

Multipart Singing in Northern Latgale: Dynamics of Tradition in the Late 20th – Early 21st Century

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The study of multipart music is one of the main fields of ethnomusicology, and one of the most relevant today. This fact is demonstrated by the large number of conferences and other events dedicated to multipart singing held around the world, in which the scholarly body of work is continually added to and reviewed. At events of this type various local traditions of multipart music are examined, attempting to place them into a general context. Unfortunately, a Latvian contribution is missing: despite the fact that multipart music comprises a significant part of Latvian traditional music, there is still practically no information about it in international ethnomusicological circles.¹ It now seems appropriate to correct this situation by offering an insight into one of the more vibrant areas of Latvian multipart music. Here one can find a number of interesting forms of multipart singing, in a tradition which is now struggling for survival in the 21st century.

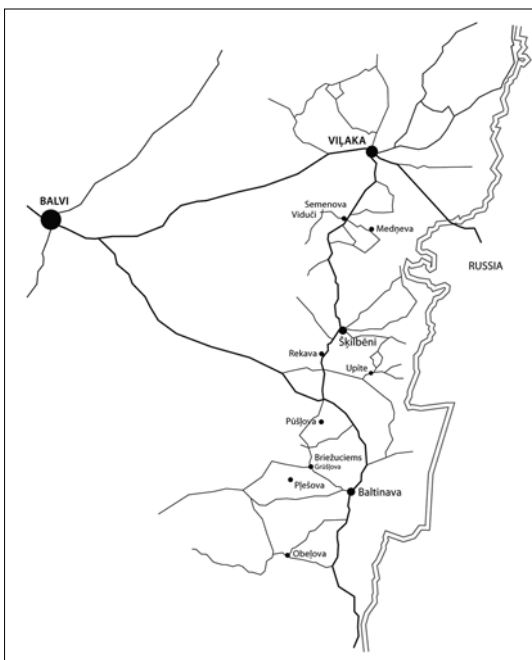
The area in question is the north-eastern part of Latvia, bordering with Russia (figure 1). In line with the administrative territorial division of the 1920s and 30s, it encompasses the territory of three municipalities – Baltinava, Šķilbēni and Viļaka – and is surrounded by a geographical division (in the form of forests or swamps) on all sides. This division creates a special island with a vibrant and diverse traditional music heritage.

This territory remained isolated from the more populated areas and main roads even in the 20th and 21st centuries. Unlike the rest of Eastern Latvia, in this region there is a large majority of indigenous inhabitants (more than 90%) – Latvians (Latgalian), living with uninterrupted traditions and surviving local dialects. In the study of Latvian traditional culture, this region is referred to as Northern Latgale (figure 2). It is also the northernmost Catholic-dominated area in Europe,

Figure 1. The north-eastern boundary of Latvian multipart singing.



Figure 2. Map of Northern Latgale.



¹ Multipart music is widely distributed throughout the whole of Latvia, except in a few territories, where it has not been recorded, especially in the north. Multipart singing, particularly drone singing, is mentioned and more or less described in a number of articles by Latvian authors (Jurjāns 1894; Kalniņš 1958; Krūmiņš 1962; Goldins 1965; Mediņš 1970; Витолинъ 1976; Бендорф 1986; Bendorfs 1988 etc.). However, until now there have been few broader studies touching upon Latvian multipart singing (Brambats 1973–74; Brambats 1983; Boiko 1987; Бойко 1990; Boiko 1992; Бойко 1992; Boiko 2008; Beitāne 2009).

squeezed in between the Lutheran-dominated area (in the west) and Russian orthodox (in the east).

The region of Northern Latgale forms a specific cultural region where various traditional rituals and crafts as well as a number of the old forms of traditional music have been maintained for a comparatively long time – up until the end of the 20th century and even into the early 21st century. These forms comprise two historic layers – an old one, which is rooted in pre-Christian culture, and a more recent one, which is associated with the influence of musical thinking of the 18th century, and is based on functional harmony. Neither of these layers is homogenous as both encompass various styles. The repertoire of traditional music of Northern Latgale has developed over time, with elements of both layers evident where they interact.

The vocal repertoire of Northern Latgale is essentially multipart except in the case of solo performance. Here one encounters both drone singing and ostinato, and various forms of harmonic multipart singing. In many instances, drone and harmonic multipart singing are combined. The dominance of multipart singing in Northern Latgale is emphasised in an interview with one of my sources, Natālija Smuška: 'It is not a song if it only has one part. I can't stand it, if only the first part is sung. That's not singing!'² This quote confirms the local assumption that the musical thinking of singers is multipart. Although the idiom is determined by tradition, the singers themselves believe that their multipart singing is spontaneous. In the same interview, Natālija Smuška explains: 'Those who sing, sing in any way they can! Whichever part is easiest for us, that's what we sing. We don't divide up the parts. Whoever likes the part, sings it.'³

Field studies suggest that the form and expression of multipart singing often depend on

the factors mentioned above, that is, that the parts are not intentionally divided up, but that the most creative singers always aim for something 'of their own'. As a result, new multipart versions of songs continue to be created. One must agree with Jaap Kunst, who wrote more than half a century ago: 'Who can draw the exact borderline between homophony and polyphony; [...] who can fix the place where heterophony turns into polyphony? Living practice is always richer and more plastic than any scheme-building theory' (Kunst 1950: 47).

This article is dedicated to the living practice of multipart singing. Within the article, there is an attempt not only to acquaint the reader with typical types of multipart singing found in Northern Latgale, but also to follow its life in the 1990s and the early 21st century, outlining the most important contexts and conditions that have influenced and continue to influence the practice of multipart singing in the region.

