

International Symposium

Big festivals of Estonian culture as part of world heritage

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Abstracts

Guntis Smidchens

The Heritage of Baltic Song Festivals

Viewed from outside, Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian song festivals today all look the same. What makes them look similar – every few years, a mass choral concert on an outdoor stage – also makes them unique. Baltic song festivals are unlike any other cultural event anywhere else in the world. In this international context, Balts share an inspiring, unique heritage, a memorable chapter in the world history of nonviolent political action. Balts maintain living memories of the Singing Revolution, the only mass movement in human history to identify and use songs as the key weapon in a successful struggle for political independence.

Viewed from within the three cultures and languages, song festival heritage is much more complex. It is a combination of many living traditions: verbal (songs, public speeches, informal cheers, personal experience stories), material (clothes, flags, flowers, stages and stage decorations, foods), and customary (processions, concerts, actions during performances, sequences of events), and each tradition carries multiple functions and meanings. This paper surveys singers and dynamic song repertoires to trace out dramatic changes over time, and to reveal substantial differences between the three national song festival traditions. It nevertheless argues that there is a stable, essential foundation common to all three: The experience of each individual singer before, during and after the festival. This is a shared heritage of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian song festivals.

Stanislav Nemeržtski

Sing and dance for happiness: big festivals of Estonians and subjective wellbeing

Different surveys around the world has provided solid evidence that leisure activities contribute to personal satisfaction with one's life. Subjective wellbeing, one of the most important components of satisfaction with life, depends very much on how profoundly we can engage into favourable activity. There is good evidence that there is particularly strong connection between subjective wellbeing and cultural/ heritage related leisure activities. There is no doubt that in Estonian context, folk dance and folk singing can be considered exactly those types of leisure activities.

A quantitative survey was carried out in 2014, during XXVI Song and XIX Dance Festival, among performers, in order to investigate motivation for engagement into these activities, links between leisure activities and subjective wellbeing and creative self-efficacy (creative self-efficacy is considered as important feature of one's satisfaction with life). In the paper, results of the survey are presented and discussed.

Sille Kapper

What kind of Estonian culture is held and preserved at dance celebrations?

What role do dance celebrations play in preserving and passing on the knowledge and skills connected with traditional dancing? Which concepts and realizations of a *dance* may be compatible with dance celebrations' process, and which of them are left aside, and why? The presentation is based on dance ethnography (2008 – 2105) in two *dance worlds*, which partially overlap one another: it is the traditional folk dancing on one hand, and the (stage) folk dance as a hobby, including participation at dance celebrations, on the other. The study shows how it is us who create those institutional truth regimes that sometimes overshadow alternative knowledge, though important for preservation and sustainable development of our culture.

Petri Hoppu

Identity and Agency in Contemporary Skolt Sámi Folk Dance

My presentation examines the role of dance of the Skolt Sámi in Finland in negotiating their history, identity and agency. The Skolts' original homeland was situated mostly in present-day Russia but partly also in Norway and Finland. In 1852 the border between Norway and Russia was closed, leaving one of the Skolts' villages in Norway, and in 1920, the border between Finland and Soviet Russia was drawn as a straight line through the Skolts' homeland. Finally, World War II devastated the Finnish Skolts' lives. The Skolt homeland was ceded to the Soviet Union, and the Skolts themselves were evacuated to the eastern parts of the municipality of Inari in Finland.

What makes the Skolts unique among other Sámi groups in Finland and Scandinavia are their dances. Since the 19th century, Skolts have danced popular couple and group dances of Russian origin. Similar dances have been known among other Sámi in Kola Peninsula as well. Today, the Skolts are reflecting their dances and dancing from new perspectives, integrating them to their contemporary hybrid identities. This strategy does not entail an exclusive protection of traditions, but it provides the Skolts a possibility to negotiate both with their history and contemporary society. As a result, despite their dramatic past, diaspora, and discrimination in their new settlements, the Skolts have "been able to preserve their culture and distinctive, yet ever-changing ethnic identities. Their identities are

characterized by many points in their social and personal histories, and dancing is a part of the routes they have travelled within these experiences.

Mare Kõiva, Glory Toom

Folk dance as part of (Estonian) national culture in Australian context

Egge Kulbok-Lattik

The Development of Estonian Culture and National Cultural Policy

The presentation aims to frame into a whole Estonian multiple experience (and the Baltic States) of the past in the politics of culture. This experience is unique as it covers both – the development and experience of the Western type as well as the Soviet type of modernity.

What kind of differences and similarities we can follow between these different political systems and state practices in culture? The presentation considers the specific features of Soviet cultural policy, highlighting its ambivalence and impact to the development of Estonians culture.

Maarja Lõhmus

National culture and Big festivals in Estonian Public Broadcasting

Presentantion of song and dance festivals on Estonian Radio and Television has always been big event, equally as cultural, political, media event, and also as something that helps to develop Estonian Public Broadcast. Broadcasts of Song Festivals have always been a stage performance for active people and rituals, also a possibility to present with deep emotions different parts of Estonia. This makes them a part of Estonian identity, and also a bridge between past and future. The first radio voice of Estonian culture, Felix Moor, worked for Estonian Radio from 1927 to 1947, when he did his last broadcast from XII Song Festival (<http://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/xii-uldlaulupidu-28-06-1947-a-xii-uldlaulupidu-28-06-1947-a-laulupeo-rongkaik>).

