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*The Vano Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire International Research Centre
for Traditional Polyphony*

December, 2025

Tbilisi

Ethnomusicological Life in Georgia

July to December 2025

Festivals, Conferences, Competitions

25 to 27 July	Tbilisi Open Air Ethnographic Museum hosted “Art-Geni” Festival
28 September	Festival of Kartlian Traditional Song and Chant in Kaspi.
12 to 14 October	Second round of the 9th National Competition of Georgian Children’s and Juvenile Choirs in Tbilisi.
25 October	The village of Korenishi in Lechkhumi hosted the Festival of Lechkumian Traditional Song.
8 November	The Gala concert and award ceremony of the 9th National Competition of Georgian Children’s and Juvenile Choirs at the Tbilisi State Conservatory.
24 November	Tbilisi hosted Folk Festival of Tbilisi Children’s and Juvenile choirs.

Concerts, Evenings, Exhibitions, Jubilees

1 July	Evening of Megrelian folklore in Zugdidi.
2 July	Concert of ensemble Didgori at Tbilisi State Conservatoire.
2 July	Joint concert of ensembles Nai and Rekheuli in Ozurgeti.
4 July	Concert of children’s folk ensembles at Ozurgeti Folklore Centre.
7 July	Chanting University students’ report concert at the Folklore State Centre.
14 July	Ilia State University student’s report concert at Ilia State University.
19 July	Ensemble Margaliti’s concert in Ozurgeti.
30 July	Khulo Drama Theater hosted a joint concert of Ensemble Ialoni and local ensembles.
31 July	Evening of traditional music in Zugdidi.
10 August	The event dedicated to Anzor Erkomaishvili’s 85th Anniversary at Ozurgeti Drama Theatre.
16 August	Ensemble Margaliti’s concert in Mestia.
7 September	Ensemble Margaliti’s concert in Ambrolauri.
13 September	Ensemble Didgori’s concert at Niko Lortkipanidze’s memorial house in Chunesi.
14 September	Ensemble Didgori’s concert at Niko Nikoladze’s memorial house in Didi Jikhaishi.
24 September	Ensemble Ialoni’s concert at Ozurgeti Folklore Centre.
25 September	Ensemble Rustavi’s concert at Batumi Centre of Music.
26 September	Ensemble Erisioni’s solo concert in Ankara, Turkey.

27 September	Ensemble Didgori's concert at Mukhran Machavariani's memorial house in Argveta.
28 September	Ensemble Didgori's concert in Kutaisi.
30 September	Ensemble Sathanao's solo concert in Lentekhi.
7 October	Joint concert of ensemble Didgori and Finnish musicians at the Gallery of the Folklore State Centre.
9 October	Ensemble Sathanao's solo concert in Zugdidi.
10 October	Evening of Georgian-Finnish music at the village Matani.
12 October	Ensemble Margaliti's concert in Akhmeta.
14 October	Ensemble Rustavi's solo concert in Rustavi.
22 October	Concert dedicated to Anzor Erkomaishvili's 85th anniversary at Jansugh Kakhidze Tbilisi Music and Cultural Center.
25 October	Concert of ensemble Ialoni and local ensembles in Zugdidi.
28 October	Jansugh Kakhidze Tbilisi Music and Cultural Center hosted the concert "Georgian and European Early Music" as part of Tbilisi Baroque Festival.
1 November	The 20th anniversary concert of Giorgi Garakanidze Folk and Church Music Festival in Batumi.
3 November	Ensemble Sathanao's concert in Batumi.
3 November	Ensemble Rekheuli's solo concert in Ozurgeti.
12 November	The Youth Center Hall of the Trinity Cathedral hosted Gurchiani's Creative Evening.
15 November	Gala concert of Choirmasters' Schools of Georgia at Jansugh Kakhidze Tbilisi Music and Cultural Centre.
16 November	Ensemble Margaliti's concert in Gori.
6 December	Ensemble Shav nabada's concert in Barcelona.
15 December	Solo concert of Kaspi Choirmasters' School at Omar Kelaptrishvili Cultural Center in Kaspi.
18 December	Ensemble Ialoni's concert of urban music – "One Distant Dream" at Tbilisi's Karvasla.
19 December	Georgian Folk Song Ensemble Martve's solo concert In the Anzor Erkomaishvili Concert Hall.
21 December	The State Ensemble Basiani's solo concert at Jansugh Kakhidze Tbilisi Music and Cultural Center.
22 December	Ensemble Margaliti's solo concert In the Small Hall of the Shota Rustaveli Drama Theatre.
25 December	A reporting concert of Adjara's Academic Ensemble Arsiani was held at the Batumi State Music Center.
28 December	A joint concert of ensemble Didgori and the Kareli Choirmasters' School at Kareli Cultural House.

Lectures, meetings, master classes, presentations, etc.

15 to 22 July	Ethnomusicologist Nino Nansishvili held master classes of Georgian folk music in Belgium.
23 to 25 July	Master classes of Acharan dance at the Folklore State Centre.

27 July	4.08 – Three members of the Ethnomusicologists’ Creative Group Nanina were invited to Helsinki to conduct masterclasses of Georgian folk song.
30 July to 12 August	A group of Canadians and Australians led by Levan Bitarov attended master classes of Georgian traditional music conducted by Chamgeliani sisters (in Lakhushdi), Beso Turmanidze (in Merisi), and Avto Turkia (in Lanchkhuti).
1 to 14 August	Ethnomusicologist Malkhaz Erkvanidze conducted master classes in Georgian traditional music for the British and Irish in the village of Bukistsikhe, Chokhatauri district.
29 August to 7 September	Levan Bitarov, Chamgeliani sisters, and Avto Turkia conducted master classes for foreign guests as part of Levan Bitarov’s authorial tour.
9 to 24 September	A group of Germans, British and Americans led by Levan Bitarov attended master classes in Georgian traditional music conducted by Chamgeliani sisters (in Lakhushdi), Beso Turmanidze (in Merisi), and Avto Turkia (in Lanchkhuti).
10 to 24 September	Ethnomusicologists’ Creative Group Nanina’s master classes in the cities of the UK.
16 September	Ozurgeti Folklore Center hosted a presentation of the online journal “Georgian Folklore,” a catalog of archives, and translated books published by A. Erkomaishvili Folklore State Center of Georgia.
30 September	A presentation of the publications of A. Erkomaishvili Folklore State Center of Georgia.
30 September	Zugdidi hosted a presentation of ensemble Artguri’s project – “Educational Project on Georgian Chanting in Zugdidi – a Significant Example of Supporting the Tradition.”
4 to 12 October	Choirmaster Tornike Skhiereli conducted master classes of Georgian traditional music in several cities of Germany.
11 October to 30 November	Ethnomusicologist Nana Mzhavanadze conducted masterclasses of Georgian traditional music in the cities of Leuven, Liège, Antwerp (Belgium), and Paris (France).
18 November	Rustaveli Theatre hosted the premiere of the feature film about Anzor Erkomaishvili’s life “Shavi Shashvi Chioda”.
4 December	Batumi Drama Theatre hosted a presentation of the anthology “Georgia-History, Culture, Ethnography”.
12 December	At the National Palace of Youth in Tbilisi, the presentation of Tristan Sikharulidze’s monograph was held.

Concert tours

9 to 13 July	Ensemble Didgori toured with concerts in Finland.
20 to 27 July	Ensemble Shavnabada’s concerts in Several cities of Europe.
27 July to 4 August	Three members of Ethnomusicologist women’s creative group “Nanina” were on a concert tour in Helsinki (Finland).

31 July	Ensemble Rustavi's concert tour in the city of Elmschorn (Germany).
17 to 25 August	The Achara State Ensemble Arsiani toured with concerts in Bulgaria.
3 to 6 September	The Achara State Ensemble Arsiani toured with concerts in Turkey.
9 September	Ensembles Rustavi's concert tour in London.
10 to 24 September	Ethnomusicologists' Creative Group Nanina's concert tour in the cities of the UK.
12 September	Ensemble Rustavi and Nanina held a joint concert in London.
14 September	Ensemble Rustavi's concert tour in the city of Bidgoszcz, Poland.
19 to 21 September	Student's choir of the Chanting University participated in the festival "Antiche Radici" in San Paolo Albanese, Italy.
17 to 19 October	Ensemble Margalepi's concert tour in Stuttgart, Germany.
17 to 21 October	Ensemble Didgori participated in the Second Beijing International Week for Intangible Cultural Heritage.
30 October to 13 November	Ensemble Basiani participated in the 43rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference in Samarkand.
5 to 9 November	Folk group of Ozurgeti Centre of Culture directed by Tristan Sikharulidze participated in International Folklore Festival in Lithuania.
5 to 10 November	Ensemble Rustavi's concert tour in Shanghai, China.
6 to 18 November	Ensemble Margalepi's concert tour in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia
14 to 17 November	Concert tour of Akhali Banas Gundi in Czech Republic.
23 to 25 November	Concert tour of the Chanter's Choir of the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Italy.

