

Decoloniality and Russian Music: Finno-Ugric Legacies in Contemporary St. Petersburg

Anya Shatilova
Wesleyan University
Middletown, Connecticut

Abstract

This article presents two case studies examining the musical groups Talomerkit and Ingervalva in the context of the late Soviet and post-Soviet reawakening of Finno-Ugric culture in St. Petersburg, Russia. Coming from different ethnic backgrounds, these two groups demonstrate different ways of engaging with local Finno-Ugric traditions. While Talomerkit uses a so-called tradition-based approach with minimal alteration of primary material, Ingervalva looks for alternative stylistic choices through electric instruments and electronic sounds. Based on my fieldwork done in June 2018 and May 2019, I present ethnographic observations about Talomerkit and Ingervalva's musical activities and focus on issues related to the repatriation of Finno-Ugric musical heritage to a local community in St. Petersburg after the interruption of these traditional musical practices during the Soviet period. By using ethnomusicological approaches of decolonization, my aim is to foreground the voices of artists and activists who engage with the legacy of a small, non-Slavic Finno-Ugric population indigenous to the lands of present-day St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast. I argue that those autochthonous perspectives are instrumental in challenging the cultural discourse in Anglophone Russian music studies, which predominantly focuses on musical knowledge production through the lens of the Slavic population.

Decoloniality and Russian Music

Despite the decades-long intellectual history of postcolonial theory in Anglophone scholarship, the notion of postcoloniality has yet to find its proper place in the context of Russian studies. As Nancy Condee warns:

If we turn our attention to the Russian Federation today, a curious paradox obtains, since the federation's internal relations with Chechnya, Bashkortostan, and elsewhere show little trace of decolonization; in fact, the historical contradictions of its disciplinary systems find themselves in crisis between the dead empire and the newly emergent one... a dynastic empire fell, a socialist one followed, and a third is now consolidating its institutions along familiar trajectories. [2006: 830]

While attempts have been made to incorporate postcolonial critique into the realm of Russian studies, such research mostly focuses on post-Soviet spaces outside of

Russia [Spivak, Condee, Ram and Chernetsky 2006; Koplatazde 2019; Moore 2001; Tlostanova 2015; Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012]. On the other hand, colonized peoples and cultures within the Russian Federation that constitute a large portion of the country's population and remain politically and culturally subjugated are rarely discussed in the context of postcolonial discourse.

In this article, I bring attention to small, non-Slavic Finno-Ugric populations indigenous to the lands of present-day St. Petersburg and Leningrad Oblast. Three groups collectively known as the Ingrians—ижорцы [the Izhors], водь [the Votes], and ингерманландские финны [the Ingrian Finns]—as well as вепсы [the Veps] have been subjects of colonial rule for many centuries, and the ownership of their land was disputed by the Grand Duchy of Moscow, Swedish Empire, Russian Empire, and Soviet Union [Matley 1979]. While the Izhors, the Votes, and the Veps inhabited these lands long before the Slavic domination, the Ingrian Finns moved to Ingria only in the seventeenth century. They migrated from Finland to the territory inhabited by the Izhors and Votes when this region was under the rule of the Swedish Empire. They came from two areas in Finland: Äyräpää in the central part of the Karelian Peninsula and the province Savo in southcentral Finland (they became known as äyrämöiset and savakot) [Matley 1979: 2]. While under Russian influence, the Izhors, the Votes, and the Veps adopted the Orthodox faith, the Ingrian Finns preserved Lutheranism, which helped them to resist acculturation [Kuznetsova, Markus, Muslimov 2015: 154].

The gradual decrease of the Finno-Ugric population and assimilation into the socio-cultural environment of the Slavs, with whom they have been sharing the land, resulted in a significant loss of their cultural and ethnic identity. More harm to Ingrians and the Veps was done during the early twentieth century because of Soviet dekulakization and collectivization campaigns and further during World War II, when most Finno-Ugrians of the St. Petersburg region were deported to Central Asia and later to Siberia [Kon'kova and Kokko 2009: 7, 16; Kon'kova 2009a: 96; Kon'kova 2009b: 51]. Only after 1954 were Ingrians and the Veps allowed to resettle on their native land [Kurs 1994: 112]. (1)

Focusing on the music legacy of these Finno-Ugric groups, I use the idea of coloniality as Luis Chávez and Russell P. Skelchy [2019] define it in ethnomusicology. Differentiating colonialism and coloniality, Chávez and Skelchy point out that the former “refers primarily to a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a people or nation-state rests on the power of another nation” [2019: 121]. In turn, quoting Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Chávez and Skelchy [2019: 121] note that coloniality refers to “the longstanding patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administration.”

By applying the notion of coloniality to the lived musical experiences of Finno-Ugric peoples of the St. Petersburg region, I offer two modes of decolonial knowledge production in Russian music studies adapted from Chávez and Skelchy's definition [2019: 118]. First, it can be achieved by shifting focus from the tradition of Western art music as the predominant research area associated

with Russian music studies in the Anglophone scholarship; and second, by attuning to and implementing musical knowledge and experiences of the non-Slavic populations of the Russian Federation, including ethnic minorities and *коренные народы* [Indigenous people]. To employ the strategies of decoloniality, I propose that “Russian” in the context of Russian music studies should not be perceived as a homogenous term associated exclusively with the musical practices of ethnic Russians but also should be used in a broader sense, incorporating the knowledge production of other ethnic groups within the Russian Federation.

