteristic of weaving, family Saints' and wedding songs. They are characterized by a predominantly unison performance of the main line of the melody, where the leading voice is more developed than the accompaniment. Here, towards the finale, which is also the tonal centre, the voices crisscross and create the sound of a major second, which the singers sustain for a long time. Heterophony is present in West, East and central Serbia.

Heterophonic-Bourdon singing is heard in the hoeing songs and the examples preparing for work, here the leading voice is more prominent, because it is accompanied by Bourdon and towards the end of the phrase, it also sometimes lags behind this Bourdon sound by a major second, which is why it is called the "leading downwards". In this case, the final second will be sung longer. This kind of singing is present mostly in West, but also in some parts of central Serbia.



**Female and male ensembles performing
Serbian polyphonic songs**

Bourdon two-part singing is also encountered in “evening songs” named “na glas” (“glas” – melodic model), where the melody is only developed by the leading, starting voice and another voice joins it only later, towards the end. In terms of style in Serbia bourdon singing is mainly present in two main forms: as the Dinaric, which prevails in the West, and Shop, that prevails in the East part of the country (Shop region is spread within the three countries: Serbia, Bulgaria and North Macedonia).

Main difference between the two is that in Dinaric there are accented crossing the parts, forming the interval of seconds, and in Shop there is a monothematic, condensed melody that occurs above the drone. The mentioned Bourdon styles are also characterized by continuous sounds in the accompaniment. To maintain them, singers use the cross-breathing technique.

A distinctive feature of these old songs is “calling out”, which means down-sliding of the voice at the end of the song, on the long vowel “eee” by women, and on the short exclamation on the same vowel “e” by men.

Another tradition of polyphonic singing is called “na bas”, “to bass”. According to some theories, it developed in the middle of the past century, but some similarities with intervals in bagpipe and some other instruments playing; it might be also said it has much longer origin in these regions. It is relatively homophonic and diatonic; it is performed by three, or sometimes also about ten performers, although there is only one soloist that sings the upper part. In essence, it is a two-part movement in thirds, but ending in a fifth. These songs have no clearly defined function and time or place of performance; they are sung during work and at family or village celebrations.

In some cases, the songs performed by women “to bass” also exhibit the features of old village songs, such as a secondal interval, a variable mode structure, a non-tempered scale, and a chain-breathing sound. Such songs are called “hybrid”.

In different parts of the country may be found variants of the song that is sung “to bass”, and are called “zumba” (probably as onomatopoeic word for instrumental accompaniment). They feature narrative contents of humorous character sung by the soloist against the background of “Zumba, Zumba” (or “Zumbe, Zumbe”) motorically sung by the accompanying singers.

Along with these two basic styles (second diaphony and “to bass”), in rural tradition there are also examples of singing with parallel thirds, as a part of town musical heritage.

In general, old Serbian village songs are characterized by fairly solid melodic-rhythmic modes, to which various texts can be sung. But still main characteristic feature is secondal sounding, which gives the style its name. Today outstanding performers of the style are the groups “Crnućanka” (from Rudnik Mountain region) and “Rybashevke” (from Užice region).

Jelena Jovanovic
Ethnomusicologist

History of One Song

“Vitsbil-Matsbil”

“Vitsbili-Matsbil” is one of the favorite songs for the Svans; it is included in their repertoire of almost all today’s folk ensembles and is fairly popular among both Georgian and foreign audiences. Particular attitude of the Svans to this song is explained, firstly, by the fact that it conveys the freedom-loving character of this ethnographic group and its fighting spirit against serfdom. As it is known, from time immemorial, each community in Svaneti was governed by its own *makhvshi*. In the Middle Ages, when the communal order cracked and the age of feudalism began in Georgia, “privileged” families appeared in Svaneti as well (the Ruchegianis, Darchkelanis (later the Dadeshkelianis, the Gelovanis, the Ghibianis), who often had attempts to dominate entire population of Svaneti. These attempts were particularly opposed by the so-called *Balszemuri* (i.e. above Bali) Svaneti. Bali is the name of the ridge located between the villages of Becho and Latali. Becho and the villages below it were *Balskvemouri* (i.e. below Bali) Svaneti, which was ruled by the Dadeshkelians, and therefore it was also called *Sadadeshkeliano* (lit. belonging to the Dadeshkelianis). Latali and the villages above it belong to *Balszemouri* Svaneti and it was called *Ubatono* Svaneti; however, this worried the Dadeshkelianis so much that they gave no rest to the Svans above the Bali, and the people decided to take revenge on them.

Embittered by their masters’ injustice, brothers Vitsbil and Matsbil Kibolani, from the village of Latali, who had been elected leaders by the village, escaped to the forest for three years, where they accumulated a large supply of bullets and food. They secretly dragged all this to the tower standing at the end of the village of Ladreri and fortified themselves there.