Expeditions

1 to 2 July	Ethnomusicologist Giorgi Kraveishvili's expedition to the village of Sarpi.
6 to 7 July	Ethnomusicologist Maia Gelashvili's expedition to Shuakhevi Municipality.
14 to 21 July	Expedition of Sandro Natadze to the villages of Kakheti.
20 to 31 July	Ethnomusicologist Giorgi Kraveishvili's expedition to the villages of Chokhatauri, Ozurgeti, Lanchkhuti and Tsageri municipalities.
28 to 30 July	Ensemble Ialoni's expedition in Zemo Achara.
11 to 15 August	Expedition of Sandro Natadze to the villages of Mtskheta-Mtianeti
12 to 15 August	Ethnomusicologist Giorgi Kraveishvili's expedition to the village of Sarpi.
19 to 22 August	Expedition of Sandro Natadze to the villages of Imereti.

**23 to 25
September
12 October
24 to 26
October**

Ensemble Ialoni's expedition to Guria.

Expedition of the Chanting University Students to Kakheti.

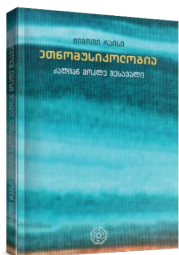
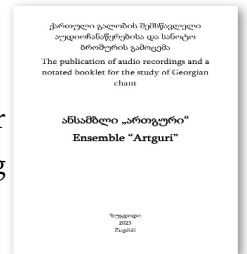
Ensemble Ialoni's expedition to Samegrelo.

Publications



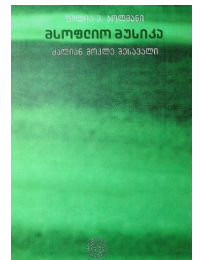
The Shota Rustaveli National Scientific Foundation has published the monograph “Musical and Choreographic Folklore of the Georgians and Abkhazians Living in Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan”

Ensemble Artguri has published audio recordings and sheet music brochure for learning Georgian chanting



The Folklore State Centre has published Timothy Rice’s book - “Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction”

The Folklore State Centre has published Philip V. Bohlman’s book “World Music: A Very Short Introduction”



Ethnomusicologists’ Creative Group “Nanina” has published an educational sheet music collection “Songs from Ensemble Nanina’s Repertoire”

The Charity Foundation Kartuli Galoba published the monograph of renowned Gurian singer – Tristan Sikharulidze



Prepared by Sophiko Kotrikadze

Nanina's UK Tour

Ethnomusicologists' Creative Group Nanina visited the UK on special invitation, where they held master classes and concerts of Georgian folk songs in various cities of England and Scotland. The two-week trip turned into an emotionally charged cultural encounter, which once again showed how great the love for Georgian folk music is in Britain. The tour aimed at introducing diverse traditional music of Georgia to local audiences and building the bridge called intercultural ties.



Ensemble Nanina 2025 UK tour poster

Over the course of two weeks, our group had the opportunity to share the unique world of Georgian traditional music and at the same time observe the insights and teaching methods that exist in the Western ethnomusicological space.

Nanina's British tour was organized by Neil McKay, the founder of Cultural Center Pitchblend in Bristol. Main goal of the centre is to popularize cultural heritage of different countries in contemporary British space.

Our chief hosts were British ensembles performing Georgian folk songs: Maspindzeli from London (dir. Bernard Barnes), Perebi from Oxford (dir. Holly Taylor-Zuntz), Bednieri from Birmingham (dir. Eb Jordan) and Chveni Khmebi from Lancaster (dir. Beth de Lange).

Georgian names of the ensembles and the abundance of Georgian traditional songs in their repertoire already

speak about the attitude of British society towards Georgian culture. It should be noted that despite the rather rich singing experience of these ensembles, the reason for their special interest was Nanina's repertoire, distinguished in the abundance of lesser-known variants of traditional songs, and its utmost closeness to authentic performance in terms of form and manner.

As part of the tour, 18 master classes and 9 concerts of Georgian traditional music were held in various cities of England and Scotland: London, Oxford, Birmingham, Bristol, Stroud, Manchester, Crediton, Lancaster and Glasgow. In London we held a joint concert together with the State Ensemble of Georgian Song and Dance *Rustavi*.

Especially important for us, was the attitude of English and Scottish listeners to Georgian folk music, which should be considered the fruit of many years of friendship and creative collaboration. Such relations between Georgia and Britain started around the 1990s, when Georgian ethnomusicologists Edisher Garakanidze and Joseph Jordania were first invited to the UK to hold master classes. From then on, Edisher Garakanidze regularly visited Great Britain for this purpose. It was precisely

then that the foundation was laid to the cultural relations that continue to live on today thanks to the new generation of musicians.

Three years ago, on Neil McKay's initiative Festival "Tsutisopeli" was founded; it is held every year in different cities of the UK. The goal of the festival is to foster inter-cultural dialogue through sharing music and traditions.

This year's festival, along with Nanina, saw the participation of all the four above-mentioned British ensembles: Maspindzeli, Perebi, Bednieri and Chveni Khmebi. The highlight of the entire tour was festival "Tsutisopeli", as part of which together with us, the leaders of local ensembles also held a master class, performing the songs taught by Edisher, as well as the songs they had learned during their trips to Georgia...



Ensemble Nanina in the UK

At the end of the festival, thanks to Neil McKay's efforts, a festive table with Georgian dishes and wine was laid out. It was led by English tamada – Beth de Lange – with Georgian traditional toasts. Georgian urban and folk songs performed by Nanina and the British hosts decorated the table.

This tour once again convinced us that Georgian traditional music is not only a legacy of the past, but also a living and active organism, constantly evolving through interaction, observation, and new contacts, that traditional music is a unique phenomenon that has the power to bring people from completely different cultures closer together and make them friends... It is especially gratifying that the successful tour has also opened interesting perspectives for the future of Nanina, which we hope will be realized in many aspects.

We would like to express special gratitude to the support of our tour organizer, Neil McKay. We would also like to thank all who listened and learned Georgian folk songs with genuine interest and saw us as living bearers of this tradition.

Maia Gelashvili

ethnomusicologist, co-founder of group Nanina

43 Years of Inspiration from Georgian Singing

I heard Georgian songs for the first time in September 1982 when I was a student in the United States. Although I had been a music lover all through my childhood and adolescence, I felt something totally new listening to this music. It moved me deeply and awoke my curiosity. Listening to the Melodiya anthologies of the time, I was fascinated by the diversity and the power of Georgian singing.



Photo: Frank Kane and ethnophore Andro Simashvili. Credit: Geoff Burton, 2002

On my first visit to Georgia in June 1984 I attended rehearsals and concerts with the Tbilisi Ensemble, the State Ensemble, and Rustavi. My time there made a huge impression on me, and I went home to New York determined to do whatever was necessary to learn more Georgian songs and to try to understand their essence. I was fortunate enough to know extremely talented musicians who shared my passion. We founded the “Kartuli Ensemble” in the USA. It was actually loose constellation of singers with nuclei in New York, Boston, Minneapolis, and sometimes other places. The different groups studied and learned Georgian songs and gave concerts.

I knew I would have to learn the Georgian language to better understand the songs and, hopefully, one day, to talk with Georgian singers and to learn about their music. That seemed like a big challenge in 1985 when Georgia was still part of the Soviet Union and it wasn’t easy for US citizens to go there.

In the summer of 1986, an intensive Georgian language course was offered at the University of Chicago with Howard Aronson and Dodona Kiziria as the teachers. I was disappointed to learn that there were no further Georgian language classes available in the United States but intrigued to discover that the

Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations (INALCO) in Paris, France offered a three-year program in Georgian (taught by Georges Charachidze, Dominique Eligoulachvili and Lea Nash). I moved to Paris in September 1988 and enrolled in this program. I also sought out the Georgian singers in Paris and began to sing with them in concerts as part of the “Merani” Ensemble.

In early 1990, the Georgian Ministry of Culture got in touch with me to propose that the Kartuli Ensemble come to a music festival in Georgia in June 1990. Although I was already living in France, I coordinated with the singers in the United States to organize this trip. We spent about two weeks in the country, mostly in Imereti, with concerts in cities such as Kutaisi, Vani, Tsqaltubo, and Samtredia, among others. It would be difficult to count all the remarkable groups and singers we met, but they

included the Sanavardo, Guria, and Lile Ensembles. Edisher Garaqanidze traveled with us for most of the tour and we became friends. In 1993, I founded the Marani Ensemble in Paris. Originally, most of the people in the group were not Georgian and had no experience with Georgian music. More and more talented singers joined the group, and we began to give concerts in Paris and elsewhere in France. Marani visited Georgia in 1996 and 1997, traveling to Kakheti and Guria in particular to learn with various singers (Levan Abashidze, Achiko Medolishvili, Tristan Sikharulidze, etc.). Marani also began to invite Georgian singers to Paris to work with our ensemble, to lead public workshops, and to sing with us in concert. Our first guest was Tristan Sikharulidze in 1996. Later guests included Islam Pilpani, Malkhaz Erkvanidze, Polikarpe Khubulava, and Andro Simashvili.