This article presents two case studies that focus on the music groups Talomerkit and Ingervalva, who are involved in the reawakening of Finno-Ugric traditions in contemporary St. Petersburg and demonstrate different ways of engagement with the tradition. Talomerkit, a group that was formed by ethnic Ingrians, uses a so-called traditional musical approach that is based on minimally altered primary material. The group acts as local cultural activists and works on the repatriation of Ingrian heritage to the population. In contrast, Ingervalva, whose members do not have ethnic connections to Ingrians, uses more radical musical strategies that involve electronic and electric sounds along with composed elements in their interpretation of Finno-Ugric material. Perceiving local Slavic/Finno-Ugric musical heritage as a constituent part of the cultural identity of the St. Petersburg area, Ingervalva uses it as a tool of their musical creative process and to promote inclusive multi-ethnic and tradition-based musical spaces.

Based on fieldwork completed in June 2018 and May 2019, in this article I present ethnographic observations of Talomerkit and Ingervalva’s musical activities and focus on issues related to the repatriation of Finno-Ugric musical heritage to a local community in St. Petersburg after the interruption of these traditional musical practices during the Soviet period. Being born into a family of an Ingrian mother and an ethnic Russian father, my position in the field was two-fold—as an ethnic insider but also a cultural outsider. Like many of my generation, whose families belonged to the silenced Ingrian community, I grew up with limited access to local Finno-Ugric cultural knowledge. While some customs, like Lutheran baptism and traditional food, were passed on to me and my siblings unhesitatingly, language and family history were kept at a distance from us. Summers and school breaks spent in one of the Ingrian villages near Gatchina became those times when most of my cultural learning would informally occur. My grandparents would put me on *финки* [kicksled or *potkukelkka* in Finnish] and make guest visits to other Ingrian houses in nearby villages. We would drink goat’s milk with *munavoi* [egg butter open sandwiches] for breakfast and celebrate Lutheran Christmas, but none of these customs were explained to me and articulated as something I should perceive as my ethnic identity. After summer breaks, my parents, siblings, and I would move back to our apartment in St. Petersburg, and the time I spent in our micro-Ingrian world would feel like something distant, existing in parallel.

I started researching Ingrian history and culture only after my grandparents had passed away, and I sourced most of the information on the topic from academic publications and ethnographic fieldwork. After beginning my

ethnomusicological training, I have been investigating sites of Ingrain knowledge transmission, such as festivals, churches, and museum exhibitions, and establishing contacts with local musicians and activists. During fieldwork in 2019, I conducted several in-person, semi-structured interviews with Talomerkit and Ingervalva and engaged in ongoing digital fieldwork.

In the first part of the article, I introduce the group Talomerkit in conjunction with a non-profit grassroots organization, Pietarin Inkerin Liitto [St. Petersburg Union of Ingrian Finns]. I offer a description of one of the main festivals of the local Finno-Ugric community—Juhannus [St. John’s Day]. Further, I look closer at Talomerkit’s signature song “Tulkkaa Tyttäret Tulelle,” which belongs to the category of calendar songs of the Kalevala-meter genre of Ingrian oral poetry. I contextualize it within the ritual setting of the traditional celebration of Juhannus and trace the history of the oral transmission of this song and Ingrian singers.

In the second part of the article, I examine the group Ingervalva and focus on its artistic thinking as a popular music band that engages with local Finno-Ugric tradition. I discuss the sources that Ingervalva uses to build its repertoire and examine one of its early songs “Undarmoi ja Kalervoi,” an arrangement of an Izhorian *runo* song which was included by Elias Lönnrot in the Karelo-Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*. I emphasize the significance of this *runo* song and Izhorian cultural legacy as a source of inspiration for many now well-known musical and literary works, and how the nationalizing of the *Kalevala* by Finns blurs the distinction between Finnish and Ingrian cultures.

The aim of this article is to rethink established Slavic-focused modes of musical knowledge production in the St. Petersburg region and the relationship between land and community. As pointed out by Chávez and Skelchy, “[A]utonomy over land is not about mirroring the frameworks of the nation-state but challenging existing colonial ideas about property and ownership by asserting native perspectives” [2019: 121]. Following this line of thought, I present these two case studies to demonstrate the musical agency of the Finno-Ugric population and their legacy as a constitutive part of the regional cultural fabric and to add their voices to global discussions about decoloniality. By doing so, I address the importance of postcolonial hermeneutics, which according to David Chioni Moore, “might add richness to studies of place” [2001: 124]. I argue that legacy of Finno-Ugric population should be included in correcting the socio-cultural asymmetry of the region. While the cultural reawakening of the Finno-Ugric population in St. Petersburg began in the late 1980s, it remains a mainly grassroots initiative without the major support of local cultural and governmental institutions.

Talomerkit: Revivalists of Traditional Ingrian Music

In previous centuries, special patrimonial tokens, *talomerkit*, existed in the households of the Votes, Izhors, and Ingrian Finns. They were placed on work equipment, boats, fishing tackle, felled timber, and sometimes even on grave crosses. A family’s *talomerkit* was passed from father to his eldest son, and any

remaining sons had to choose a new sign for themselves. In the seventeenth century, talomerkit were also used in documents as a personal signature, especially if the signatory was illiterate, which was characteristic of Orthodox Ingrians. (2)

These days, Talomerkit is known as the name of a local music group based in St. Petersburg and made up of the members of the local organization *Inkerin Liitto*. This non-profit organization was founded in 1988 with the goal to promote the traditional culture and language of the Ingrian Finns and serves as an advocate for the rights of Ingrians and even assists in individual cases of political rehabilitation. Today, Talomerkit is one of only a very few groups in the city that present and promote local Finno-Ugric music using a so-called tradition-based musical approach. Talomerkit performs traditional songs and dances of the Ingrian Finns, Votes, and Izhors, all sung in their original languages and based on ethnographic recordings collected by researchers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The history of Talomerkit can be traced to the year 2000, when an anthropologist and Ingrian activist, Olga Konkova, formed an amateur choir. It was mainly formed by students of the Finnish language classes at *Inkerin Liitto* to learn and sing traditional Ingrian songs. At that time, the choir consisted of sixty people, and one of the singers was Vetka Lappolainen, who now sings with Talomerkit. According to Lappolainen, Konkova chose some of the most vociferous people to perform ancient *runo* songs. “Сначала мы просто орали” [At first, we were just screaming], comments Lappolainen, “как объясняла Конькова, народное пение—это когда в деревне на одной горке поешь, на другой тебя должны услышать [as Konkova explained, folk singing is when you sing on one hill of the village, people should hear you on the opposite side] [Lappolainen 2019]. (3)