Documentation and research

The documentation of traditional music in Northern Latgale is a fairly recent phenomenon. Systematic fieldwork in this region was begun only in the 1980s, immediately bringing some specific types of multipart singing to the attention of researchers.⁴ For example, it was discovered that drone singing could still be encountered in this area in the late 20th century. The results of fieldwork revealed a scenario which did not obviously correlate with that recorded in earlier publications of Latvian traditional music. There is a simple explanation for this: right up until the 1980s, collectors of Latvian traditional music regarded their main task not as the comprehensive documentation and study of traditional music, including multipart singing,

² Interview with Natālija Smuška (1937), 26 July 2007 in Medņeva.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Two Latvian ethnomusicologists have studied multipart singing in Northern Latgale. The systematic documentation and study was begun in 1990 by Martin Boiko. In 1992 he was joined by the author of this article, for whom the traditional music of Northern Latgale is the most important research subject. Fieldwork results of both ethnomusicologists are held in their private collections, and in many cases also in the traditional music archive of the Latvian Academy of Music, the Archives of Latvian Folklore at the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia, as well as the audio library of Latvian Radio. These resources combined comprise a number of large collections of musical repertoire and interviews, which until now have been partly published in a number of articles and three monographs (Boiko 2008; Beitāne 2008; Beitāne 2009).

but rather as the transcribing of melodies, often limiting themselves to visits to one singer and not even taking an interest in whether the melody could also be sung in multiple parts.

In 1991 Martin Boiko described his fieldwork results in the study 'Ziemeļlatgales burdondaudzbalsība: konteksts un struktūras' (North-Latgalian Drone Singing: Context and Structures), immediately pointing out that: 'there is still no comprehensive study in Latvian ethnomusicology of the drone and its place in its environment, including a description of its current state and the diversity of local versions of drone songs in one of the territories in which it is still found' (Boiko 1991: 3–4). In his study, Boiko attempts to solve this problem, describing the conditions of drone singing in Northern Latgale in minute detail: its performance criteria, the associated folk terminology and the song repertoire in all of its local diversity. This is also the first time in Latvian ethnomusicology when the influence of traditional music ensembles on drone singing is analysed. Boiko's study is significant not only in the context of the history of Latvian ethnomusicology, but also in the context of this article, because it offers an overview of the field. This was documented in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In the period mentioned above, other interesting, previously uninvestigated forms of multipart singing in addition to drone singing came to the attention of ethnomusicologists in Northern Latgale. Amongst these, the most notable is multipart singing with a solo upper accompanying part, which in the local tradition is called 'singing with a half-part' (*dziduošana ar pusbolsu*). This type became the subject of study for the author of this article, starting from 1994, when systematic fieldwork was begun, with the results reported in the study 'Vēlinās izcelsmes vokālā daudzbalsība latviešu tradicionālajā mūzikā' (Multipart singing of late origin in Latvian traditional music, 2009).

In the 1990s traditional music ensembles had already existed in a number of villages in Northern Latgale for some time.⁵ These ensembles united singers who had inherited their repertoires and vocal techniques directly from the previous

generations, as a result of being active participants in traditional singing in the 1920s–40s. The activities of these ensembles provided a new functional context for repertoires for which the traditional basis for existence had disappeared for historic reasons. Boiko, in the study mentioned above, notes the following:

After the *talka* (collective agrarian work on the field (working bee), traditionally performed when neighbours gather together to help finish a particular type of farm work – A. B.) drone songs had ceased to exist because *talkas* became a thing of the past. They were destined for extinction as those singers died who had learned the songs through participation – there was no longer a place for them to be sung. The ensemble movement, based on the assumption that the ancient local repertoire is valuable and worth preserving in this or other forms, again presented the opportunity for drone singing to exist, thus avoiding extinction. An environment was created in which the songs began to function once more, albeit in a completely different way to that of earlier times, when learning and further inheritance existed (Boiko 1991: 43).

I would like to mention that Boiko's observation can be just as well applied to other forms of multipart singing in Northern Latgale.

The documentation of multipart singing in Northern Latgale in the first half of the 1990s occurred when working with small groups of singers, gathering singers that had come from the same village and had sung together previously. In this way, an attempt was made to gain information about the repertoire which had existed before the unification of singers into ensembles. In some cases, ensembles had been established fairly recently, and researchers succeeded in recording local versions of songs before they were simplified through the practice of ensembles. This occurred naturally, because ancient versions of songs were originally sung by the strongest personalities and the best singers. This material was combined with that from various local traditions. During this period, fieldwork provoked at least two responses from the practitioners of local music. Firstly, an increased interest in drone-

⁵ Most ensembles in Northern Latgale were established between 1978 and 88.

Figure 3. A *talka* reconstruction in Northern Latgale 2002. Photograph by Martin Boiko.



and other specific types of multipart-singing raised singers' awareness of this repertoire. Secondly, organisers of local cultural events were encouraged to see multipart singing as a special asset of their particular region: one worth documenting, maintaining and transmitting to future generations.

In 1999, local cultural events began which encouraged the preservation and transmission of traditional music began in Northern Latgale. Consultants, including ethnomusicologists, were often involved in this process. Those same ethnomusicologists who had recently recorded local versions of the multipart musical repertoire, and who had tried to steer clear of the influence of ensembles, now had the opportunity to begin a new chapter in their work. The result was that, in time, each participant in a tradition became important. So too, as did the contemporary context of singing, which had by now mostly become ensemble singing.

During this period, researchers working on the documentation of multipart singing also became involved in local cultural events. These were specially organised not only to give an opportunity for the wider public to get to know the repertoire of local traditional music, but also to encourage its transmission to the younger

generation of the local community. Among these was the organisation of a *talka* in 2002, an attempt to recreate one of the most important functional contexts of multipart singing of the 1920s–40s (figure 3). The most important singing roles in the *talka* were, of course, entrusted to the oldest singers in the ensemble who had participated and sung in *talkas* in the 1930s–40s. Now, in the early 1990s, as experienced practitioners, they took part in interviews with ethnomusicologists in which they demonstrated local versions of the relevant musical repertoire. The role of the ethnomusicologists was twofold: on the one hand, they were the principal consultants in the planning and execution of the *talka* day; on the other hand, they were observers, recording the musical repertoire and its performance in this reconstructed context. It should be noted that this was the first time that this repertoire was performed in a near traditional context – no longer during an interview in the rooms of performers, but in the open air as part of the traditional *talka*.

Of course, this produced a number of significant results. The first was the realisation that the forceful singing style required outdoors greatly differed from that of audio recordings of the 1990s. The second was the discovery of an important detail in the recordings: that is, a

call sung by the leading singer at the end of the drone song, in a high register with a glissando sliding downwards. This cannot be heard in any of the earlier recordings. The call occurred quite spontaneously, and the singer herself admitted that it had happened 'of its own accord'. She only realised when singing in the *talka* conditions that the song had then been sung in this manner. The comments of other singers suggested that they also felt very 'at home' in these reconstructed conditions. These not only reminded them of their youth, but also reminded them how the songs were once sung. There were even comments such as 'sing themselves'. Obviously, the reconstruction of traditional contexts can be a very useful method in the documentation and study of the dynamics of tradition.