In 1997 I founded the Irinola Women's Ensemble in Paris. The group performed at the first Symposium in Tbilisi in 2002. People who came to concerts and were impressed with the singing of Marani and Irinola started to invite me to lead workshops to teach them Georgian songs and to help them to understand how to sing them. I started to realize that I enjoyed teaching more than singing in performance or preparing groups to sing on stage, so I eventually stopped leading the Marani and Irinola Ensembles and decided to devote most of my time to teaching.

Initially, my workshops involved mostly teaching Georgian songs. After the death of Edisher Garaqanidze in 1998, some of his pupils led groups and workshops in the UK, but there was almost no teaching on the European continent. My first workshops were in France (1994), the UK (2002 and 2003), and Germany (2005). As time went on, my focus shifted to teaching *how* to sing Georgian songs. Georgian singers have a remarkable set of habits for the use of the voice, sound, and vibration, and how people's vibrations meet when they sing together. My work is inspired by this and builds on this. The more I focused on the principles of how to sing Georgian music at my workshops, the more I realized that these principles are very useful for singing other kinds of music. The people attending my workshops began to come as much for the techniques that I teach as for the learning of Georgian songs.

This is the core of my work today. Many of the people who attend my workshops in France, for example, are part of the revival of Occitan traditional singing that is taking place here. They find in Georgian folk music not just a vocal technique that is compatible with their way of singing, but also the values of togetherness and unity, which are really the essence of Georgian music according to Georgian singers themselves.

I am happy that my workshops have inspired many people to travel to Georgia to discover the country for themselves, to work with Georgian singers, and to start groups which sing Georgian songs in many places in Europe. I hope this modest contribution reflects the enormous generosity that Georgians have shown me all through my adult life as I have sought to learn about their music and culture.

Frank Kane
Voice teacher

Last Soinari Player — Varden Meparishvili (1877–1969)

Varden Meparishvili was one of the last representatives of *Soinari* players. The melodies preserved to this day for playing on the Gurian *soinari* are known to us thanks to him. The Meparishvilis were renowned *Soinari* players and boasted the best performers for generations.



Varden Meparishvili playing a soinari

In the book “Ancient Instrumental Foundations of Georgian Folk Music (Part I. Pan Pipe)”, published in 1936, Valentina Steshenko-Kuftina notes: “The last representatives of the line of performers on the multi-pipe *salamuri* – Gurian *Soinari*, passed away quite recently; some of them are still alive and continue this ancestral tradition. Among those who preserved the hereditary culture of *Soinari* are: Ioseb and Karpe Kikvadze (now deceased); Levan Berdzenishvili (one of the most famous masters, passed away recently) and Vladimir Berdzenishvili (is alive, but has given up this craft); Ivane and Eprem Meparishvili (Varden’s

father and grandfather); Sardon and Tito Sikharulidze (the latter made two *Soinaris* for the Museum of Georgia); Ivane and Ivaki Shatirishvili (both live in Surebi, they have passed on two *Soinaris* to us).

Varden was a grandson of Ivane Meparishvili, a renowned *Soinari* player. His father Eprem passed away early, and grandfather took care of him in his father’s stead, from whom he learned to play and make *Soinari*. As he recalled, his grandfather and father often spent entire nights reciting poetry to the accompaniment of the *Soinari*, which they played during the pauses between verses. In 1931 Shalva Mshvelidze visited the village of Tsipnari (Kokhnari community) and recorded on wax cylinders the melodies played by Varden on small, then big *Soinari* and on the one with the so-called Sharabidze’s tuning. (for listening follow the link <https://audiomack.com/tedo881/playlist/63251844>)

In 1934, Valentina Steshenko-Kuftina visited the place and later included in her book a six-part cycle of the pieces for *Soinari*, which she had transcribed from Meparishvili’s performance. For her Varden sang his family poem “Mival Guriashi, mara”, with *Soinari* accompaniment.

It is noteworthy that he later entrusted the small *soinari*, on which he had performed these melodies, to Steshenko-Kuftina (the tonal scale, photograph, and melodies for the small *soinari* are preserved in the book).

In the early 1950s, Meparishvili endured a difficult period: he spent two years in prison on charges of slandering. Although he was ultimately acquitted by the court, the harsh prison conditions adversely affected his health.

In 1959, folklorist Kakhi Rosebashvili visited the 82-year-old soinari player, recorded several of his instrumental performances, and subsequently transcribed them into musical notation. According to Varden Meparishvili's granddaughter, Khatuna Sikharulidze, Varden did not possess a musical instrument at that time. He therefore gathered Johnson grass, bound it with wild cherry bark, and crafted three soinari instruments. Two were given to Rosebashvili, while he retained one for himself. The soinari fashioned by Varden Meparishvili is preserved today in the folk instrument collection of the Grigol Chkhikvadze Laboratory of Ethnomusicology at the Tbilisi State Conservatoire.



Meparishvili honorary certificate

In the last years of his life, Varden Meparishvili regained his enthusiasm for playing the soinari. The National Archives of Georgia preserve a 1959 recording in which he performs on the soinari a humorous song – *“I built a house of gold and silver”* (In the National Archives catalog, Varden Meparishvili is listed under the name Kirile, which we believe to be a mechanical error, since by 1959 no other Meparishvili soinari player was still alive.)

During the 1960s, Varden Meparishvili was several times a laureate of both republican (Chokhatauri, Tbilisi) and all-Union (Leningrad) Olympiads, and a recipient of honorary diplomas. At the end of his life, he lamented only one thing – *“I can no longer perform as I did in my youth.”*

One of Varden's fellow villagers recalls that in his younger years he loved visiting him, enjoying generous feasts and listening to songs performed on *Soinari*. He still remembers one such performance, full of sadness: *“When I grew old and weak, / My face withered, became wrinkled, / And after all, my dear Soinari / love be it there or not.”*

For centuries, *Soinari* was a part of Gurians' life, a companion of a night traveler and hunter. With *Soinari* they scared away wolves, called dogs, lured birds, calmed the sick, grazed animals and played in the cornfield – during rest time, when young corn stalks sprouted; family members would spend nights playing the *Soinari*.

As Valentina Steshenko-Kuftina notes, unfortunately, already in the 1930s young people regarded the *Soinari* as a childish amusement, and most performers even felt ashamed before their listeners... Varden Meparishvili passed away in 1969.

Unfortunately, despite his efforts to pass on this tradition to future generations, today *Soinari*'s direct legacy is lost, and we can only judge and learn from what has survived in audio and written sources. Last *Soinari* made by Varden Meparishvili is kept in the family of his descendants as the most precious relic. Steshenko-Kuftina

noted that there was a cyclic form for playing the *Soinari*, which indicates its high level of development. According to the researcher, the six-part cycle of *Soinari* pieces, inherited by Varden Meparishvili from his father and grandfather, served to reveal the instrument's registral variety, as far as this was possible within its six-tone range.



Last soinari instrument

In the 1970s Giorgi Salukvadze attempted to revive the *soinari* and establish it within the Ozurgeti ensemble *Iadoni*. For this purpose, he had a special metal *soinari* made, added a seventh pipe, and arranged the sequence of pipes in ascending order. In doing so, the *soinari* clearly departed from its traditional form. The ensemble *Iadoni* continues to perform “Aguna” and “Safundruko” accompanied by such *soinari* instruments to this day.

I believe that both the Gurian *Soinari* and the Megrelian *Larchemi* are priceless treasures of Georgian cultural heritage, in which much remains to be discovered and studied.

Tevdore Gogoladze

researcher of Georgian folk wind instruments.

The material is taken from a personal interview with

Khatuna Sikharulidze and from the book

“Ancient Instrumental Foundations of Georgian Folk Music.

Part I. Panpipe”, Steshenko-Kuftina, V.K., 1936.

Innovative Collection

“Songs from the Repertoire of Ensemble Nanina”

Recently, the Ethnomusicologists’ Creative Group *Nanina* published its vocal repertoire in the form of a collection. The primary impetus for this publication was the considerable interest of both Georgian and international audiences in *Nanina*’s repertoire, which is distinguished by its dialectal and genre diversity, original performance practices, and abundance of fascinating variations.



Ensemble Nanina's song collection

The edition is innovative: two-part, three-part, and instrumentally accompanied songs are presented in multiple audio tracks – one with full sound (*tutti*), and others with highlighted voices and karaoke versions, enabling listeners to sing the missing voice themselves. In addition, songs performed with round dances and choreography are accompanied by video recordings. The uniqueness of the publication thus lies in its multifaceted, integrated approach. The collection offers several modes of engagement:

- **Listening** – through recordings of full sound
- **Reading** – with musical notation and lyrics
- **Studying** – using versions with highlighted individual voices
- **Self-performance/Creativity** – with karaoke versions that allow listeners to sing the chosen voice accompanied by the remaining voices, thereby becoming an active participant in polyphonic harmony.