In 2009, after the disintegration of the choir, as informants to my research put it, enthusiastic members of *Inkerin Liitto* founded the group Talomerkit. From 2009 to the present day, the membership of Talomerkit has varied, and at the time of my research, the group had four or five regular members—Irina Demidova, Dmitri Harakka, Aina Jaokkola, Vetka Lappolainen, and Julia Tuomo. Demidova, who joined the group a few years after its formation, became the conductor and leader of the group. Studying folklore in the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Demidova specialized in Russian Slavic music, but became interested in Finno-Ugric culture in the process of working with Talomerkit. Demidova helped Talomerkit to compile a new selection of songs and record two albums, *Tantsikuahan* and *Souva Laiva*, which were produced with the financial support of *Inkerin Liitto*, the Finnish Society of Ingrian Culture (*Inkerin Kulttuuriseura*), and the Russian Izhora Community.

Throughout its existence, Talomerkit has performed at Ingrian celebrations in St. Petersburg such as Joulupäivä [Christmas], (4) Kalevalan päivä [Kalevala Day], (5) Laskiainen [Shrovetide], (6) Juhannus [St. John’s Day], (7) and *Inkerin päivä* [Ingrian Day]. (8) The musicians also regularly visit Ingrian diaspora communities in Estonia and Finland and perform at local festivals and events in

St. Petersburg dedicated to the heritage and cultures of numerically small, Indigenous peoples of Northwestern Russia and Leningrad Oblast. Thus, Talomerkit's target audience predominantly consists of Ingrians, enthusiasts participating in local celebrations in Russia and neighboring Finno-Ugric countries, or those interested in the heritage of the Indigenous peoples of Northwestern Russia. As a result, Talomerkit is participating in the construction of an Ingrian identity, musical and social, and in doing so aims to highlight the ethnic distinctiveness of the Ingrian population of St. Petersburg from the dominant Slavic identity.

Even though Inkerin Liitto was founded by the Ingrian Finns, it also acts as the all-Ingrian organization and does not separate its traditions from that of other Ingrians—the Izhors and the Votes. Similarly, Talomerkit features the songs of all three groups in its performances. To form its repertoire, members of Talomerkit mainly relied on archival materials, the studies and personal collections of Olga Konkova, and on the book *Народные песни Ингерманландии* [*Ingrian Folk Songs*] compiled by Eino Kiuru, Terttu Koski, and Elina Kylmäsuu in 1974. Published by the Karelian branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, this volume is one of a very few printed sources of Ingrian music and the only collection of Ingrian songs that was published during the Soviet period.



Figure 1: Imatra, Finland. Talomerkit (Dmitri Harakka –first left, Vetka Lappolainen – first row, second left, and Aina Jaakkola – first row, second right) with the dance group Piirileikki at Imatra päivä. 19 August 2018. Photo published in Talomerkit's official Facebook group on 9 September 2018.

“Traditions from the past are used not only to signify difference, but also to create a sense of continuity,” notes Tina Ramnarine in her monograph on Finnish folk music [2003: 15]. In the case of Ingrian traditional culture, as emphasized by

the members of Talomerkit and Ingrian Liitto, such “a sense of continuity” was forcefully interrupted:

Ингерманландская культура долгое время не развивалась, потому что не говорили, не пели. Единственное чем поддерживали культуру—это религиозные богослужения, они практически не переставали осуществляться. Даже в Сибири люди молились в своих домах, захватывали из Ингерманландии церковную утварь. В Ленинградской области практиковалось даже такое, что мужчин пасторов не было (как должно быть традиционно) и тогда женщины исполняли роль проповедника—они собирались в домах, читали вместе книги. Позже, когда появилась возможность слушать радио, слушали финский канал. Поэтому все культурное наследие в архивах, а не в памяти людей.

[Ingrian culture has not been developing for a long time, because people did not speak, did not sing in Ingrian languages. The only thing that supported the culture was religious services, which did not cease to be performed. They were done in houses, however, not churches. Even Ingrians in Siberia continued to pray, supplying their houses with seized church utensils from their native land. In Leningrad Oblast, when there were no male pastors available (as it should be traditionally), women played the role of a preacher—they gathered in houses and read books together. Later, when it became possible to listen to the radio, they listened to a Finnish channel. Therefore, the entire cultural heritage is now in the archives and not in people’s memory]. [Jaokkola, Lappalainen, and Tikka 2019]

Starting from the time of perestroika, Ingrians have been revitalizing traditional cultural practices despite interrupted knowledge transmission. One of the first Finno-Ugric autochthonous celebrations revived by the Ingrian Finns was the mid-summer festival Juhannus. In an interview with the newspaper *Bumaga*, one of the activists from Inkerin Liitto, Susanna Parkkinen, recalls that during the first years of Juhannus’s official reappearance in Ingria, the celebration attracted approximately two thousand people [Chirin and Kudriavtseva 2017].