The village and the arable and mowing fields around it were clearly seen from the tower. Appearing on this territory in the daytime was tantamount to death for lords, their family members or servants. The brothers practically left the masters without harvest. Months passed. The Dadeshkelianis had to do something, to save themselves from dying of hunger, and

they did the following: night after night, they quietly removed the earth from the tower’s foundation, and in its place, they placed pine stumps, which burned well. In the end, the foundation was set on fire, and when the stumps turned to ashes, the tower began to fall slowly. It is said that the great lord Sortman Dadeshkeliani climbed to the top of a rather distanced tower and, delighted with the news, began to laugh loudly. At this moment one of the brothers aimed a gun at him from the tower, shot him in the head with one bullet and pierced his heart with the other. The tower fell, the brothers died, but they took revenge on their lord and showed the will of free people to the Dadeshkelianis. People recognized the selfless brothers as heroes fighting for freedom.

This very story was the basis for the song “Vitsbil-Matsbil”, more precisely the verse “Two Kibolani Brothers”. We have two versions of this verse. One was written down by Akaki Shanidze, in Becho in 1923, and the other – by Varlam Topuria, in the village of Iskar (Etseri community), from Sonia Shervashidze, in 1927. Both variants are available in the book “Svan Poetry” (A. Shanidze, V. Topuria, M. Gujejiani. Tbilisi, 1939). The verse is fairly extensive, only a short fragment is used in the song. As for the song, in Svaneti it is encountered in several variants. All of them are performed by a male choir, with *chuniri-changi* accompaniment. There are reports of a round-dance version of the song, however it has not reached us in this form.

Short content of the fragment of this heroic-epic ballad used in the song is as follows: “You, wretched Dolians, who eat the leftovers of the Etserians,/ We cannot endure the Etserians, from us they take away our children in the cradles..../ They gathered in Lechqani of Becho, selected two brave men, two brothers Vitsbil and Matsbil. You spent three years in the forest preparing guns, fourth year you returned to the tower at the end of Ladreri“...

*The material processed by Maka Khardziani,
basing on the books: “Svan Poetry” (Tbilisi, 1939),
“Ladler” (Tbilisi, 1971), and
Vakhtang Pilpani’s narration.*

ვიცბილ-მაცბილ

Vitsbil-Matsbil

ჭუნირი
Chuniri

ჩანგი
Changi

რა შოვ და რა შო ვ და, სა - ბრა - ლ დო - ლა - რ,

ra shov da ra sho v da, sa - bra - l do - la - r,

რა შოვ და რა შო ვ და, სა - ბრა - ლ დო - ლა - რ,

ra shov da ra sho v da, sa - bra - l do - la - r,

*

* ბანი იმეორებს ტექსტს ზედა ხმებთან ერთად.
The bass part's text is identical to that of the upper voices.

ლეჟ - რი დო - ლა - რ, რა შოვ და, ვო რე რო რა შო ვ და,
 lezh - ri do - la - r, ra shov da, vo re ro ra sho v da,

ლეჟ - რი დო - ლა - რ, რა შოვ და, ვო რე რო რა შო ვ და,
 lezh - ri do - la - r, ra shov da, vo re ro ra sho v da,

ტეფ - ნა - მ - სა - დე ე - ტე - რა - ლეშ, რა შო ვ და,
 t'ep - na - m - sa - de e - tse - ra - lesh, ra sho v da,

ტეფ - ნა - მ - სა - დე ე - ტე - რა - ლეშ, რა შო ვ და,
 t'ep - na - m - sa - de e - tse - ra - lesh, ra sho v da,

1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6. 7.

ვო.
vo.

ვო.
vo.

1. საბრალ დოლარ, ლეჟრი დოლარ,
ტეფნამსადე ეცერალეშ.
2. იამჟი ეცრალს დეშ ლოგჭენიდ,
ბოფშარს ჰაკვნარშ გვეღეშგალეხ.
3. ჩუ ლუზვერ ლიხ ბეჩვი ლეჩყან,
ქავ ხოთიშახ იოორი მაარე.
4. იოორი მაარე, იოორი ლახვბა,
ჟახად ხეჟხანს ვიცბილმაცბილ.
5. სემი ზაილდ ცხეკას აჯადხ,
ჟაგიშ ი პინტხიშ ლამარას.
6. მესტხვამ ზავჟინ სგავ მეხდელხიშდ,
ლადრერ ჰოკერ მურყვამთეჟი.
7. ვოი საბრალე ვიცბილმაცბილ,
ხილზიგალედ ლადრერ ჰოკერ.

1. sabral dolar, lezhri dolar,
t'epnamsade etseralesh.
2. iamzhi etsrals desh logch'enid,
bopshars hak'vnarsh gvegheshgalekh.
3. chu luzver likh bechvi lechqan,
kav khotishakh ioori maare.
4. ioori maare, ioori lakhvba,
zhakhad khezhkhankh vitsbil matsbil.
5. seemi zaild tshek'as ajadkh,
zhagish i pintkhish lamaras.
6. meshtkhvam zavzhin sgav mekhdelkhishd,
ladrer hok'er murqvamtezhi.
7. voi sabrale vitsbil matsbil,
khilzigaled ladrer hok'er.

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