Recreating the traditional setting was also considered useful by the organisers of local cultural events of Northern Latgale. By providing conditions similar to the traditional ones, they saw an opportunity of involving the local community in traditional cultural activities and, of course, to improve the viability of the repertoire of traditional music. Between 2002 and 2008, these activities were deliberately organised so that they would require less intervention 'from outside', that is, from cultural workers and ethnomusicologists. This approach aimed to encourage representatives of the local community to plan and implement their own traditional culture. It allowed ethnomusicologists to adopt the position of 'observers' and to note what happened to the musical repertoire when it was able to exist according to its own rules. This was important because these events became alternatives to the activities of the folklore movement. This movement had attempted to influence the activities of traditional music ensembles, including multipart singing repertoires, by initiating educational events. Paradoxical situations often occurred, whereby leaders of the folklore movement tried to teach representatives of local traditions the 'correct' way to sing their own repertoire, one which had been directly handed down from previous generations. Ethnomusicologists were often 'held to ransom'. They were caught between the leaders of the folklore movement who wished to 'protect the right traditions', and the singers themselves, who complained that they no longer understood how

to gain the approval of leaders of the folklore movement, necessary in order to perform, for example, at the International Folklore Festival Baltica. Interestingly, the views of the leaders of the folklore movement about 'real traditions' had been informed, to a large degree, by the work of ethnomusicologists. Ethnomusicologists were, in turn, expected to help to preserve songs in the exact form in which they themselves had recorded them. This provoked a debate which is still ongoing in Latvian ethnomusicology today. One of the main issues of this debate is: how far should ethnomusicologists get involved in the preservation and transmission of traditional music through activities organised by cultural and educational workers?

Twenty years have passed since the announcement by Boiko in his 1991 study of the renaissance of Northern Latgalian drone singing – given a totally different approach, context and meaning (Boiko 1991: 26). This is enough time to be able to draw some conclusions about this phenomenon, its new circumstances, contributing factors, and results. The continuation of this study will search for answers to the questions above, and will return to a starting point of sorts – the 1990s – when significant information was gained about types of multipart singing in Northern Latgale. This period also heralded the beginning of a new life for this type of singing.

Types of multipart singing

The study of multipart singing in Northern Latgale was promoted in the 1990s by fieldwork, when a number of specific types of previously unknown multipart songs came to the attention of ethnomusicologists. Among these, two styles were particularly notable – drone and multipart singing with a solo upper accompanying part. Through the coincidence of various factors, these styles still existed in the late 20th century, and could be documented and studied until recently. In this article, the description of these styles will be based on the results of fieldwork, using the above-mentioned study by Boiko for additional information and comparison. As the multipart singing repertoire of Northern Latgale is broad, a number of examples will be offered which are considered to be very significant in the practice of local traditional music. When selecting these

examples, an attempt has been made to choose those in which it is possible to identify innovations, as well as observe changes, their development and direction.

Drone singing

The drone of Northern Latgale, with rare exceptions, is the static (unchanging) pedal drone. The drone is created by one unchanging, sustained tone: a vowel sung in a long, drawn-out manner. The drone begins after the recited solo part of the caller, which is limited to the range of a fourth. Each of the parts has its own name in local terminology. The melodically active part is called *skaitīšana* (reciting), and correspondingly the solo singer is called the *skaitītāja* (reciter). The drone part is called *vilkšana* (drawing out). Not every singer can be a solo singer: this requires a particularly strong voice. Usually the strongest personalities in a community became the solo singers. Sometimes there could be more than one solo singer, and these would sing in turn. The rest then joined in with the drone. One should not assume that singing the drone part was less important. It created a base for the solo singer, and she still needed a powerful singing voice.

Although the information from interviews of the 1990s allows one to assert that there was a definite place for drone songs by the second half of the 19th century, there is no doubt that singers from Northern Latgale inherited this part of their musical repertoire from even earlier times. This is demonstrated by this multipart singing style, the origin of which is indisputably rooted in a time before the introduction and establishment of functional harmony in Northern Latgale.

One reason why drone singing was able to be maintained in the tradition for so long, can possibly be found in its functional association with one of the most important types of collective work in local farming life – the *talka*. This event, very important in traditional farming life purely in terms of agricultural fertility, served as a long-term framework not only for the maintenance of drone singing, but also for a whole set of very specific traditions and actions. For these, the original

justification was probably associated with various fertility rituals in a broader sense.

Drone singing of Northern Latgale thus has a narrow functional range: it is only associated with the *talka*. Boiko also notes this, drawing attention to the fact that this kind of specific and narrow functional association is not typical of the traditional music scene, which existed in this particular territory in the second half of the 19th century and the 20th century. He also notes that the narrow functional range of drone singing in Northern Latgale has no explanation nor hypothesis. It does, however, have a 'side effect': for local inhabitants, drone singing is interpreted as 'the musical symbol of the *talka*, an unusual musical emblem, the sound of which can mean nothing else than the fact that a manure *talka* is being held' (Boiko 1991: 21–22).

The *talka* in Northern Latgale can be regarded as one of the most vibrant functional contexts of multipart singing. Drone songs occupy a central place in the musical repertoire of the manure *talka*, which in the local tradition are called *tolku bolsi* (*talka* songs). According to the division of labour during *talkas*, singing these songs was a female privilege. The singers were the manure spreaders; the singing occurred in the field when one cartload of manure had already been spread, and the next cartload had yet to arrive. The singer Bārbala Dukaļska described this as follows: 'All of the workers arrived with horses. The hostess set the table, the host brought beer, everyone had a meal, and then went to do their jobs. The manure spreaders went to the field. Straight away carts were loaded up, they were driven to the field, and all of the young girls spread the manure. The transporters arrived – around five horses and carts – all five of them walking one behind the other. At the field the pile was shovelled out, and we spread it all. But during the time when there was no job to do, then we sang.'⁶ When preparing to sing a *talka* song, the singers usually stood together, so that it would be easier to hear each other sing. They sang into the wind, so that the song was carried far. As is told in a number of interviews, it was important for the singers to be heard from as far away as possible. It has also been recorded that the *talka*

⁶ Interview with Bārbala Dukaļska (1926–2008), 8 September 2000 in Medņeva.

was regarded as successful only if the singing had been heard well from a distance.