“Come, Girls, to the Bonfire”: Mid-Summer Festival Juhannus

In summer 2018, when I attended Juhannus, it took place in a valley near the Oredezh River, in an area of Leningrad Oblast previously abundant with Ingrian villages. Although Juhannus is the name given to the celebration of the summer solstice by the Ingrian Finns, nowadays, it brings together all Finno-Ugrians living in the St. Petersburg region. Usually, local performance groups of traditional Ingrian dance and music participate in the festival along with guests from Finland and Estonia. Juhannus 2018 was not an exception. The festival started around

noon and went on until dusk, which allowed the festival to conclude with an old Ingrian ritual—the dance around the bonfire. On one side of the valley, surrounded by fir trees and pines, stood the stage from which musicians, dancers, and speakers communicated with the audience. Along the river, there were numerous tents selling merchandise, handicrafts, as well as traditional food, historical books about Ingria, CDs, and DVDs of the performers. The open space in the middle was allocated for interactive entertainment, like souvenir workshops and traditional games. A group of women in Ingrian costumes and flower crowns circulated the perimeter of the valley with the kantele hanging around their shoulders to entertain the idly lounging public with Ingrian tunes. (9)



Figure 2: Women in traditional costumes are playing tunes on the kantele while interacting with visitors at Juhannus. Photo taken by the author on 23 June 2018.

When speaking about celebrations of Juhannus in the late nineteenth century, Susanna Parkkinen explains that its format as a song and dance festival, which continues these days, was introduced by the Ingrian composer Mooses Putro [Chirin and Kudriavtseva 2017]. However, in earlier times, it had a more ritual nature. For the Izhors, for example, bonfires played a central role in the mid-summer celebration, which they call Jaani. Olga Konkova describes this ritual in her book about Izhorians:

[С]амые небывало красивые костры были у северных ижор на Карельском перешейке. За две недели до праздника молодые пастухи из бревен и поленьев воздвигали башню высотой до 10 м! А рядом ставили несколько дровяных башен пониже. Все костры обносились оградой с воротами, где все жерди были соединены берестой. И вот светлой ночью, на фоне еще не остывшего от заката неба, вспыхивало новое зарево: горели костры, пылала ограда и в воздухе, как огненные птицы, летали подожженные берестяные шары, сплетенные пастухами в длинные ночи перед Яани.

[The most unusual bonfires were made by the Izhors of the Karelian Isthmus. Two weeks before the celebration, shepherds would erect a tower from logs up to ten meters high, and several wood towers were lowered next to them. All bonfires were surrounded by a fence with a gate, where the poles were connected by birch bark. On the night of Jaani, bonfires and fences were burned and emblazed birch bark balls preliminary woven by shepherds for the occasion flew in the air like fireballs. The bonfire was supposed to burn with a very bright flame, as a purifier of the human body and soul from evil forces and evil spirits. Young people jumped over the bonfires believing that they would be cured of ailments, and if you jump high, then the bread will become tall and thick]. [2009a: 165]

One of the songs that was sung at Jaani to invite girls and women to the bonfire was “Tulkkaa Tyttäret Tulelle”:

Izhorian	Russian	English
Tulkkaa, tyttäret, tulelle	Приходите, дочери, к огню,	Come, girls, to the bonfire,
vanat naiset valkkioille,	старые женщины, - к костру,	old women to the light!
kuulkaa, naiset, kuin miä laulan,	слушайте, женщины, как я спою,	Women, listen as I sing
pankaa päähä kui rajatan:	запомните, что скажу:	remember that I will say:
kyl on heikko herran valta –	худые же владенья барина –	the landowner’s vile possessions –
kukko on kuuvvella talolla,	один петух на шесть домов,	one rooster for six houses,
kana kaikilla kylällä	одна кура – на всю деревню.	one hen for the whole village. (10)

Figure 3: Lyrics of the song “Tulkkaa Tyttäret Tulelle” in Izhorian and Russian languages [Kiuru, Koski, and Kylmäsuu 1974: 78]. English translation by the author.

This sonic enactment of the ritual was revived by Talomerkit and now can be heard at the celebration of Juhanuus. As I discovered after listening to Talomerkit’s version of the song, the group adapted the lyrics from the version of “Tulkkaa Tyttäret Tulelle” sung by the Izhorian-Votian singer Nat’u Lukina. Lukina’s singing was recorded in 1968 by the editors of *Ingrian Folk Songs* and published as number thirty-two in that volume [Kiuru et al. 1974: 78–79, 495]. As mentioned in the commentary to the song, in earlier recorded versions, singers would add a line, “Whoever does not come to the bonfire... let that woman give birth to a girl.” However, in the version sung by Talomerkit, the singer simply ridicules the squalor of neighboring villages [Kiuru et al. 1974: 495].

“Tulkkaa Tyttäret Tulelle” was characterized by Kiuru et al. as a calendar song, the vocal genre that belongs to Ingrian Kalevala-meter poetry, which was given its name after the publication of the Finnish epic *Kalevala* by Elias Lönnrot in the nineteenth century [1974; Kallio 2010: 391]. Other genres typical for this type of poetry in Ingria were epic songs and medieval ballads, lyrical songs, lullabies, round-dance songs, wedding songs, and laments [Kiuru 1974: 6–23]. (11) Kiuru points out that Ingrian calendar and wedding songs were performed in the villages of the Soikkola peninsula in ritual contexts as late as the first few decades of the twentieth century. However, by the time of the publication of *Ingrian Folk Songs*, those rituals were almost completely forgotten and remembered only in fragments by villagers of older generations [Kiuru 1974: 9, 13].