This type of multifunctional collection, published with multitrack audio and video supplements, represents the first precedent in Georgia. It enables even inexperienced listeners to:

- Learn all three voices of a song with ease (through notation and highlighted tracks)
- Sing the learned voice along with the karaoke version
- Study songs accompanied by dance or round dance in their traditional performance form through video recordings.

The collection includes musical transcriptions of twenty songs from *Nanina*’s repertoire, with accompanying Georgian and Latin texts. The notation is supplemented with annotations (dialect, genre, performance features, ethnographic context, passport data), content, verbal texts for karaoke versions, explanatory notes in both

Georgian and English, as well as international transcription of the Georgian alphabet to facilitate the pronunciation of Georgian words.

The appendix contains audio and video materials that reinforce the learning process and render traditional performance forms accessible for study and practical use. We extend our gratitude to our British colleagues – Caroline Bithell and Susan Thompson – for the video materials included in the appendix. The appendix is uploaded to the digital platform of the collection and is accessible via the QR code provided at the beginning of the publication.

The author of the karaoke concept and musical director of the project is Victoria Samsonadze. The songs were recorded at the sound recording studio of the A. Erkomaishvili State Folklore Center by Archil Burchuladze. The project was financially supported by the Ministry of Culture of Georgia.

The aim of the collection is to popularize Georgian traditional polyphonic music and to facilitate its study through innovative approaches, employing multitrack audio-video resources and thereby increasing the accessibility of Georgian musical folklore both locally and internationally.

Maka Khardziani

Author of the project idea

Project leader and compiler of the collection

Director of the Ethnomusicologists' Creative Group Nanina

Georgian Folk Song in the UK

The love for Georgian traditional music in Great Britain has a history of thirty years. It began in 1993, when Edisher Garakanidze and Joseph Jordania were invited to London to conduct master-classes in Georgian folk singing. From then on, Edisher Garakanidze was invited annually to various cities across Britain for the same purpose. Although he passed away in 1998, the work he initiated continued to flourish, and today several ensembles performing Georgian folk songs exist in Britain. Among them are: Maspindzeli, Trio Samaya, Perebi, Bednieri, Chveni Khmebi, and Torola. Our readers are already familiar with Trio Samaya (<https://shorturl.at/fLxB0>) and Ensemble Maspindzeli (<https://www.facebook.com/Maspindzeli/>) from previous issues of the bulletin.

Now we would like to introduce three newer ensembles: Bednieri, Chveni Khmebi, and Perebi.

Their leaders – Eb Jordan, Beth de Lange, and Holly Taylor-Zunts – share their stories.

Ensemble Bednieri [Happy] Leader: Eb Jordan

We began singing Georgian folk songs together in 2023. At first, it was something of an experiment. In Birmingham, I was looking for people with whom I could perform Georgian songs. Since then, we have grown to around thirty regular members, formed a choir, and started meeting every two weeks. Anyone interested is welcome to join us. Over the past two years, we have attended many *supras* (traditional feasts) and participated in numerous events and festivals.

We learned several songs from Nino Naneishvili, who was invited to Birmingham as a teacher. In 2024 and 2025, we had the honor of hosting *Amer-Imeri* and *Nanina* during their tours in Great Britain, and we learned new songs from them. This year, our first trip as a group took place in Wales, where we spent a weekend studying and performing Georgian songs, dancing, feasting, and enjoying time together. We chose the name *Bednieri* (“Happy”) because we are happy to sing Georgian songs, and this brings joy to everyone. We have many connections with Georgia – some members of our group have Georgian roots, while I have been singing and studying Georgian songs for more than seven years. My first experience of Georgian polyphony came at the age of twelve, when Ensemble *Amer-Imeri* visited our school in 2002. That experience sparked my love for Georgian singing. Later, I studied music and ethnomusicology for four

years at the University of York, and for three years in Indonesia. In 2018, I joined Ensemble *Maspindzeli* in London and once again encountered the extraordinary vibrations of Georgian music.

I have been fortunate to work with many outstanding Georgian teachers, both in Britain and abroad. My experience includes traveling across Georgia and learning from renowned singers and ethnomusicologists such as Nana Mzhavanadze, Levan

Bitarovi, Nino Naneishvili, the Chamgeliani sisters, Murad Firtxelani, Dato Zurabiani, the Turmanidze family, and others. I especially highlight my study of Kakhetian ornamentation with Eka Shoshiashvili.



Ensemble Bednieri

Together with *Maspindzeli*, in 2023 I participated in the international festival *Georgia*, where I learned songs and dances from various groups, including *Lalkhori*. Tornike Skhiereli and Ana Chamgeliani taught me to play *chuniri*. I also practice regularly with Frank Kane and am a member of his “Georgian Singing Teachers’ Group of Great Britain.” I draw on this experience in leading Ensemble *Bednieri*, deepening respect for Georgian song and culture, and creating a sound world inspired by Georgian singing traditions. We study the repertoire of all regions and ethnographic

groups of Georgia, to showcase the stylistic diversity of the country.

Recently, we formed a second, smaller group to study more complex repertoire – church chants, Gurian songs with *krimanchuli* (yodeling), Kakhetian ornamentation, and more.

In May 2026, in collaboration with Pitchblend, we plan to hold the festival *Tsutisopeli* in which we hope to host Ensemble *Adilei* and the Chamgeliani sisters. We also look forward to organizing many more singing workshops and Georgian dance classes in the future.

Ensemble Chveni Khmebi [Our Voices] Leader: Beth de Lange

I first sang a Georgian song in 2001 at the “Unicorn Natural Voice” camp. It was only a fragment of *Elesa*, taught to me by an English friend, but I was immediately captivated by the harmony. Soon afterwards, I was fortunate to attend the “Mountains” summer school at Kinnersley Castle. For several days, together with other enthusiasts, I immersed myself in learning folk songs. This summer school gave me both enthusiasm and confidence to teach a few Georgian songs to my community choirs. These included *Shen Khar Venakhi*, *Chela*, and *Aslanuri Mravalzhamieri*, which my choir members greatly enjoyed.

Later, I registered with Michael Bloom’s online network of Georgian choirs in Britain. Through this, I learned that Ensemble *Anchiskhati* was touring Great Britain. I invited them to hold a concert and workshop at Derby Cathedral. This was the first time that singers living in Derby heard Georgians perform live and learned songs directly from them. The experience was fascinating for all of us.

Growing interest in Georgian song encouraged me to form my first Georgian singing group in Derby. This was never a performance group – we simply met to sing together for enjoyment. As a member of the Natural Voice Network (NVN), I invite everyone to share the pleasure of singing, and performance is not always our goal. While in Derby, I tried to bring as many Georgian singers as possible to our city to sing for us and lead workshops. Among them were Nana Mzhavanadze, Malkhaz Erkvandze, *Mzetamze* and *Satanao* ensembles.

In 2017, I moved to Lancaster and began conducting Georgian singing workshops. These workshops were open to all and attracted many participants. I decided to prepare the group for a concert at Lancaster Priory. Unfortunately, our plans were disrupted by COVID-19. To prevent the spread of the virus, we canceled the concert, and the following week lockdown began. After lockdown ended, one of the group members, Sarah Thomas, asked if we could meet again to sing together. I was not ready to recreate an open group, so I invited a few friends to meet at one member's home. It was then that the idea of forming a performance group emerged.

We began performing at local charity events and eventually fulfilled our dream of singing at Lancaster Priory.

This was so successful that now, every year at Christmas, we are invited to perform *Alilo*. The name of the group – *Chveni Khmebi* ("Our Voices") – expresses the joy we feel in singing Georgian songs, while also acknowledging that we perform them with a strong Lancashire accent! I also re-established a workshop group, open to all, which continues to thrive.



Ensemble Chveni Khmebi

Since moving to Lancaster, we have been fortunate to host several Georgian ensembles. We began by welcoming Badri Jimshelishvili's youth choir. Later, thanks to our partnership with Pitchblend, we hosted ensembles *Musikeli*, *Yaloni*, and *Amer-Imeri*. This year, we had the honor of hosting *Nanina* as part of the *Tsutisopeli* festival.

I have already learned many songs, so when choosing repertoire for my groups, I consider several factors: whether I like the song, whether I want to sing it, and how easy it will be for my singers to learn. We mainly sing folk songs, but we also enjoy performing urban pieces such as *Gazapkhuli* and *Suliko*. We continue to expand our Christmas repertoire as well.

Last year, our friend Lasha Futkaradze filmed us singing *Mravalzhamieri* learned from Badri. The video went viral in Georgia, and we received many warm and loving comments.