Drone songs were also sung when the hosts arrived on the field with refreshments, usually beer and cheese. As Boiko writes: 'singing *talka* songs in the field was considered a given and obligatory part of a *talka* day. The arrival of the host and his offering of refreshments gained a ritual meaning, although informants do not associate this action with magical meaning. The theme of slaughtering a sheep, lamb or even a ram, oft-repeated in various contexts within *talka* songs also merits attention. [...] It is possible that this reflects a tradition of ritual sacrifice. It is quite possible that this *talka* song has been apportioned some kind of magical meaning in the past.' (Boiko 1991: 27) The idea that manure *talkas* represent reflections of ancient magic is suggested by another ritual that is not directly associated with the drone. This ritual was maintained up until the time when traditional manure *talkas* ceased to be organized in Northern Latgale as a result of economic development, which happened around the end of the 1950s. The ritual activity occurred in the cow shed when the manure had been removed and the floor was covered in straw. Then workers loudly scraped the walls of the shed with their manure forks, and made calls like the voices of animals: mooed like cows, squealed like pigs, etc. This was a signal for the farmer that the shed was clean, and they had come to partake in refreshments – beer and cheese. The most interesting part began when the hosts arrived. Then the wife of the host was pushed to the ground, rolled around the shed floor, sometimes even having her legs beaten with nettles. A number of informants have related that sometimes before going to the shed, the wife of the host would wrap her legs tightly, so that the nettles wouldn't hurt. Based on interviews from the 1990s, one can conclude that this ritual was spread over the whole of the territory where drone singing occurred, and performed at almost all of the *talkas* remembered by the informants. Informants could no longer explain the meaning of this activity. The most common answer to the question of why this was done was that it was the tradition. It is also possible that the original reason for this ritual was associated with encouraging fertility. It is also just as probable that it is because of this ritual that in Northern Latgale, *talka* drone singing was preserved in active functional

circulation right up until the mid-20th century and is still sung today in a post-functional context. However, as we can conclude from the answers of informants during interviews, knowledge of the earlier ritual meaning disappeared in the first half of the 20th century, yet singers have preserved a special attitude to this material up until today: it undoubtedly occupies a special place in their value system.

Based on material recorded by Boiko, which demonstrates the existence of this form of multipart singing in a total of 10 places, it becomes apparent that it was still possible to record a large amount of local versions of drone singing in Northern Latgale in the late 20th century. Examining these versions, one can see both – their similarities and differences. All of the examples present two-part singing, which is comprised of an upper melodically active part, sung by the solo singer, and the lower drone part, sung by the other singers – usually four or five – on one sustained note, usually the vowel 'a', and in some cases also 'o' and 'e'. In all examples, the range of the melodically active part is a fourth. The framework tones are placed at a distance of a minor or major third. The drone part in all cases coincides with the lower framework tone. Differences appear, mainly thanks to the variations of melody, the variation in rhythm, the tempo differences, as well as the use of microintervals and melismatics in the melodically active part. One can agree with Boiko, who points out that all of the examples of drone documented in Northern Latgale – both the local, melodic, and individual versions – are variations of the same melodic model (Boiko 1991: 47).

Furthermore, three examples from the study by Boiko will be examined, which partly reflect the situation of drone singing in Northern Latgale in the late 20th century (figure 4–6). Based on these, Boiko not only describes relevant individual versions, but also identifies a number of both purposeful and spontaneous innovations, which, to quote the author, have influenced the diachronic dynamic of drone singing (Boiko 1991: 44).

The first (figure 4) and second (figure 5) examples are two versions of the same melody. According to Boiko, their comparison allows one to speak of spontaneous innovations, which occur when one singer learns from another in an ensemble setting. Boiko believes that the singer in

Figure 4. *Talka* song recorded in 1990, transcription by Martin Boiko (Boiko 1991: 65: 13).

Figure 4 shows two systems of a musical score for a 'Talka' song. The first system is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 80. The lyrics are: Na - dūd, Dīv - si, šū - din lī - ta, Šū - din lī - ta. The second system is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 66. The lyrics are: na - va - jag, Šū - din lī - ta na - va - jag. The score includes vocal lines with lyrics and piano accompaniment with a fermata 'A'.

Figure 5. *Talka* song recorded in 1990, transcription by Martin Boiko (Boiko 1991: 64: 12).

Figure 5 shows two systems of a musical score for a 'Talka' song. The first system is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 80 and an 'accel.' marking leading to a tempo of quarter note = 96. The lyrics are: Šū - din mu - nam buo - li - ņa - mi Mās - lu tol - ka. The second system is marked with a tempo of quarter note = 80. The lyrics are: tei - ru - mā, Mās - lu tol - ka tei - ru - mā. The score includes vocal lines with lyrics and piano accompaniment with a fermata 'A'.

the second example (figure 5) has created her own individual version after learning the song from the singer of the first version (figure 4), losing a number of details as a result, and reconfiguring a number of other details. Boiko is referring to differences in tempo contrasts and rhythmic, whereby in the first example, particularly in the beginning, various small lengthenings and shortenings appear. In the second example the values of the notes conform with the metre in all parts. Boiko also points out the differences in singing technique: in the first

example there are many microintervals associated with the second and third levels, which, similarly to the characteristic glissando of the first example, have been lost in the second. Boiko concludes that this is why an overall reduction in details has occurred. This indicates a tendency to simplify and to conform more to the rules of a more 'contemporary' singing style (Boiko 1991: 42).

Both of the examples above are fairly similar to the third example (figure 6). However, an important difference exists: that is, a particular

Figure 6. *Talka* song recorded in 1990, transcription by Martin Boiko (Boiko 1991: 61: 9).

♩ = 84

Pļau - nit, bruo - ļi, pur - va pļo - vas, Lei - ču pļo - vu__

na - pļau - nit, Ā, ā, na - pļau - nit.