Although in *Ingrian Folk Songs*, the editors provide only brief accounts of the singers, such as their date and place of birth, I was able to locate a more detailed biography of Nat’u [Natalya] Lukina (1898–1977) via an open access digital project “Votian and Izhorian Folk Songs.” (12) According to Finno-Ugrian scholars Paul Ariste and Hans-Hermann Bartens, Lukina was born in the village of Luutsa [Luzhitsy] to a Votian father and Izhorian mother, speaking the Votian language as her mother tongue. (13) After her marriage, Lukina moved to Jögöperä [Krakol’e]. (14) From interactions with Lukina during the expeditions, the collectors wrote some reflections regarding her character and singing style:

Nat’u was a good storyteller and a great singer. She spoke fast and would not repeat anything she said. Folklore collectors have written beliefs and traditions, oral history and songs from her. Nat’u had a rich repertoire of Ingrian songs, she was well versed in wedding rituals, and participated as a singer in weddings celebrated according to old traditions until an advanced age. She knew many more Ingrian songs than she did Votian ones and had learned the few Votian songs in her repertoire mostly in her home village Luuditsa. Like the songs of Duña Trofimova and Oudekki Figuova, Nat’u’s Votian songs display considerable Ingrian influences

(Ingrian features tend to emerge in the songs of those singers who have performed in both Votian and Ingrian environments). Nat'u also knew bawdy songs, but would not sing these to the collectors, as they were not decent. Lengthy Russian ballads constituted the majority of her repertoire. According to Paul Ariste, Nat'u enjoyed speaking about and crying over her difficult life. [Ariste 1986; Ariste and Ergo-Hart 2005; Bartens 2012 quoted in Kuusk 2015] (15)

“Tulkkaa Tyttäret Tulelle” is a calendar song with distinguishable characteristics of Kaleva-meter style such as the narrow range of the melody and repetitive poetic devices like alliteration and parallelism. The song metrically belongs to a type of trochaic tetrameter with 5/4 groupings and their variations [Kallio 2010: 399; Saunders 2017: 33, 40; Siikala 2000: 256]. According to my observations, melodically, Talomerkit’s version is almost a replica of the archival recording of another Izhorian-Votic singer—Anna Kivisoo (born 1881), a contemporary of Lukina. Although Talomerkit’s main intervallic and stylistic gestures are very similar to Kivisoo’s, their vocal style in the album lacks microtonal ornamentations characteristic to Kivisoo’s singing:

♩ = 108

Voice Lead

o - oi tulk - kaa tyt - tä - ret tu - le - e - le tu - le - e - le

5
tulk - kaa tyt - tä - ret tu - le - e - le tu - le - e - le va - nat nai - set

9
valk - ki - oil - le valk - ki o - oil - le va - nat nai - set vak - ki - oil - le

13
valk - ki o - oil - le

Figure 4: The first two lines of “Tulkkaa Tyttäret Tulelle” sung by Talomerkit (Souva Laiva CD). (16)

The above descriptions of the old and new versions of the mid-summer festival, known among Ingrians as Juhannus and Jaani, demonstrate some of the strategies that the local Finno-Ugric community implemented in recreating the “sense of continuity” mentioned by Ramnarine in relation to traditional culture [2003: 15]. As shown in my analysis of “Tulkkaa Tyttäret Tulelle,” the interrupted oral transmission of Kalevala-meter songs resulted in a syncretism of musical and textual elements drawn from various sources and locales. This sonic

reconstruction of Izhorian ritual by Talomerkit absorbed the legacy of many generations of Ingrians, which presents a Finno-Ugric perspective on sociocultural environment in the St. Petersburg region.

Ingerval: Finno-Ugric Legacy and Popular Music

Although the trio named Ingerval only appeared in public in 2018, its history began much earlier in the 2000s, when Russian “ethno-folkers” started experimenting with Celtic music. (17) Georgii Mazhuga, the founder, arranger, flutist, and electronics mixer of Ingerval, shares his memories about that period of Celtic obsession:

В 1990-х—начале 2000-х был интересен жанр фэнтэзи, особенно про хоббитов... Мои коллеги меня, возможно, как-то превратно поймут, но мое представление такое – где хоббиты, там и кельты, Толкиен и так далее. На этой основе образовалось огромное количество команд в том числе, например, московская группа «Мельница», которая абсолютно из этой «толкнутой» тусовки.

[In the 1990s and early 2000s, people were fascinated by the genre of fantasy, particularly hobbits... My colleagues may somehow misunderstand me, but my idea is where the hobbits are, there are Celts, Tolkien and so on... On this basis, a considerable number of bands were formed, including, for example, a popular group from Moscow Мельница [Melnitsa], which was absolutely from the “Tolkien-obsessed” crowd]. [Mazhuga 2019]

Mazhuga further says that he became involved in that scene with the band Минус Трели [Minnus Trellich], which he and his friends from St. Petersburg founded in 2007. Along with Celtic music, Minnus Trellich took up the Scandinavian tradition, specifically Swedish music. The engagement of the band in Swedish tradition comes from Mazhuga’s family history—his great-great-grandfather, Carl Fredric Andersson, came to St. Petersburg from Stockholm in the nineteenth century to study architecture and continued his career in the Russian Empire.

Later, Minnus Trellich gradually moved from an exclusively instrumental music format toward experimentation with vocals. Those experiments led to collaborations with a choir from the Swedish Consulate and a singer, Katya Dolmatova. The alliance culminated in joint concerts and the recording of an album of Swedish Christmas songs, which was presented in their show at St. Anne’s Lutheran Church, a popular venue for various art and music shows. Eventually, due to artistic disagreement, some members of Minnus Trellich established a separate band, Ingerval, with a stronger vocal component.

While still with Minnus Trellich, Mazhuga started contemplating the idea of including local Finno-Ugric musical material in their repertoire:

В какой-то момент я подумал, чего ради мы будем играть какую-то историю, связанную с чужой музыкой? Все равно в США или Великобритании будут играть лучше, потому что у них это в крови.

[At some point, I thought, why are we playing the music of somebody else's culture? Anyway, in Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States, musicians play this music much better because they have it in their blood]. [2019]

In the early 2010s, the niche of local Ingrian music arranged in the popular music styles was almost vacant. As Mazhuga remembers, only the group Конец Лера [Konets Leta] was engaging with the music of the Indigenous peoples of the St. Petersburg region. However, Mazhuga notes that the genre of the music produced by Konets Leta was stylistically close to the eclectic nature of “world music,” where Ingrian elements are only ingredients in the melting pot of various musical traditions [2019].