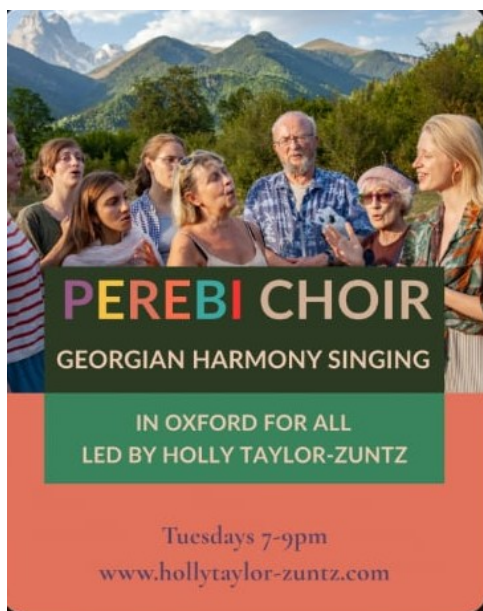
Because of family circumstances, I could not travel much, but in 2013 I had a year-long break. One child had grown up and left home, while the other had not yet been

born. I took advantage of this and visited Lakhushdi village in Svaneti. It was a memorable journey: I had the honor of tasting *chacha* at Givi Firtxelani's birthday feast, hearing the Chamgeliani sisters sing, visiting a small mountain church, and traveling to Ushguli.

Chveni Khmebi and my workshop group continue to meet and sing together. This year, we are planning three Christmas performances: one at Lancaster Priory, another in the Lake District, and a third for a local environmental organization. We are also talking about visiting Georgia together to go on a walking tour – and of course this will also involve singing!

Ensemble Perebi [Colors] Leader: Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Perebi is a newly established mixed choir in Oxford dedicated to Georgian polyphonic singing. The group was formed in October 2025 and is open to singers of all genders and abilities. *Perebi* focuses on the spirit at the heart of Georgian song.



I am a Natural Voice leader, and I lived in Georgia for several years, learning songs directly from local tradition bearers. I integrate Georgian polyphony with somatic and embodied vocal practices, making complex harmonies more accessible and alive for community singers. Through my study of the Georgian language and travels across the country, I can explain to choir members the cultural context, history, and meaning of each song we learn. I also lead workshops and weekend courses on Georgian singing and vocal practice (hollytaylor-zuntz.com); I sing at festivals in Georgian villages such as Merisi and Lakhushdi (devotionalarts.org); and together with Susan Thompson, I co-host the podcast *Voices of the Ancestors* (www.voicesoftheancestors.co.uk).

Ensemble Perebi

For several years, I directed the Oxford-based women's Georgian choir *Kalta*, which built a strong community around traditional singing. In 2025, this project evolved into *Perebi*, becoming a mixed choir. The group has already hosted guest teachers Nino Naneishvili and Frank Kane, as well as ensembles *Amer-Imeri* and *Nanina*, invited by Pitchblend. Oxford has firmly established itself on the map of Georgian singing "hotspots" in Great Britain.

The name *Perebi* ("Colors") was chosen with care. In Georgian, the word carries multiple shades of meaning and appears in words such as *mravalperovneba* ("diversity," literally "many colors") and *qvelaperi* ("everything," literally "all kinds").

Symbolically, it expresses diversity within unity. This perfectly suits the choir, where different voices intertwine to create a unified, vibrant sound. *Perebi* symbolises the group's aim: to celebrate difference, inclusion, and the rich colours that arise when individuals sing as one.

The Return of Meskhetian Archival Materials to Performing Practice

Since 1901, various audio archives in Georgia have preserved extensive collections of recordings of Georgian traditional music. Among these, Meskhetian songs are among the least recorded, and consequently, Meskhetian music remains one of the least studied Georgian musical dialects. Ethnomusicological research on Meskheta began only in the 1930s for several reasons. From the 1830s, this region was the subject of a territorial dispute between Tsarist Russia and the Ottoman Empire – a dispute later inherited by the USSR and the Republic of Turkey. Access to Meskheta was strictly controlled by Soviet authorities, and this isolation largely explains why the in-depth study of Meskhetian folk music commenced only in the 1960s, an endeavor associated with Valerian Maghradze.

Below is an interview conducted by Baia Zhuzhunadze, an employee of the IRCTP, with ethnomusicologist Victoria Samsonadze – a choirmaster, consultant at the Akhaltsikhe Choirmasters' School, and a researcher whose special interests include Meskheta and its musical culture.

B.Zh. — Victoria, you have made a significant professional and personal contribution to the study and publication of Valerian Maghradze's archive. It will soon be a year since you began working as a consultant at the Choirmasters' School in Akhaltsikhe, where you teach archival recordings to children.

V.S. — Thank you for your interest in such an important issue as the transmission of Meskhetian musical culture to future generations and its revitalization. I am delighted to have the opportunity to share my professional experience and scholarly observations with the students of the Choirmasters' School. I am grateful to Mr. Anzor Erkomaishvili, the Folklore State Center of Georgia, its director Mr. Giorgi Donadze, and Ms. Lika Liparteliani, Head of the Creative Direction of the Choirmasters' Schools, who entrusted me with this important work.

You rightly noted that the observation of Meskhetian musical traditions and the collection of audio materials have been ongoing for nearly a century. The surviving audio materials from the field expeditions of composer Shalva Mshvelidze (1932–33) and ethnomusicologist Grigol Chkhikvadze (1949) demonstrate that the old Meskhetian musical tradition was still preserved – albeit in limited form – in the memory of certain folk singers of the time. It is also evident that this once polyphonic, genre-diverse, melodically rich, and original ancient tradition was, by then, marked by the disappearance of Georgian elements, standing on the verge of extinction and in need of preservation.

Fortunately, in subsequent years, the distinguished composer and patriot of the region, Valerian Maghradze, undertook the task with great zeal and dedication. He assumed the burden of saving, reviving, and breathing new life into the Meskhetian musical tradition. By tracing remnants of polyphonic thinking in Meskhetian villages,

he assembled an ensemble through which he presented to the public his own polyphonic interpretations of old monophonic Meskhetian examples. Thus, it can be stated with confidence that Valerian Maghradze, through his collecting and ethnomusicological work, laid the foundation for the stage performance of Meskhetian traditional songs.

Shota Altunashvili, who frequently accompanied Valerian Maghradze on expeditions, also made a significant contribution to the preservation and popularization of the region's performance traditions. A few years before Altunashvili's passing, I had the good fortune to meet him. I vividly recall his joyful expression when he learned that young women from the conservatory interested in folklore (now ethnomusicologists: Maia Gelashvili, Ketevan Bantsadze, and your colleagues) had come to Akhaltsikhe in 1999 specifically to seek out and record Meskhetian songs.

I still recall his joyful expression when he learned that young women from the Conservatoire interested in folklore (now ethnomusicologists: Maya Gelashvili, Ketevan Bantsadze, and myself) had come to Akhaltsikhe in 1999 specifically to seek out and record Meskhetian songs. Altunashvili sang for us with great enthusiasm and shared the distinctive features of the songs of his region.

I remember that, as we departed, we immediately sang in three voices *Samkrelo*, which we had learned from him on the spot. For me, this was both a discovery and an occasion for admiration of Meskhetian song. It was during this first expedition that I became deeply interested in the songs of the region. Subsequently, I devoted a substantial part of my professional work to the study and performance of Meskheti's musical culture, a commitment that continues to bring me great satisfaction.

Particularly noteworthy is the contribution of Zaza Tamarashvili, who has led this work for many years and has played a major role in educating future generations in Meskheti, instilling in them a love for the songs of their native region.

Currently, in addition to directing Ensemble *Meskheta*, Zaza Tamarashvili serves as a choirmaster at the Akhaltsikhe Choirmasters' School. It is a great honor for me to collaborate with a person of such experience and professional excellence.

B.Zh. — What is the teaching process like? How comprehensive is it?

V.S. — In general, the curriculum of the Choirmasters' Schools includes the study of traditional music from both native and other regions. The students master folk songs, traditional chanting, instrumental performance, round-dance movements, and oral folklore. Thus, the teaching process is both diverse and engaging.

From time to time, I visit Samtskhe-Javakheti to inspire students with the traditions of their native region and to explain the historical trajectory of musical traditions and folk examples before they reached us. I emphasize the ethnographic context accompanying each song we perform today and highlight the importance of restoring and reviving Meskhetian songs. Using specific examples, I try to demonstrate the cultural

treasure they possess and the significance of their mission in preserving and transmitting this heritage. Every meeting with them also enriches me, providing energy and motivation, as I witness their profound interest.



Akhaltsikhe Chormasters School

B.Zh. — What is the attitude of children and listeners toward the revived archival material?

V.S. — The issues we discuss at our meetings certainly involve the revival of archival materials. This year, at the Akhaltsikhe Chormasters' School, we implemented the project *Unforgettable Pearl*, within which we revived a remarkable ancient Meskhetian table song, *Gegutisa mindorzeda*. After famili-

arizing themselves with the theoretical aspects, listening to variants, and engaging in lengthy discussions, the children approached the practical learning of the song with renewed enthusiasm. They gained a deeper understanding of the song's content and their own role in its revival.