In the presentation, analysis of Song Festival broadcasts is presented, with their development, and examples from 1947, 1962, and 1969 (broadcasting: Ivar Triikkel, Kaarel Toom, Hans Kivilo, Lembit Lauri, Mari Tarand, Age Raa, Ene Hion, Helju Jüssi etc, listen:

<http://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/laste-laulupidu-1962-a> ja <http://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/kop-heliarhivaar-kop-heliarhivaar-28602>).

Broadcasts of Song Festivals has become culturally important event for Estonian Public Broadcast, and thus it is unique in the world.

Iivi Zajedova

The role of cultural festivals by Estonians abroad in preserving their cultural identity

When studying the role of Estonian cultural festivals, it is necessary to bear in mind that after World War II the national culture became divided. Many citizens of the Republic of Estonia fled to the West in advance of the occupying Red Army and consequently, one can speak of a territorial division between the national culture that existed in the state of Estonia and the one that was pursued by Estonians abroad until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1991.

The Estonians abroad kept alive their cultural traditions in circumstances that varied according to the country in which they lived.

More than twenty years have passed since Estonia's independence was restored. The presentation shows the role cultural festivals had in preserving Estonian culture abroad during different times until today when no longer the political aspect is as important as is the need to preserve our culture and traditions that belong to all Estonians. The presentation is based on research done in 2007-2015.

Ain Haas

Preservation of Estonian Folk Music Abroad and in the Homeland

By the mid-20th century, the old folk music instruments and singing style had almost disappeared from Estonian culture. People preferred to play international instruments, particularly accordion and guitar, and sang tunes learned from schoolbooks or heard on the radio in the form of new compositions and German popular songs. This presentation examines the revival of old instruments (kannel or Baltic psaltery, bowed lyre, and bagpipe) and the archaic chants of the *regilaul* tradition. The revival of such traditions has gone further and is better rooted in the Estonian homeland, primarily due to the music schools and museums located there. The same process, to a lesser extent, has occurred among Estonians abroad as well. In both cases, individuals inspired by the lost culture of their ancestors have played a key role. The interest in the disappearing instruments and singing style reflects a desire to resist the forced homogenization of modern society.

Urbanization, international contacts, and modern technology contributed greatly to the decline in the popularity of folk music during the last century, but these same factors have recently become very important in assisting the restoration of the old traditions.

Martin Ehala

How to define the Greater-Estonian identity?

Traditionally, the Estonian national identity has been understood quite narrowly: a person who speaks Estonian natively, and preferably without an accent, is Estonian. For a long time, this definition has been good enough, especially at socially stable times when the differences between community members core values seem insignificant.

In turbulent times, this language based definition has been insufficient, since speaking Estonian as a mother tongue has not ensured a shared set of core values. At such times, attempts to define "the true Estonian" become acute, to exclude these Estonian speakers from the national body who do not share the same core values as the one who is doing the defining.

On the other hand, for the definition of the Greater-Estonian identity, the native knowledge of Estonian as a boundary criterion is too narrow, because it excludes a large number of people who on other criteria than language would be "true Estonians" enough. However, for conservative Estonians, stretching the definition of Estonian identity beyond language, may cause discomfort, because of the fear that many people whom they do not feel anything in common may start to claim to be Estonians. And this turns them quite reluctant towards the whole idea making it hard for the Greater Estonian identity to emerge.

For the Greater-Estonian identity formation, a basic premise is the question of how to define this identity in a way that its boundaries would not be overly blurry, enabling in principle anyone to be included (as, for example, through e-citizenship); but would still be enough, so that also those who value the Estonian identity could be accepted as "true Estonians" even if their language knowledge is not native.

The presentation will give an overview of the phenomenon of identity, and alternative ways to define national identity. Based on this theoretical basis, the presentation focuses on the ways how to define the Greater-Estonian identity and what could be done to develop this identity.

Hain Rebas

Politics and mid-20th century All-Estonian Song festivals

Central to this analysis are the career of Maestro Gustav Ernesaks, relationships among composers and choir conductors during the repressive 1950s in the Estonian SSR, the nature of post-WWII Song Festivals in Estonia and the in the free West, and the concert tour by the eminent Estonian Men's Choir, RAM, to Sweden in 1967. Also critical to the discussion are the influences of composers/conductors Juhan Aavik and Eduard Tubin in Sweden, repressed Tuudur Vettik in Siberia (!), and emerging Roman Toi in Germany/Canada and Harri Kiisk in Sweden. The role of these men was fundamental to the continuity and development of free and democratic Estonian choir culture.

But who steered choir culture and song festivals in the Estonian SSR? What to make of legendary Gustav Ernesaks' connections to apparatchik Raoul Viies and his boss Leonid Lentsman – both men's links extended to the KGB? How to reconcile Ernesaks' Song Festival Anthem "Mu isamaa on minu arm" with the National Flag Anthem, which, since the 1930s in Estonia and in subsequent decades throughout the West, has been Enn Võrk's "Kaunistagem Eesti koad"?

Let it be resolved that "Kaunistagem Eesti koad" is reinstated as Estonia's official Flag Anthem, not only in recognition of Enn Võrk's repression by the communist regime, but in the name of national continuity and patriotic unity.

Sandra Vokk

Different stories, shared heritage – role of storytelling in preservation of national culture

Strong and united Estonia depends on how we adjust and tell different stories and understandings of our common cultural heritage. Storytelling is an important way for passing on knowledge. Traditional knowledge allows us to understand, how and (that's) why; storytelling allows us to understand the feeling of it. Digital technology, internet and audio-visual language open new possibilities for telling our stories, for making social changes possible, and passing on our national culture in a new way.