Mazhuga invented the name Ingervalva by merging the words Kalevala and Ингерманландия [Ingermanland or Ingria]. Two members of the trio had professional music training: the singer, Katya Dolmatova, was trained as an ethnomusicologist-folklorist and the guitarist, Alexander Nikolaev, who replaced the co-founder of the band Sergey Bukreev, graduated from the St. Petersburg State University of Culture and Arts. Although Mazhuga is the only member without a formal musical education (he graduated from the Department of Fine Arts at the Herzen Pedagogical University), since his sophomore year in college he has been involved in the music scene of the city, playing the flute with different popular music bands.

Mazhuga shared with me that the initial idea of Ingervalva was to popularize the traditional music of the Northwestern part of Russia, which includes both Finno-Ugric and Slavic songs [2019]. Stylistically, the band has been moving toward the arrangements of traditional songs in the genre of electronic dance music, particularly dubstep and trance.

As a newly established music group without a direct ethnic connection to Ingrian culture, Ingervalva took a stand on discovering and reintroducing Ingrian music heritage to popular music listeners. Certain parallels can be observed between the steps taken by Talomerkit and Ingervalva in repatriating the Ingrian music legacy. Both groups were forced to use only secondary sources in constructing their repertoires due to the disappearance of people who remembered Ingrian oral poetry or instrumental music. According to Mazhuga, Ingervalva attempted to go on an expedition to record some songs from one of the very few living native Ingrians and bearers of Ingrian oral tradition, but the woman got seriously ill, and the fieldwork was canceled [2019]. He also emphasized the scarcity of Ingrian archival musical materials, especially those available for public use. Like Talomerkit, the collection *Ingrian Folk Songs* [Kiuru et al. 1974] serves as a principal source that the musicians of Ingervalva use for their arrangements. Other sources that Ingervalva found useful in repatriating Ingrian musical

knowledge are the choral composition, *Unustatud Rahvad* [*Forgotten Peoples*], and a dissertation written by Erik Reid Jones [2006], which is a detailed musical analysis of that composition.

Forgotten Peoples is a collection of six cycles of a cappella choral music by Estonian composer Veljo Tormis (1930–2017). This composition was written between 1970–89 and set to songs and languages of the Livonian, Karelian, Ingrian, and Vepsian peoples, “peoples whose language and songs have all but disappeared – ‘forgotten peoples’” [ECM Records liner notes 1992]. At the time of writing, Tormis perceived the cultures of Karelians, Ingrians, Veps, and Livonians as dying, and the songs included in the cycle were characterized by music critics as Tormis’s “personal sound museum of a lost world” [Reinvere 2017].

“У нас основной принцип – надо поиздеваться всласть над музыкой, что бы вообще никто не узнал! Порушить все основы, позлить традиционалистов и консерваторов!” [Our main principle is to fool around with music to our heart’s content, so it becomes almost unrecognizable. To break all foundations and annoy traditionalists and conservatives!] [Mazhuga 2019]. Those are the words of Mazhuga regarding the level of distortion of the original musical material in Ingerval’s arrangements. Initially, having concerns about the reaction of native Ingrians to the band’s interpretation of Finno-Ugric material, the musicians of Ingerval sought approval from Olga Konkova, who encouraged the band to continue their work on promoting Ingrian culture.

In Mazhuga’s view, who is a proponent of the modification of traditional music, the sonority of local Finno-Ugric songs is rather uncomplicated and could benefit from the involvement of arrangers, contrasting it to the development of Irish music tradition:

Все восхищаются ирландской музыкой, но она такая продвинутая в том числе, потому что очень много народу, в том числе композиторов, внесли свой вклад. Например, Торла О’Каролан. Половина стандартов ирландской музыки написаны подобными людьми. А местная финно-угорская песенная традиция осталась нетронутой... Этот материал интересно взять и как-то переработать.

[Everyone admires Irish music, but it is so sophisticated because a lot of people, including composers, contributed to it. For example, Turlough O’Carolan. Half of the standards in Irish music were written by such people. But local Finno-Ugric music remained very raw. It is interesting to do something with it]. [2019]

To enrich the knowledge of local Finno-Ugric traditions, Ingerval also often collaborates with musicians of Ingrian backgrounds. One of the band’s long-time friends and collaborators is Ksenia Kanevskaia–Reshetova, an ethnic Izhora, who often consults with Ingerval about the musical material for its arrangements (see Fig. 4). Kanevskaia–Reshetova is a self-taught singer of traditional Ingrian songs

who is interested in verse translations of Ingrian poetry to the Russian language and actively participates in local Ingrian celebrations as a performer [Kanevskaia–Reshetova 2019].



Figure 5: A screenshot of a photo of Ingervalva with Oke Kanevskaia (Ksenia Kanevskaia–Reshetova), Alexander Nikolaev, Katerina Dolmatova, and Georgii Mazhuga at the Revolution Festival in St. Petersburg. This photo was published on Ingervalva’s official Facebook page on 15 April 2019.