During the filming, which took place in the ancient Meskhetian Crowned Hall, the children brilliantly embraced the role of heirs to their ancestors and revived the ancient Meskhetian table tradition through song. The video of this performance can be viewed on the website of the Folklore Centre, where one can witness the children's remarkable engagement in this vibrant archival reconstruction. <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1BZEQehtzG/>

B.Zh. — As we know, most of Maghradze's recordings are monophonic. How do you polyphonize monophonic examples?

V.S. — This is a highly sensitive issue that requires a careful and nuanced approach. At first glance, the polyphonization of a single-part example may not appear particularly challenging for a professional musician. However, when dealing with archival recordings—especially those reflecting vanished polyphony—the task demands in-depth study, ranging from regional traditions to the subtle nuances characteristic of dialectal performance. Considering all the field-specific features, united by the syncretic nature of folklore, I refer to this process as “musical restoration.” When I engage with an ancient restored example, I truly feel like a restorer. In this work, one cannot simply give free rein to imagination; rather, each sound must be placed precisely, without losing its meaning, while breathing new life into it in accordance with the example's overall context and the local characteristics of folk musical thought.

B.Zh. — Do you use restored examples in real life, in addition to the ensemble's repertoire?

V.S. — It happens naturally. What is part of one's soul inevitably flows into life. The same will occur with children: when they wish to sing, they will express themselves

through song in any appropriate setting— among friends, at the table, with guests, at concerts, or on excursions. Wherever the call of their own blood stirs their hearts, they will revive the learned and restored examples. This is how songs come to life; this is how tradition continues, without coercion or instruction.

The same occurred during the filming of *Unforgettable Pearl*. When the rather demanding filming process concluded, the host set a table for us in another space. The choirmaster, Zaza Tamarashvili, was moved by the desire to sing and began with a captivating voice: “*The blue horse on the Geguti field...*” The children joined in spontaneously, without any request or instruction, sincerely and naturally. The table song, performed in a genuine everyday setting, became an integral part of our lives at that very moment. For me, these moments vividly exemplify how a revived example can return to its authentic life context. I

believe the children will never forget that day; the song has already become part of their souls, and their love for it will surely bear fruit.

B.Zh. — In terms of polyphonic thinking, what is the current situation in Meskheta?

V.S. — I believe that genetic memory will play a significant role in the revival of polyphonic thinking. In this regard, the “return,” sharing, and popularization of musical heritage among the younger generation will be crucial. This process has already begun, and the existence of choirmasters’ schools in Samtskhe- Javakheti provides genuine grounds for optimism.

B.Zh. — Thank you very much. I wish you success.

Folk Ensemble Mzeshina from Telavi (Kakheti)

The women's folk ensemble Mzeshina, based at the Telavi Municipality Centre of Culture, was established in 2017 under the direction of Ekaterine Karaulashvili, with Beka Bidzinashvili serving as consultant and co-director over the years. The ensemble's primary goal is to search for and revive forgotten folk examples from the mountainous regions of Eastern Georgia. Ekaterine Karaulashvili provides detailed information about the ensemble's activities.

S.K. — Please tell us how *Mzeshina* was created.

E.K. — *Mzeshina*, in its current membership, was formed in 2017 as a choir of chanters and singers. However, it should be noted that the girls have practiced singing and chanting from an early age. In 2005, I founded the children's folk ensemble *Mzeshina*, and I can say that today's *Mzeshina* is the heir to that collective.

S.K. — Who are the members and what do they do?



Ensemble Mzeshina

E.K. — At present, we are ten in number. The girls come from villages in the Telavi and Akhmeta Municipalities. Some of the members are students at Giorgi Mtatsmindeli University of Chanting and the Tbilisi State Conservatoire; others are alumnae of the Choirmaster Direction at the Theatre and Film University, while the rest represent various professions.

S.K. — Please tell us about the repertoire.

E.K. — We mainly perform Kakhetian songs, drawing from both women's and men's repertoires, as well as folk examples from different parts of Eastern Georgia's highland and lowland regions. In addition, *Mzeshina's* members also play folk musical instruments and chant in various churches.

S.K. — Which sources do you use for the songs, and what is the working process like?

E.K. — We learn songs from both published music collections and archival audio recordings. I would particularly highlight the variants from Artana, sung by Andro Simashvili and his uncle Abria Simashvili. At present, I teach new songs to the group, but all members are actively involved in the selection process. At the next stage, I strive not to restrict the singers in terms of improvisation.

S.K. — How active is *Mzeshina's* creative life?

E.K. — *Mzeshina* is quite active in Georgia. It frequently participates in events organized by the Telavi Municipality, as well as in concerts and festivals. At the same time,

we organize field expeditions throughout Kakheti to learn folk examples directly from tradition bearers. *Mzeshina* has released one audio album of Kakhetian and Tushetian songs. Some of these were revived from music collections, while others were learned directly from tradition bearers. The ensemble is an active participant in the National Folklore Festival and the *Nanina* Festival of Georgian Women's Traditional Music and has been featured in the program *Ethnopori* on Achara Television. Most recently, we participated in the second season of the television project *Khalkhuri*.

S.K. — Please tell us about your plans for the near future.

E.K. — Our main goal is the revival and popularization of Kakhetian folk songs, which we intend to continue. In 2026, we plan to participate in the Fourth *Nanina* Festival of Georgian Women's Traditional Music and to hold a solo concert.

S.K. — I wish you good luck!

Interviewed by Sophiko Kotrikadze

Voices of the Ancestors: An Archive of Women's Georgian Song



Voices of the Ancestors podcast
logo

Voices of the Ancestors is a podcast dedicated to amplifying the voices of women singers of Georgian polyphonic song: a project that blends story and song into a growing digital archive. Hosted by **Holly Taylor-Zuntz** and **Susan Thompson**, the podcast brings listeners on a journey through Georgia's vocal landscapes. Meeting women who sing and sustain folk traditions, both in Georgia and abroad. Each episode features a guest interview, live or archival recordings of songs, and discussion of history, culture, musical practice, and the lived experience of women singers. The website supports the episodes with transcripts and links to resources. In its [24 episodes](#) the podcast has welcomed a range of

Georgian and non-Georgian participants whose voices and work enrich the archive. Among Georgian guests are:

- **Maka Khardziani**, ethnomusicologist and Director of Creative Group Nanina who reveals how Georgian women's voices continue to shape the nation's musical soul.
- The **Changeliani sisters** (Ana, Madona, Eka) from Lakhushdi, Svaneti, who share stories of village rituals, local myths, dance, grief, and ancestral memory in *Rituals of the Singing Village*.
- **Nino Razmadze**, ethnomusicologist and specialist in Georgian folk instruments, who helps listeners distinguish changi, chuniri, chonguri, and more, with field recordings of master players.
- **Tamar Buadze**, choir conductor and teacher, who speaks about her Megrelian roots, working with youth and women's choirs (such as Tutarchela), and how she came to delight in Laz repertoire.
- **Nino Naneishvili**, director of *Ialoni* ensemble, discusses healing songs and the ancient symbolism of round dances.

Across these conversations, recurring themes emerge:

- **Transmission and memory**: how songs move between generations or across distance, and how individual memory shapes versions of songs.
- **Ritual, myth, identity**: the intersections of folklore, spiritual practice, local myth and song.
- **Instrumental accompaniment and voice**: exploring how instruments like chonguri, chuniri, changi interact with vocal polyphony, and how field recordi-

ngs enrich practice.

- **Women’s musical agency and boundary-crossing:** how female singers have navigated formal institutions, male-dominated structures, and evolving performance spaces. *Voices of the Ancestors* functions as a living **resource and archive**: listeners, researchers, singers, and students can return to it as a trove of interviews, musical examples, and reference links. The searchable transcripts and resource pages expand their utility beyond audio alone.

However, the hosts are clear that this project is *not exhaustive*. Many women singers still await documentation; many regions and repertoires have yet to be invited into its pages. Each episode is a node in a much larger network of stories. In their framing, the podcast encourages continued listening, fieldwork, and collaboration so that more voices may eventually join this chorus.



Voices of the Ancestors podcast hosts, Holly and Susan

Listeners have expressed enthusiastic appreciation for the emotional resonance and depth of the podcast. Some highlights from the review section include:

“Intimate, uplifting, inspiring and beautiful; This very enjoyable start for the second series. We are taken into the hearts of these women...”

“This is such an interesting podcast, featuring beautiful voices, stories and songs from Georgia ... a hidden gem of the world.”

“Voices of the Ancestors enables Georgian singers to share their lives with us ... I definitely feel a real part of a family of Georgian singers in the UK ... creating connections...”

These endorsements testify to the podcast’s capacity to build global musical community, to move listeners emotionally, and to deepen knowledge in an accessible form.

For listeners, *Voices of the Ancestors* offers a rare window into women’s experience in Georgian polyphonic traditions: not through abstraction, but via lived stories, song excerpts, place, and memory. It is at once an audio journey, research tool, and a call to further discovery. We hope your bulletin’s audience will listen, share, and perhaps contribute new voices to this growing archive.