Ā

textual arrangement for the song. As can be seen in the transcription, in the places where the text is repeated by the melodically active part, there is a vocalization of the length of a bar. Based on information gained in interviews, Boiko concludes that this change has probably been consciously introduced by the singer herself, who is also the leader of the local ensemble. He writes about it thus: 'The eldest sister of the singer [...] stated that during her time the song was not sung like this, neither here nor anywhere else. The other singers unwillingly told of changes that they, or more likely, their leader had introduced, apparently feeling unsure of the reaction of traditional music researchers. These innovations definitely need closer study. All three singers could sing just as well without the aforementioned section of vocalization – with a full repeat of the second line' (Boiko 1991: 40). It is possible that the desire of these singers to introduce these changes was originally influenced by the wish to create a special drone singing version for the needs of their own ensemble, which therefore would differ from other versions existing in the nearby area. One cannot deny that this version, with the period of vocalization, really does sound artificially created. However, one can conclude that this innovation has become a tradition over the last 20 years, and is regarded as traditional for the activities of the ensemble under discussion.

These examples offer only a small insight into various drone singing situations at a time when the singers were still alive: those who had inherited these songs from previous generations, and who consciously or subconsciously influenced the development of this style of singing. Contemporary drone singing practice is based on this to a large degree. The opportunities to encounter spoken information during fieldwork, similar to that which is described here, are continually diminishing. Unfortunately the number of those singers who were the main keepers of knowledge about drone singing in the late 20th century, is also decreasing. However, drone singing can still be witnessed in the repertoire of the singers of Northern Latgale.

Multipart singing with a solo upper accompanying part

There is another type of multipart singing that is notable in the repertoire of the traditional music of Northern Latgale – information about this style first appeared around the same time the existence of drone singing was discovered. This is three-part and four-part homophonic singing with a solo upper accompanying part, which in the local tradition is known as *dzīduošana ar pusbolsu* (singing with a half-part). This typically has a

number of specific musical features: the upper accompanying part is sung solo, beginning in the second half of the melody, and the part is sung in a special (loud) style, which is also often referred to as 'yelling'. There is also a wide functional spectrum and specific folk terminology associated with this. This style is associated with a particular repertoire, which has become a part of the local tradition over a long period of time, and occupies a special place in the value system of its singers.

Before a more detailed description of multipart singing with a solo upper accompanying part is presented, explanations of the terminology used by local singers will be provided. To the question: 'Why is this kind of singing called singing with a half-part?' Stefānija Matisāne of Rekova village in the Šķilbēni district answers: 'Why is it a half-part? Because it is only half of the melody.'⁷ This means that this part is not 'full': it usually begins in the middle of the song, and is sung only during the second half. However, there are other explanations for this term. Anna Ščemeļinska comments: '[it is called – A. B.] a half because she [the singer of the upper accompanying part – A. B.] sings the highest part on her own.'⁸ This demonstrates the second important characteristic – the position of the upper accompanying part is higher than the main part. This fact is not reflected in the local terminology, although to the singer, it is naturally understood. One also finds names for the other parts in folk terminology: 'Here, in earlier times they sang in three parts: the first part, the second part and as it was called, the half-part.'⁹ The singers also explain how to sing the 'half-part' correctly: 'Over the top, you have to lift it up', adding that the 'half part is sung by only one person.'¹⁰ This part could not be sung by just anyone. Usually a singer with a loud and powerful voice was chosen. Often singers refer to singing the upper accompanying

part as *kliegšana* (yelling). For example, Rozālija Slišāne from Šķilbēni comments: 'You have to yell on the half-part [...] you see, you have to yell, all by yourself', but in another instance this same singer warned other singers: 'Don't start too high, you won't be able to yell the half-part.'¹¹ The singers tell that there are particular songs for which the half-part must be sung, because, as Anna Ščemeļinska notes, 'not all songs have the half-part. Only certain songs have the half-part.'¹² When preparing to sing the upper accompanying part, singers tend to say: 'let's sing with the half-part',¹³ dividing the parts up: 'you will sing the half-part',¹⁴ etc.

The term 'singing with a half-part' and corresponding style is not of recent creation. Singer Anna Ščemeļinska says: 'As far as I remember, it has always existed.'¹⁵ All of the singers relate that their mothers and grandmothers sang like this. This suggests that multipart singing with a solo upper accompanying part has existed in Northern Latgale for more than 100 years. Facts that would immediately verify the existence of this kind of multipart singing in the more distant past have not been found, although that does not rule out the possibility that this tradition was known here even earlier.

In most cases, multipart singing with the solo upper accompanying part in Northern Latgale is heard in multifunctional songs, which can be functionally associated with singing in various *talkas* (manure, rye, flax, potato harvests), when herding, at weddings, summer and winter solstices, as well as during traditional spring and summer singing outdoors. Only in a few instances is this material limited to only one function, e.g., the winter solstice. In some other cases the songs' functional contexts are unclear, and the question arises, to what extent these songs can be regarded

⁷ Interview with Stefānija Matisāne (1927) and Anna Ščemeļinska (1925–2011), 3 December 1994 in Rekova in the Šķilbēni district.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Interview with Rozālija Slišāne (1912–2006), 22 August 1992 in Šķilbēni.

¹² Interview with Stefānija Matisāne and Anna Ščemeļinska, 3 December 1994 in Rekova in the Šķilbēni district.

¹³ Interview with singers in Baltinava, 2 December 1994.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Interview with Stefānija Matisāne and Anna Ščemeļinska, 3 December 1994 in Rekova in the Šķilbēni district.

as traditional, considering that they have probably appeared in the repertoires of the singers since the establishment of ensembles. These songs are sung in a variety of social situations.

The songs are made up of the main part and its homophonic accompaniment – a lower accompanying part¹⁶ and a solo upper accompanying part. In most cases the main part and lower accompanying part are sung in parallel thirds, with some exceptions, when they merge in tonic unison, or make dominant fifths. The upper accompanying part often begins in the second half of the melody or alternatively is sung only in cadences and half-cadences a third higher than the main part, creating parallel thirds together with the main part. As an interval of a third is the dominating interval between the main part and the upper part, and between the main part and the lower part, then parallel triads are often formed.

In order to convey an impression of this type of multipart singing, this article continues with a typical example. It was possible to document many versions of this example over a period of time (1994–2009), as it was recorded not only through contact with various groups of singers but also through repeatedly meeting with one and the same group of singers. These conditions allow conclusions to be drawn about a number of changes and transformations in the style, as was already the case with the drone songs.