Undarmoi Ja Kalervoi: Izhorian Oral Poetry in the Global Context

“Undarmoi ja Kalervoi” is the first Finno-Ugric song Mazhuga and Minnus Trellich decided to arrange, and later it became one of the group’s signature songs. It is an ancient *runo* song about family estrangement between the brothers Untamo and Kalervo and Kalervo’s son Kullervo. The cycle of *runo* songs relating to the story of Kullervo is included in the Karelo-Finnish epic *Kalevala* which was compiled by Elias Lönnrot and based on the oral poetry that he collected in Finland, Karelia, and Ingria. The *Kalevala* consists of “popular songs, ballads, charms, and runic poetry strung together into an artistic whole by the genius of Dr. Lönnrot” [Billson 1895: 320–21]. The *runo* songs about Kullervo were added to the *Kalevala* in the second edition under the number thirty-one and were collected by Lönnrot primarily from southern Karelia and Ingria [Pentikäinen 1999: 40]. Indeed, Kullervo was published in *Ingrian Folk Songs* [1974] under the number five as an ancient Izhorian epic song. As noted in the commentary, its story was collected in Ingria in 1847 by Finnish folklorist, linguist, and archeologist, David Emanuel Daniel Europaeus [Kiuru 1974: 489]. As early scholars of the *Kalevala* noticed regarding *runo* songs about Kullervo, “this group of stories has nothing at all in common with the rest of the *Kalevala* story...” because “the *Kalevala* is a mere patchwork of popular runes, but fortunately the

original elements are themselves in existence” [Billson 1895: 339, 322]. The story of Kullervo describes “a quarrel between brothers which leaves one dead, the other the murderous guardian of the dead brother’s newborn son Kullervo. The boy grows up to exact revenge for his family’s destruction but is himself destroyed by his discovery of his unwitting incest with a sister he did not recognize” [J.R.R. Tolkien, Verlyn Flieger 2010: 211–12].

Runo songs about Kullervo that were based on Izhorian oral poetry inspired many now widely known works of music and literature. One of the earliest and famous compositions based on this story is the symphonic poem, *Kullervo*, by Jean Sibelius completed in 1892, less than fifty years after the publication of the second and final edition of the *Kalevala*. Another famous figure on whom the *Kalevala* and the story of Kullervo had a tremendous effect was J.R.R. Tolkien. The first time Tolkien discovered the *Kalevala* was in 1911, at the time when “Elias Lönnrot’s compilation of Finnish folk-ballads was a relatively recent addition to the world’s mythological literature” [J.R.R. Tolkien, Verlyn Flieger 2010: 211]. “It has long been known from Tolkien’s own comments in his letters that the Finnish mythology of the *Kalevala* had a powerful effect on his imagination and his legendarium,” which is explicitly evident in his two unpublished works “The Story of Kullervo” and “On the Kalevala” [J.R.R. Tolkien, Verlyn Flieger 2010: 211].

The most recent and internationally acclaimed work based on Ingrian musical heritage is the above-mentioned Tormis’s choral work, *Forgotten Peoples*, in which part of the cycle, called *Izhorian Epic*, closes with the song, “Undarmoj ja Kalervoi.” As mentioned earlier, the *runo* song, “Unto ja Kalervo,” with the same text is included in *Ingrian Folk Songs* (Fig. 5). The difference in spelling of the title can be explained by different linguistic approaches. The editors of *Ingrian Folk Songs* used the characters of the Finnish literary language to transmit the nonliterate language of Izhorian oral poetry, in this case, the Soikkola dialect [Kiuru et al. 1974: 24]. Tormis’s source is unknown, but he specifies that “the original texts have been adapted for the present purpose” by linguists from Paul Ariste Centre for Indigenous Finno-Ugric Peoples at the University of Tartu [1996: 57].

Unto ja Kalervo	Undarmoi ja Kalervoi	English Translation
Mäni miisi kyntämähä, maan rajoilla raatamaa.	Mäni miisi kündämähä, maan rajoille raadamaa.	A man went to plough, to till the face of the earth.
Kynsi kymmenän vakkoo	Künsi kümmenä vakkoo,	He made ten furrows,
ja vakkoois sata vakkoo.	ja vakkoi sada vakkoo,	he managed a hundred furrows.

Ja vakkoi sata vakkoa	ja vakkoi sada vakkoa	He managed a hundred furrows
yhen kannon ympäriilt,	ühen kannon ümbäril,	around a stump,
yhen kannon ympärille.	ühen kannon ümbärille.	around a stump.
Halkesi kanto kaheks,	Halkkeesi kando kaheeks.	The stump split in two,
halkesi kanto kaheksi –	Halkkeesi kando kaheeksi,	the stump split in two and
syntyi kaksi poikoilast.	sündüi kaksi poigoilast.	two boys were born.
Yks vaa Unnoissa ylleen,	Üks vaa Unnoissa ülleeni,	One of them grew up in Undoila,
toine kazvoi Karjalas.	toine kasvoi Karjalaas.	the other was brought up in Karjala. (18)
Mikä Unnoissa ylleen,	Migä Unnoissa ülleeni,	He that grew up in Undoila
se ylleen Untarmoiks;	se ülleeni Undarmoiks,	came to be called Undarmoi, (19)
mikä kazvoi Karjalas i,	migä kasvoi Karjalaasi,	he that was brought up in Karjala
se kazvoi Kalervikoiks.	se kasvoi Kalervigoiks.	came to be called Kalervikkoi.

Figure 6: The Lyrics of the runo song, “Unto ja Kalervo,” in the version published in *Ingrian Folk Songs* (first column) and in the liner notes to the CD *Forgotten Peoples* by Tormis [1992] (second column).

The archival recording of the song was digitized and posted on the website of “The Center for the Indigenous People of the St. Petersburg Region.” (20) This version was recorded from an Izhorian singer from the Soikkola peninsula, Ekaterina Aleksandrova (1902-1986), one of the last bearers of Ingrian oral poetry [Konkova 2009a: 197].

Notably, over time the *Kalevala* became heavily nationalized and associated mostly with the Finnish culture—thereby the impact of Ingrian and Karelian oral poetry on the formation of the epic has been somewhat curtailed. Yet, most of the *runo* songs from the *Kalevala* were collected in East Karelia and Ingria which eventually became the “holy land where artists, musicians, and literary men, not to mention troops of folklorists, had made pilgrimages to seek creative inspiration and to imbue themselves with the spirit of the *Kalevala*” [Wilson 1975: 141]. Even though Finns, Karelians, Ingrians, and Veps are linguistically and ethnically closely connected, they have distinct self-identifications. Such co-opting of the *Kalevala* as a Finnish epic erases the distinctiveness of those Baltic-Finnic

peoples, a notion that Heidi Haapoja-Mäkelä characterizes as “one of the dimensions of the Finnish ‘colonialistic glances’” [2020: 7]. Being surrounded by Slavs for many centuries, Ingrians and, to a lesser extent, Karelians absorbed many cultural elements of ethnic Russians, which is also reflected in their oral musical tradition.

