

Creating and Retaining Seto Identity: Case Study of a Seto Choir Existing Outside Setomaa

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Abstract

A Seto choir based in a town outside Setomaa region is examined; the study is based on fieldwork. The main aim of the paper is to examine how 'being Seto' manifests itself externally. Both the way a performance is performed and the way being Seto is performed have been analysed drawing on different approaches to performance as described by Erving Goffman and Richard Schechner. Using the method of Schechner one rehearsal period from the run up to the performance, the performance itself and its aftermath have been studied. Practical activities in preparation for a concert, but also performances of being Seto took centre stage. In order to analyse how being Seto is performed, the frontstage-backstage dichotomy identified by Goffman has been used. Thereby factors like Seto dialect, costumes and importance of certain songs and specific aspects of Seto singing have been examined. Results show that singers and their understanding of singing were influenced by external factors (e.g., audience), whereas being Seto depends on internal factors (e.g., the cultural experience of choir members). Being Seto is combined with the recreational activity of choral singing.