The following example is functionally associated with wedding traditions, although it can also be sung at other events. Emīlija Logina from Briežuciems in the Baltinava district gives a straight answer to a question about when the song was sung: 'this was only sung at weddings', adding 'well, when we came together and wanted to sing this melody, then we sang it.'¹⁷ The functioning of this song during weddings is associated with the custom of making the bride cry, which is widely

spread throughout the whole of Eastern Latvia. Emīlija Logina tells: 'It is said that the bride needs to cry. To cry it all out – because she cannot predict all of her life ahead.'¹⁸ In the Baltinava district, in the childhood and youth of the singers, the tradition of making the bride cry usually occurred when the bride's crown was removed. Emīlija Logina continues: 'We sang at any time. When we wanted to. They say that you should sing. And if (the bride) didn't cry, it was said:

If you don't fall, rain,
You are bound to fall during hay making,
If you don't cry now, young girl
You are bound to cry during the rest of your life.'¹⁹

To the question: 'Did the bride cry all the time while the song was being sung?' Emīlija Logina answered: 'Some did', while the singer sitting next to her, Bronislava Plantiece added: 'they used to cry a lot more.'²⁰ Brides cried so that 'there wouldn't be tears in their next life.'²¹ The text of the song compares the tears of the girl and the fir tree as a special tree. Bronislava Platniece related that the fir tree is the saddest tree, and that when a person dies, fir branches are used. In turn Felicija Logina comments on the fir tree: 'It grew, its roots withered; it grew – for withering, and it's a kind of mourning tree, it has to wither, it has to die.'²² Other singers also mention the contrast of these images. When explaining the similarity of a fir tree to a girl's symbolic farewell to her youth, which is expressed as ritual crying while singing a song, Antoņina Logina says: 'It is because it is difficult for a fir tree to be green when it has water under its roots, you see, needles fall and so on, that is why the fir tree is compared with the girl who has to get married, and she is sad for her youth. In earlier times, she was forced to get married – the mother

¹⁶ In particular cases there are two lower accompanying parts. In these examples one of these is usually a third lower than the main part, while the other part displays harmonic functions – the tonic and dominant.

¹⁷ Interview with Emīlija Logina (1914–2009), Felicija Logina (1925–2006) and Bronislava Platniece (1924), 9 September 2000 in Briežuciems.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

Figure 7. The first version of the song with a solo upper accompanying part, recording by the author in 1994, transcription by the author.

♩ = 72

♩ = 66

eg - le, eg - le, Kam__ na - za - jo - ji, Oi,___ eg - le, eg - le, Kam__ na - za - jo - ji.

1.Oi,___ eg - le, eg - le, Kam__ na - za - jo - ji, Oi,___ eg - le, eg - le, Kam__ na - za - jo - ji.

eg - le, eg - le, Kam__ na - za - jo - ji, Oi,___ eg - le, eg - le, Kam__ na - za - jo - ji.

found a suitor, picked him out from the other side of the village and said, 'here, daughter, now you must go to this man'. That's what I think."²³

Although it is not obvious from the text, many singers explain that this song could not only be sung at weddings, but also in other situations. One of the singers remembers that it was sung 'all year round – outdoors, indoors, wherever there was a free choice'.²⁴ More detailed information about the function of this song in other situations was provided by a singer from a neighbouring district. She remembered that it was also sung at *talkas*: 'when we picked potatoes in the autumn, during the *talkas*.²⁵ The song was also sung outdoors in spring and summer. The singers remember: 'We went to the forest, and all climbed together up onto a hillock and sang.'²⁶ Others added to this

description, mentioning that it was also sung during manure *talkas* and when herding.

The first version of the song was recorded by the author in autumn 1994 in Baltinava, when beginning her first independent fieldwork in Northern Latgale (figure 7).

Occasionally exchanged for unisons (tonic) and fifths (dominant), parallel thirds dominate the relationship between the main part and lower part. In the first half of the melody, the upper accompanying part doubles the melody, while in the second half it is a third higher than the main part. On account of its multipart structure and symmetrical form, it is possible to display this version as a typical example of this type of multipart singing. However, this does not mean that these same singers have not introduced

²³ Interview with Antoņina Logina (1932–2004), 2 December 1994 in Baltinava.

²⁴ Interview with Helēna Slišāne (1932), 10 September 2000 in Baltinava.

²⁵ Interview with Bārbala Dukaļska, 8 September 2000 in Medņeva.

²⁶ Interview with Natālija Smuška, 8 September 2000 in Medņeva.

Figure 8. The second version of the song with a solo upper accompanying part, recording by Boiko in 1991, transcription by the author.

♩ = 69

1.Oi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-jo-vi, Oi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-jo-vi?

1.Oi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-jo-vi, Oi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-jo-vi?

1.Oi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-jo-vi, Oi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-jo-vi?

Figure 9. The third version of the song with a solo upper accompanying part, recording by the author in 2000, transcription by the author.

♩ = 66 - 69

1.Voi, eg-le, eg-le, Ka-mi na-za-jo-vi, Voi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-jo-vi?

1.Voi, eg-le, eg-le, Ka-mi na-za-jo-vi, Voi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-jo-vi?

...eg-le, eg-le, Ka-mi na-za-jo-vi, Voi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-jo-vi?

Figure 10. The fourth version of the song with a solo upper accompanying part, recording by Latvian Radio in 1988, transcription by the author.

♩ = 58 - 60

1.Voi, eg - le, eg - le, Kam na - za - ļo - vi, Kam na - za - ļo - vi?

1.Voi, eg - le, eg - le, Kam na - za - ļo - vi, Kam na - za - ļo - vi?

1.Voi, eg - le, eg - le, Kam na - za - ļo - vi, Kam na - za - ļo - vi?

Figure 11. The fifth version of the song with a solo upper accompanying part, recording by the author in 2000, transcription by the author.

♩ = 56 - 58

1.Voi, eg le, eg - le, Kam_ na za-ļo - vi, Voi, eg le, eg - le, Kam_ na za-ļo - vi, Kam_ na za-ļo - vi?

1.Voi, eg le, eg - le, Kam_ na za-ļo - vi, Voi, eg le, eg - le, Kam_ na za-ļo - vi, Kam_ na za-ļo - vi?

1.Voi, eg le, eg - le, Kam_ na za-ļo - vi, Voi, eg le, eg - le, Kam_ na za-ļo - vi, Kam_ na za-ļo - vi?