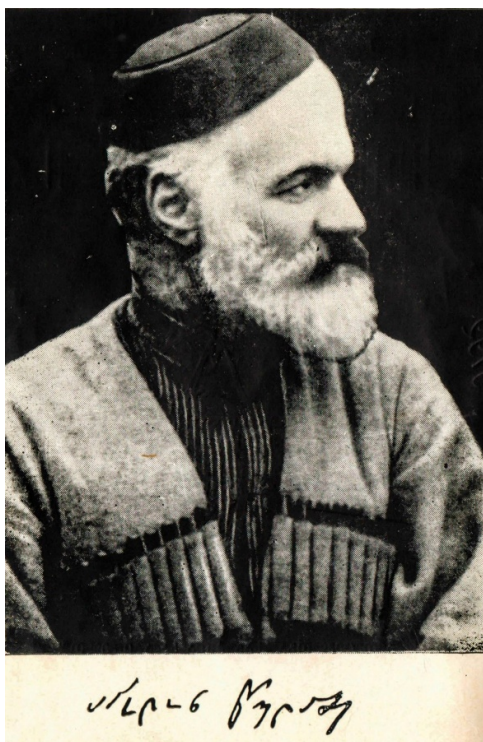
www.voicesoftheancestors.co.uk

Susan Thompson and Holly Taylor-Zuntz
hosts of the podcast

Chanting, Ghighini, Krimanchuli, Singing

Chanting

Chanting was considered the plea and salvation of the soul, not a form of carnal pleasure or entertainment. Over time, however, chanting partially lost its spiritual and otherworldly significance and acquired the character of earthly enjoyment. In churches where good chanters were present, many people attended more to listen to the chanting than to pray. From 1890 onward, when the more enlightened population turned away from priests and the church, priests attempted to attract worshippers through chanting. They hired chanters, and although this did not necessarily increase the number of believers, it created a spectacle that filled churches with lovers of chanting. Some chants were so pleasing to hear that they rivaled, if not surpassed, the works of professional musicians. For this reason, such chanting eventually acquired a folk character.



Ethnographical letters author, Apolon
Tsuladze

Chanting accompanied feasts and social gatherings, where instead of crossing themselves, people would empty a full glass or drinking horn ("Qantsi"). Good chanting stimulated appetite, entertained, and adorned the occasion. For example, during a wedding ceremony, when the priest circled the bride and groom with crowns upon their heads, chanters sang: *"Isaiah, be joyful, the Virgin has conceived and borne a son, Emmanuel."* The words, and especially the melodic style, expressed passion for life, joy, and fertility.

By contrast, at funerals, chants such as *"Grant rest to the soul"* evoked sadness, reminded listeners of the brevity of earthly existence, and filled eyes with tears. On the day of burial, the funeral feast often resembled a wedding banquet, especially if the deceased had respected mourners. Every toast was accompanied by an appropriate chant. Instead of *"Many years"*, chanters sang *"May his memory be eternal!"* three times. They did not become drunk but sang beautifully and with vigor.

Chanting was deeply loved by the people. Sometimes not every church had its own chanters (three were required), so for feast days they were invited from other villages. In some churches chanting was performed antiphonally. Most chanters were nobles or members of priests' families. Learning to chant required not only natural talent but also literacy, time, and leisure – resources unavailable to most peasants. Thus, peasant chanters were rare, and those who existed were called "semi-nobles," as they lived in better conditions than ordinary peasants.

Teachers of chanting received payment. Some nobles had their own household churches with private priests, while the nobles themselves (sometimes including women) served as chanters. They taught selected young people to chant, who in return worked for them for six to twelve months until their training was complete.

Compared to other regions of Georgia, chanting was most widespread in Guria. Many professional chanters earned their livelihood by teaching chanting. Most traveled to Imereti and Samegrelo to teach. For some, chanting was everything. In Guria, even anecdotes were composed about famous chanters, such as Maxime Tserodze. Once, summoned to court as a witness, the judge asked: “*Maxime, what do you say?*” He replied: “*If you start, I’ll say the bass part!*”

A chanter, both a dirge-singer and a merry-maker, was expected to be well-bred, decorous, articulate, well-dressed, and well-groomed. He ate moderately, drank wine “to quench thirst” rather than to become drunk. At the table he was given preference, seated in the place of honor, never pressed to make a toast, and wine was served only at his request. A good chanter, if also a teacher, was highly esteemed, loved, and respected, and was generally regarded as a public figure.

In 1932, Guria mourned the deaths of renowned chanters and *chonguri* players: Nestor Kontridze, Samoel Chavleishvili (honored with a jubilee at the Rustaveli Theater), and Giorgi Babilodze. Their student, the young singer and teacher Artem Erkomaishvili, expressed his grief in a poem, which he later transformed into a song. This chant-like composition is still sung with joy in Guria today.

Ghighini

Ghighini performed solo, either accompanied by instruments such as *chonguri* or *chianuri*, or unaccompanied while working or traveling. Epic texts such as *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin* or *Davitiani* were recited in this style. A *chonguri* player was never asked to sing, but to perform *ghighini*.

Performers of *ghighini* were highly esteemed, with sayings such as: “*Her ghighini to chonguri accompaniment is worth one woman,*” or “*Her ghighini will bring the dead back to life.*”

Krimanchuli

Krimanchuli is a leading voice in polyphonic singing, but like *ghighini*, it was sometimes performed solo. A young man, when alone, would sing *krimanchuli* in the forest, in the fields, or along the road. The desire to sing *krimanchuli* often arose from loneliness or fear. Singing dispelled fear and boredom and prevented sleep.

More often, *krimanchuli* was sung by young men. If an adolescent had to travel at night, he was advised: “*Sing krimanchuli on the way.*” Cow or goat herders sang *krimanchuli*; if a peer responded from afar, it resembled a competition between two herds playing the *salamuri* or *soinari*. *Krimanchuli* was especially pleasant to hear on a

quiet, moonlit night. Sometimes it even served as a signal for lovers arranging a meeting.

Singing

Gurian song, adapted and harmonized with labor, made work easier, more productive, and more joyful. It transformed laziness into diligence, encouraged the weak, gave strength to the weary, and enriched the spirit. Singing was learned in nature by listening during work.

It is noteworthy that singing was a peasant tradition, not one of the “brilliant” classes. Chanting and leisurely pastime were the domain of the nobility. Many distinguished chanters came from their ranks, but none of these renowned chanters and pleasure-seekers were considered good singers.

Nobleman Data Gugunava, a famous chanter, merry-maker, songwriter, and teacher known beyond Guria, referred to himself in one of his poems as the “*mother of feast*.” His former students confirmed that, compared to others, that he was not a good singer. This is unsurprising, since singing was primarily associated with hard work and diligence – activities in which his social rank was not engaged.

Source: **Apolon Tsuladze**, *Ethnographic Guria*, Tbilisi, 1971

The Tradition of *Batonebi* in Meskhети

It is known that in Meskhetian tradition, direct references to the *Batonebi* ritual are scarce. Even fewer musical examples survive: only two expeditionary audio recordings from the archives of Shalva Mshvelidze and Valerian Maghradze, and one verbal example preserved in Maghradze's archive. In this list we refer only to those samples where the word "Batonebi" explicitly appears, and which are clearly of healing purpose.

Today, oral knowledge about the *Batonebi* in Meskhети has almost disappeared. Yet, if we examine the few but significant surviving data, it becomes clear that the Meskhetian understanding of the *Batonebi* corresponds to the broader Georgian tradition – both in ritual practice and in musical or verbal expression. In accordance with the stages of an infectious disease, ethnographic tradition also reveals three phases: the arrival and welcoming of the *Batonebi*, their entertainment and appeasement, and finally their farewell and dismissal.

As in other regions of Georgia, in Meskhети *Batonebi* were greeted with smiles, sweet words, and various rituals of invitation. In the patient's room there had to be: a tray arranged with sweets, the fragrance of violets and roses, sweetened water, a walnut branch (for circling the patient), and a pleasant, peaceful environment. Interestingly, in Meskhети the ritual tray for the *Batonebi* included colored eggs, a feature also found in Imeretian tradition.

There were also prohibitions, so that the *Batonebi* would not be angered. To avoid disturbing the patient (and thus the visiting *Batonebi*) with smoke, excessive noise, or unpleasant odors, people refrained from cooking, heavy work, quarrels, or loud conversation in the household.

A significant detail in the Meskhetian *Batonebi* tradition is "uncooked honey." Formerly, honey was melted over fire to separate it from wax and comb. "Uncooked honey," however, was extracted without heating and was believed to possess special healing properties. One incantation text states that uncooked honey is medicine, followed by an invocation to the *Batonebi*: "*Sweeten yourselves, sugar yourselves, Batonebi.*"

According to the general Georgian musical tradition, in Meskhети too the *Batonebi* were entertained with instrumental music and the singing of *Iavnana*.

In Meskhети, the terms *Iavnana* or *Nana* refer to various genres: lullabies (cradle songs) as well as healing or cult-ritual songs.

