

# №25

The  
V. Sarajishvili  
Tbilisi State  
Conservatoire  
International  
Research  
Center for  
Traditional  
Polyphony  
  
B U L L E T I N

Tbilisi, December, 2018

*The News*

Ethnomusicological Life in Georgia

Grandmasters of Georgian Song are Slowly Leaving Us

The 9<sup>th</sup> International Symposium on Traditional Polyphony

*Beneficents of Georgian Song*

Piruz Makhatelashvili

*Foreign Performers of Georgian Folklore*

Ensemble Samshabati from France

*One Georgian Traditional Ensemble*

Aghsavali Choir

*Foreigners about Georgian Music*

Frank Scherbaum

*Traditional Family Ensemble*

Andghuladze Family of Singers

Ensemble Rustavi in Japan

Mixed Georgian-Foreign Families on Guard of Georgian Traditions (part I)

*Ethnographic Letters*

Work Songs of Guria (part I)

The Singing Amer-Imeri

*About One Traditional Instrument*

Panduri

Festival “Baghia Chveni Kveqana”

*About One Traditional Ritual*

*Batonebi* Cult in Georgia and Traditional Music Related to It

Batonebis Nanina

## **From Musicology of the Earth to Computational Ethnomusicology of Georgian Music**

When I first encountered Georgian vocal polyphony in 2011, during a workshop led by Frank Kane, I was immediately fascinated. My practical musical education by then had consisted only of some flute lessons as a child and ten years of classical guitar training as an adult. Later, as a University student, I took courses in musicology for two years. As my main topics, however, I was studying geology and physics to become a seismologist, a profession which I have exercised for more than thirty years.



**Doing seismological fieldwork  
in the Jordanian desert  
(2000)**

As a seismologist, who like to describe their science as „Musicology of the Earth“, I was intrigued by Frank Kane’s way of conceptualizing Georgian singing as “vibration sharing”. I immediately started to wonder about the physical aspects of these mysterious vibrations. Soon after our first meeting, we jointly began to perform some “seismologically inspired” experiments to investigate the generation of body vibrations during singing. It quickly became obvious that with special sensors body vibrations during singing can be recorded all over the body. Now, my scientific curiosity was triggered!



After my first recording session with Murad Pirtskhelani, Islam Pilpani, and Gigo Chamgeliani during our pilot study

Trying to read everything I could find on Georgian music, I eventually learned that ethnomusicologist Susanne Ziegler was working very close to where I live. She agreed to meet and since then has generously shared insights from her long-standing experience. She also introduced me to ethnomusicological research practices, e. g. the challenges related to classical transcription of Georgian music into Western staff notation. This eventually helped me realize that the recordings of body vibrations during singing could possibly help to obtain clean recordings of singer's voices in terms of pitch, intonation, and voice intensity, while they are singing together in their natural singing environment.

By 2014 it had become clear to me, that singing and my musicological research of Georgian music had become more than just a hobby and I applied for a research leave of absence from my position as professor of geophysics. In 2015, together with singer and ethnomusicologist Nana Mzhavanadze, who I had met the year before, I performed a field trip to Georgia to test, if the idea to use recordings of body vibrations during singing could have any serious use. One of the most memorable evenings during that trip was at the Chamgeliani house in Lakhushdi, when - besides enjoying the generous hospitality of the Chamgeliani family - we were able to record Islam Pilpani, Murad Pirtskhelani and Gigo Chamgeliani using larynx microphones.

Encouraged by the results of this pilot project, I applied for a larger field expedition to record Svan village singers in Svaneti and Svan settlements in other parts of Georgia. During the summer of 2016, Nana Mzhavanadze and I together with Levan Khijakaze, and with the financial support through the University of Potsdam, spent three exciting months in the field.

The tangible result is now a unique new collection of audio, video, and larynx-microphone field recordings, which is open to all researchers of Georgian music. The intangible results are even more precious to me, memories of beautiful landscapes and incredible people who temporarily shared their lives with me and taught me again and again that singing together is an invaluable treasure.

In recent years, we have been seeing a revolution in how computer technology changes the way we live and interact with the world around us. Not surprisingly, these changes have also started to influence ethnomusicology and have led to the emergence of a new field of science called „Computational Ethnomusicology“.



After the recording session in Ghebi during our field expedition 2016, with Izo Lobjanidze, Elene Lobjanidze, Tina Melashvili, Nunu Lobjanidze, and Nana Mzhavanadze

In the course of my involvement with Traditional Georgian Music, I have become convinced that new technologies and computational methods can be very useful for ethnomusicological research. Not as a replacement to classical approaches, but as a complementary perspective. For me, computational ethnomusicology has be-

come the perfect research field which allows me to combine my passion for science with my love for traditional Georgian music. For the future, I hope that these new developments can contribute to a better documentation and possibly even a better understanding of some aspects of this precious cultural heritage.

***Frank Scherbaum***  
Professor of Geophysics  
at the University of Potsdam

**Note:** The text, as it is reproduced here, has been restored to the original version, authored by me. This includes the copyright notes on the photographs, which have magically disappeared in the Bulletin.

Frank Scherbaum,  
Berlin, Feb., 2019