Figure 12. The sixth version of the song with a solo upper accompanying part, recording by the author in 2006, transcription by the author.

♩ = 60 - 65

1.Oi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-|o-vi? Oi, |u - |i, |u - |i Kam na-za-|o - vi?

1.Oi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-|o-vi? Voi, eg-le, eg-le, Kam na-za-|o - vi?

changes into this model at other times. For example, in a recording of the same group of singers, made by Boiko in 1991, the lower part divides into two parts (figure 8).

The relationship between the main part and upper accompanying part is the same as in the example described above. The higher of the lower accompanying parts is similarly sung a third lower than the main part. The lowest part either doubles the highest of the lower accompanying parts, or is a third lower. In this case a dominant triad is created in the first half of the melody before the inception of the upper accompanying part. A dominant chord of the seventh emerges when the upper accompanying part begins in the second half of the melody. To a greater extent, this can also be applied to a recording of the same singers in 2000, where there are also two lower parts (figure 9). Alongside that which has already been mentioned here, the harmonic line is made even richer. All of the examples studied, typically have glissandi in all parts.

Recordings from Briežuciems, which is not far from Baltinava, demonstrate two different versions of this song.²⁷ There is a different

structure here, which also varies in different recordings of the same group of singers. As is demonstrated in the transcription (figure 10), in a recording made in 1988²⁸ the song is only three bars long, and therefore it lacks the symmetry that was characteristic for the previous versions from Baltinava.

When meeting these singers during fieldwork in 2000, twelve years after this recording, an extended version of this song was encountered, whereby the length had already stretched to five bars (figure 11).

Possibly the two variations have joined here, as a result of communication between ensembles – the symmetrical Baltinava version and the original Briežuciema version with its characteristic repeat. The singers themselves explain the parallel existence of these two variations that differ in terms of form: ‘We have the short and long versions.’ Before performing the song, they usually agree as to which of them – the short or long – will be sung. In the recording from 2000, the lower part mostly doubles the melody of the main part. These changes have been influenced by the fact that in this group of singers, at the

²⁷ Briežuciems is located within the territory of the former Baltinava district.

²⁸ Latvian Radio recording of a concert of traditional music ensembles in Riga.

time of the recording they did not have any strong singers of the lower part. In the recording under discussion, the only singer who could still sing this part sang the upper accompanying part.

Various versions of the song mentioned above have been also documented in the former territory of the Šķilbēni district (figure 12). The most obvious difference that is not associated with the musical model for this song is the use of the refrain that is derived from Russian: 'Oji ļuļi ļuļi', at the place where the text repeats in the beginning of the second line of the melody. However, there are also purely musical features, which lead one to think that in this instance, multipart singing with a solo upper accompanying part is already leaning towards two-part singing in parallel thirds, where the upper accompanying part has already become the main melody. In this case it is no longer sung solo, in a specific manner, but simply as an upper part, which is sung by a number of singers.

The examples described above allow one to outline a number of changes that have affected the type of singing in question and the influence of both internal and external factors. In terms of Baltinava, the changes described have undoubtedly been caused by internal conditions. At its basis is a completely standard variation, which in itself is a typical of traditional singing, without transgressing canons of the relevant multipart model. In terms of Briežuciems, it seems that external factors also played a role, causing the traditions of two neighbouring areas to converge. The example of Briežuciems also clearly demonstrates what happens if there is a lack of singers in particular parts. The development of the situation in Briežuciems in the last few years demonstrates a negative tendency in terms of multipart singing, meaning that there are no longer singers sufficiently skilled to perform the repertoire discussed above. In turn, the last example with the refrain demonstrates the tendency for simplification. In this case the musical structure of the song has been preserved, although specific characteristics of the traditional multipart singing style have been lost – the upper accompanying part sung solo and its special performance style.

It is precisely the performance of the solo upper part, sung in a special manner, which may, over time, be the most endangered part of the multipart singing style discussed here. However,

there is reason to hope that the worst scenario may not happen. Enthusiasts of traditional singing, currently active in Northern Latgale, are now well aware of this style of singing characteristic of their region.

A struggle for existence in the 21st century

The examples given above are only a small part of the broad and diverse repertoire of multipart singing of Northern Latgale. These examples can all still be found in local traditional music practice. This music itself is more influenced by internal and external factors than it was in the early 1990s.

In the 1980s and 1990s multipart singing in Northern Latgale developed in an environment created by singers who had learned and used their repertoire and singing style in traditional circumstances. Uniting the singers into ensembles presented an opportunity for these songs to be heard once again, in completely different conditions and contexts. These contexts, of course, also resulted in a number of changes.

Firstly, local area boundaries changed. Before the formation of singing ensembles, it was possible to draw boundaries according to the locations inhabited by the singers. These influenced the characteristics of the functional repertoire. Once ensembles were established, however, repertoires came to be based in locally significant administrative centres, where singers gathered with differing musical experiences. These singing experiences were brought together, resulting in new versions of songs. Eventually, these versions came to form the repertoire of the ensemble, creating a new area for the localisation of multipart singing.

The core of these repertoires was made up of songs which particular singers brought to the ensemble. It was usually the singers who began these songs, and in time the original titles used by the community (*talka*, wedding, spring, autumn songs, etc.) were changed in favour of personified titles: in other words, songs sung in ensembles were named after their particular singers. In some cases unusual 'property rights' were claimed for particular songs. For example, singers in a number of interviews complained that the neighbouring ensembles had 'stolen' or 'taken' their songs. These claims were based upon the wish to establish a repertoire that was specific to each

particular ensemble, and which could represent the traditions preserved by them.

In view of the issues mentioned, late 20th century multipart singing practice in Northern Latgale comprised a number of vibrant traditions, represented by individual ensembles. The number of ensembles depended on the composition of singers and tended to decrease with the ageing of participants. In some instances, breaks in tradition occurred along with generational change, partly or totally removing any trace of multipart music. In the case of Northern Latgale, three of these breaks can be identified. In two of three cases, the ensemble ceased to exist with the death of the leading singer. In a third case the ensemble continues, although it no longer contains singers capable of multipart singing.

The situation rapidly changed in the 21st century. Increasing numbers of older singers ceased to participate in singing. Younger singers replaced them, but these no longer had the same kind of musical experience as their

predecessors. One can conclude that the activities of those ensembles which in the last two decades successfully served as a functional framework for repertoires of traditional multipart singing were not able to provide the younger generations with the opportunity to learn the repertoire.