An interesting ritual recorded in Javakheti, connected with the cult of the oak tree, involved carrying a newly-walking child around the oak while dancing. The accompanying song text has the refrain "*Mamli Mukhasa*", and the ethnographer identified the song as "*Nana*." In our view, this is not accidental and supports the idea that their original function was invocation, glorification, and supplication to supreme forces.

As is known, in western Georgia during measles outbreaks, a special figure called the “*mebodishe*” (apologist) was invited, considered to embody *Batonebi’s Aunt*. In rituals of entertaining and appeasing the *Batonebi*, she played the central role as the most knowledgeable person in this practice. In Meskhetian *Batonebi* texts, *Batonebi’s Mother* is also mentioned. According to S. Makalatia, *Batonebi’s Mother* was identified as St. Barbara, to whom offerings were made if the illness worsened.

In Meskheti, people visited the shrine twice: first to pray for recovery and supplication, and second to give thanks and fulfill promised vows. Surviving traditions include both supplicatory and thanksgiving rituals, during which corresponding *Iavnana* songs were presumably performed.

According to S. Makalatia’s description, if the patient’s condition worsened, a walnut branch was lit, and the patient was circled three times with bent knees. Such circling in supplicatory and laudatory rituals can be considered a choreographic element. Another ritual performed in Meskheti during severe illness was called “*Didebaze Davla*” (door-to-door procession for the proclamation of glory). As S. Makalatia reports: “Two women went door to door collecting offerings – bread, flour, eggs, cheese, candles, and so on, whatever people could spare. These were then sold, and with the money a white garment was purchased for the patient. The patient was taken to the shrine in this garment, and after prayers the garment was left there.”

In Meskheti, another ritual known was the twisting of wicks (*fitilis dakhveva*), to determine the icon responsible for the illness – a practice also known in eastern mountain regions. Several wicks of white wool or cotton were twisted on a spindle, each named after a different icon. Placed over a bowl of water, whichever wick fell by itself indicated the icon considered the cause of the illness, to whom offerings were then made.

To bid farewell to the *Batonebi*, people baked *kokora* bread – soft, fragrant, kneaded in milk or whey, smaller and fluffier than ordinary bread. It was hung outside as a sign of respect and reconciliation with the *Batonebi*. *Kokora* was considered a special offering; no one touched it, lest the *Batonebi* be offended.

In the patient’s room, a decorated *Batonebi tree* was set up. In Meskhetian tradition, tree symbolism had diverse manifestations. For example, in Samtskhe and Javakheti, during the farewell to the *Batonebi*, people sang *Iavnana* to a tree and embraced it. They believed that a living, healthy tree had the power to absorb illness. A child was sung to with *Iavnana*, then embraced the tree, and was healed.

Thus, it can be said that the Meskhetian *Batonebi* tradition has preserved invaluable information about ancient cultural layers in Georgia, securing its place within the unique treasury of Georgian heritage.

Victoria Samsonadze,
ethnomusicologist

Meskhethian Ritual Song **“*Batonebis Mamidasa*” [Batonebi’s Aunt]**

Transcribed by ethnomusicologist Victoria Samsonadze from Shalva Mshvelidze’s expeditionary materials. Recorded in the village of Kotelia, Akhaltsikhe district, from ethnophore Tekle Lazarashvili, in 1932.

The song was revived by the ethnomusicologists’ creative group *Nanina* within the project “*Restored Song*”.

Video may be available on youtube as [“Restored song” - Batonebi Song \(Meskhethian\)](#).

Youtube search: "restored song batonebi meskhethian"

Youtube url: <https://youtu.be/AAMck0Y5QoE?si=axk5m445nPQ1vD2w>

ბატონების მამიდასა Bat'onebis Mamidasa

I Soloist

ბა - ტო - ნე - ბის მა - მი - და - სა ქვეშ გა - ვუ - შლი ხა - ლი - ჩა - სა
ba - t'o - ne - bis ma - mi - da - sa kvesh ga - vu - shli kha - li - cha - sa

I Soloist

წავ - ლენ და და - ბრძან - დე - ბი - ან ხა - ვერ - დო ვი - თა
ts'av - len da da - brdzan - de - bi - an kha - ver - di - vi - ta

Bani

ა
a

I Soloist

II Soloist

შენ ი - ხა - რე შენ ი - დო დე ჩვენც გვა - ხა - რე შენ ი - დო დე
shen i - kha - re shen i - di - de chvents gva - kha - re shen i - di - de

Bani

ა
a

II

გე - ნა - ცვა - ლე - ა ბა - ტო - ნე - ბო ი - ყა - ვით გა - ხა რე - ბუ - ლე - ბი
ge - na - tsva - le - a ba - t'o - ne - bo i - qa - vit ga - kha re - bu - le - bi

B

ა
a

I

II

ო - ავ ნა - ნი ნა ო ვარ დო ნა - ნო ი - ა - ვ ნა - ნი
i - av na - ni na o var - do na - no i - a - v na - ni

B

ა
a

I

II

ო - ავ ნა - ნი ნა ო ვარ დო ნა - ნო ი - ა - ვ ნა - ნი
i - av na - ni na o var - do na - no i - a - v na - ni

B

ა
a

28

I ბა - ტო - ნე - ბის დე - და - სა - ო ან - წლის ა - კვა - ნი უ - დგო - ა
ba - t'o - ne - bis de - da - sa - o an - ts'lis a - k'va - ni u - dgi - a

II

B

ა

a

ა

a

32

I შიგ უ - წევს შვი - - ლი ბა - ტო - ნი ო - ა - ვ ნა - ნი ნა - ო
shig u - ts'evs shvi - - li ba - t'o - ni i - a - v na - ni na - o

II

B

ა

a

ა

a

ა

a

36

I

II შენ ო - ხა - რე შენ ო - დი - დე ჩვენც გვა - ხა - რე შენ ო - დი - დე
shen i - kha - re shen i - di - de chvents gva - kha - re shen i - di - de

B

ა

a

ა

a

40

II გე - ნა - ცვა - ლე - ა ბა - ტო - ნე - ბო ო - გა - ვით გა - ხა - რე - ბუ - ლე - ბი
ge - na - tsva - le - a ba - t'o - ne - bo i - qa - vit ga - kha re - bu - le - bi

B

ა

a

ა

a

44

I ო - ავ ნა - ნი ნა - ო ვარ დო ნა - ნო ო - ა - ვ ნა - ნი
i - av na - ni na - o var - do na - no i - a - v na - ni

II

B

ა

a

ა

a

ა

a

48

I

II ო - ავ ნა - ნი ნა - ო ვარ დო ნა - ნო ო - ა - ვ ნა - ნი
i - av na - ni na - o var - do na - no i - a - v na - ni

B

ა

a

ა

a

52

I
 ო - ჯგ ნა - ნო — ნა — ო ვარ დო ნა - ნო ო - ა - ვ ნა - ნო
 i - av na - ni — na — o var - do na - no i - a - v na - ni

II

B

ა ა

56

I
 ბა - ტო - - ნე - ბის —
 ba - t'o - - ne - bis —

II
 ო - ჯგ ნა - ნო — ნა — ო ვარ დო ნა - ნო ო - ა - ვ ნა - ნო
 i - av na - ni — na — o var - do na - no i - a - v na - ni

B

ა ა

60

I
 მა - მი - და - სა ო - ჯგ ნა - ნო ნა - ო
 ma - mi - da - sa i - av na - ni na - o

II
 ო - ჯგ ნა - ნო — ნა — ო
 i - av na - ni — na — o

B

ა ა

64

I
 ო - ჯგ ნა - ნო — ნა — ო ვარ დო ნა - ნო
 i - av na - ni — na — o var - do na - no

II
 ვარ დო ნა - ნო ო - ა - ვ ნა - ნო
 var - do na - no i - a - v na - ni

B

ა ა ა

ტექსტი – „ბატონების მამიდასა“

Lyrics – “Bat’onebis Mamidasa”

ბატონების მამიდასა ქვეშ გავუშლი
ხალიჩასა,
წავლენ და დაბრძანდებიან ხავერდივითა.
შენ იხარე, შენ იდიდე, ჩვენც გვახარე, შენ
იდიდე,
გენაცვალე ბატონებო, იყავით
გახარებულები.
ბატონების დედასაო ანწლის აკვანი უდგია,
შიგ უწევს შვილი ბატონი იავნანინაო.

bat'onebis mamidasa kvesh gavushli
khalichasa,
ts'avlen da dabrdzandebian khaverdivita.
shen ikhare, shen idide, chvents gvakhare,
shen idide,
genatsvale bat'onebo, iqavit gakharebulebi.
bat'onebis dedasao ants'lis ak'vani udgia,
shig uts'evs shvili bat'oni iavnaninao.

Translation – “Batonebi’s Aunt”

I'll spread a carpet for the Batonebi's Aunt,
So the Batonebi may take their honored seat.
Rejoice, be exalted, bring us joy,
O Batonebi, may you be ever joyful.
The Batonebi's Mother has a cradle of alder wood,
Inside lies a child stricken with nobility.

Imprint

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