Multipart singing specific to Northern Latgale has been recognised as an asset which should be preserved in the traditional musical landscape of the 21st century. To further this aim, a number of education projects have been set up. These include collaboration with ethnomusicologists and vocal teachers. In these projects, a number of alternative forms of teaching are used, beginning with the recreation of traditional settings and ending with singing workshops in which multipart singing is learned from surviving older singers. Therefore, the multipart music of Northern Latgale is entering a new phase, with an attempt to inject life into traditions which have been recovered from the brink of extinction. As for the outcome: time alone will tell.

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Mitmehäälne laulmine Põhja-Latgales: Traditsiooni dünaamika 20. sajandi lõpus – 21. sajandi alguses

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Mitmehäälse muusika uurimine on üks tähtsamaid suundi etnomusikoloogias, mis on endiselt aktuaalne. Kahjuks ei ole Läti panus selle teema uurimisse kuigi kaalukas: ehk küll mitmehäälne muusika moodustab suurema osa Läti rahvamuusikast, pole rahvusvahelistes etnomusikoloogilistes ringkondades sellest peaaegu mingit informatsiooni. Tundub, et on aeg muuta seda olukorda ning pakkuda sissevaadet Läti mitmehäälse muusika ühte elusamasse alasse, kus võib ka tänapäeval leida palju huvitavaid mitmehäälse laulmise vorme, mis üritavad 21. sajandil ellu jääda.

Regiooniks, millest käib jutt, on Läti kirdeosa Venemaa piiril, mis on igast küljest geograafiliselt eraldatud. Selle regiooni piirid, milleks on metsad ja sood, loovad erilise saare, mida iseloomustab elus ja mitmekesine traditsioonilise muusika pärand. Läti traditsioonilise kultuuri uurimise kontekstis nimetatakse seda regiooni Põhja-Latgaleks. Põhja-Latgale regioon moodustab erilise kultuurilise ruumi, kus paljud traditsioonilised tavandid ja käsitööd, aga ka traditsioonilise muusika vanemad vormid, säilisid suhteliselt kaua – kuni 20. sajandi lõpuni ja isegi 21. sajandi alguses.

Võib kindlalt väita, et Põhja-Latgale vokaalne repertuaar on põhiolemuselt mitmehäälne, välja arvatud teatud juhtumid, kus meil on tegemist sooloesitusega. Siin võib kohata nii burdooni kui ka *ostinato*'t ning rikkalikult esindatud on ka harmoonilise mitmehäälse laulu erinevad vormid. Paljudel juhtudel võib samuti rääkida burdooni ja harmoonilise mitmehäälse laulu kombinatsioonidest.

Käesolev artikkel on pühendatud mitmehäälse laulmise elusale praktikale. Artiklis ei üritata mitte üksnes tutvustada lugejale Põhja-Latgale tüüpilisi mitmehäälse laulmise liike, vaid ka jälgida selle elu 1990. aastatel ja 21. sajandi alguses, kirjeldades tähtsamaid kontekste ja tingimusi, mis on mõjutanud ja mõjutavad endiselt mitmehäälse laulmise praktikat Põhja-Latgales. Põhja-Latgale mitmehäälse laulmise uurimist 1990. aastatel toetasid välitööd, mille käigus etnomusikoloogid avastasid palju huvitavaid, seni teadmata mitmehäälse laulu tüüpe. Nende hulgast on eriti märkimisväärsed kaks stiili – burdoon ja mitmehäälne laul ülemise soolo-saatepartiiga. Paljude tegurite koostoimel eksisteerisid need stiilid seal 20. sajandi lõpus ja neid oli võimalik viimasel hetkel dokumenteerida ja uurida. Nende stiilide kirjeldus selles artiklis põhineb välitööde tulemustel, kusjuures lisainformatsiooni ja võrdluse jaoks kasutatakse Martin Boiko uurimusi. Näited, mida kirjeldatakse käesolevas artiklis, on üksnes väike osa Põhja-Latgale mitmehäälse laulu laiast ja mitmekesisest repertuaarist, kuid need annavad võimaluse identifitseerida uuendusi ja täheldada muutusi ja arengusuundi 20-aastase perioodi jooksul. Protsessid mitmehäälse laulmise elus Põhja-Latgales 1990. aastatel käivitasid lauljad, kes õppisid ja kasutasid oma repertuaari ja laulmisstiili traditsioonilistes tingimustes. Lauljate ühinemine ansamblitesse andis nendele lauludele võimaluse kōlada jälle hoopis teistes tingimustes ja teises kontekstis. Muidugi kutsus see kontekst omakorda esile palju muutusi. 20. sajandi lõpus koosnes mitmehäälse laulmise praktika Põhja-Latgales paljudest elusatest traditsioonidest, mida esindasid erinevad ansamblid. Olukord muutus kiiresti 21. sajandil. Üha rohkem lauljaid lõpetas aktiivse laulmispraktika. Nende asemele tulid nooremad lauljad, kuigi neil ei olnud enam samasugust muusikalist kogemust nagu nende eelkäijatel. Võib tulla järeldusele, et nende ansambelite tegevus, kes viimase kahe kümnendi jooksul olid edukalt traditsioonilise mitmehäälse laulu repertuaari kindlaks funktsionaalseks raamistikuks, ei suutnud enam luua nooremale põlvkonnale võimalust õppida repertuaari. Ometi suutsid nad toetada arusaama, et Põhja-Latgale mitmehäälse laulu vormid on hinnaline pärand, mida peaks säilitama 21. sajandi traditsioonilise muusika varamus. Selle eesmärgi edendamiseks on korraldatud palju hariduslikke üritusi, tehtud koostööd etnomusikoloogide ja laulopedagoogidega. Nendel üritustel kasutatakse mitmeid alternatiivseid õpetamisvorme, alustades funktsionaalse konteksti rekonstrueerimisega ja lõpetades erinevate laulmise õppetubadega, kus mitmehäälseid laule õpitakse veel elus olevate vanemate lauljate käest. Niisiis on Põhja-Latgale mitmehäälne muusika, mis toodi juba kord „kliinilisest surmast“ välja, astumas oma teise elu uude faasi. Nende jõupingutuste tulemusi näeme tulevikus.