Mazhuga highlights that in the process of Ingervalva’s creative thinking, their engagement with Finno-Ugric traditions was motivated by a search for local sonic color. By substituting a global Celtic element in the band’s music with a local Ingrian one, the musicians referred to Tolkien’s source of inspiration—the Izhorian *runo* song about Kullervo. As the history of this song and its global adaptations reveal, despite the years of obscurity in its native land the Izhorian heritage has been circulating in cultural spaces outside of Ingria. Nowadays, through the efforts of Ingervalva, it is experiencing a revitalization in a new sonority and finding its niche in a popular music soundscape of St. Petersburg.

Concluding Thoughts

In this article, I offered several vignettes about Finno-Ugric cultural spaces in St. Petersburg through the lens of the musical work of Talomerkit and Ingervalva. In addition to calling for a recognition of Ingrian knowledge as a constituent part of the St. Petersburg cultural space, this article is an invitation to consider perspectives of decoloniality by reassessing the scholarly approach to studying Russian music and culture. It is my hope that these two case studies, as an example of grassroots activism and cultural resistance, will contribute to decolonial epistemology and destabilize the Slavic focus in Anglophone Russian music and cultural studies. As Russian media artist and writer Anna Engelhardt noted, “[p]ost-colonialism is a struggle that doesn’t have ready answers, but which might inspire how we can search for them” [2020].

The ongoing aggressive war in Ukraine and the Russian political elite’s imperial resentment demands the integration of postcolonial thinking not only with respect to former imperial and Soviet territories, but also to ethnic minority groups living within the Russian Federation. Disputes over land possession in Izhorian villages in the Soikkola peninsula (21) and Rosphotos’ cancellation of a photo exhibition dedicated to the persecution of the Ingrian Finns in the Soviet Union (22) demonstrate how multi-ethnic dialogues that would scrutinize colonial history and its effects have yet to be integrated into Russian cultural discourse.

In September 2022, the Russian hip-hop artist, Oxxxymiron (Miron Fedorov), posted on his YouTube channel a video of a song, “Ойда” [Oida], that was filmed in his native St. Petersburg. Soon after its release, when the song had amassed millions of views, the Russian organization, “Лига безопасного интернета” [Safer Internet League], applied to the Prosecutor General’s Office to investigate the song for extremism. (23) A similar petition to prosecute Oxxxymiron for extremism was published by “Зов народа” [Zov Naroda], an advocacy group proclaiming its purpose as the “protection of Russia and its peoples, development of its traditions, culture, morality, spiritual bonds and

history.” (24) According to the petitioners, the closing words, “Ингрия будет свободной” [Ingria will be free], were used by Oxxxymiron to divide Russian society and to call for the “splitting off the city of St. Petersburg or Leningrad Oblast from the territory of our country.” (23) Contrary to such a statement, I interpret the phrase “Ингрия будет свободной” [Ingria will be free] from the decolonial perspective—to call for freeing Ingria and Ingrians from cultural suppression. On one hand, the title of the song “Ойда” [Oida] can be read as a compound word made of the first words of the chorus “Ой, да заберите дом / Ой, да поселитесь в нём / Ой, да подавитесь в нём” [Oi, da zaberite dom / Oi, da poselites' v nem / Oi, da podavites' v nem] [Oh, take the house / Oh, live in it / Oh, choke in it]. On the other hand, it can also be viewed as a reference to a traditional Ingrian *runo* song theme, “Oi dai.” (25) Like the Russified title “Oida,” a stylized female traditional polyphonic singing in the chorus can be heard as a Slavicization of the traditional vocal practices of the region. While such analysis is only speculation, the statement that Oxxxymiron made by releasing this song emphasizes Russia’s decolonial agenda. Oxxxymiron, who is not known for any ethnic connection to Ingrians, joined the ranks of local musicians and activists like Talomerkit and Ingervalva to give a voice to the culturally silenced Finno-Ugric ethnic minorities through music.

NOTES

1 For more information about Ingria and Ingrians as well as for discussion of the Russian term *коренные народы* [Indigenous peoples] in the context of Indigenous studies, see Shatilova 2021.

2 This is information from Talomerkit’s official group on VKontakte posted on 6 January 2016. The text was originally posted in the group, “Ingermanlandia,” on VKontakte on 5 January 2016.

3 All translations from Russian were made by the author unless otherwise noted.

4 Lutheran Ingrian Finns celebrate Christmas on 25 December and Orthodox Izhors and Votes on 7 January.

5 Kalevan päivä is known as Finnish Culture Day and celebrated on 28 February in honor of the Karelo-Finnish national epic the *Kalevala*.

6 Laskiainen is celebrated about seven weeks before Easter. The Finnish name *laskiainen* comes from the word *laskea* meaning “descent.” According to Finnish researchers, this relates to the idea of “lowering” or “immersing” into fasting (in Finnish Catholicism, Lent begins after this day). Easter received the name Pääsiäinen, which means “exit” from fasting [Chirin and Kudriavtseva 2017].

7 The summer solstice is celebrated on the day between 20 to 30 of June. The Ingrian Finns call it Juhannus. The Izhorian name of the holiday is Jaani. Eastern Slaves call it Kupala Night or Ivan Kupala.

8 Inkerin päivä is celebrated in honor of the wife of Yaroslav the Wise—the Swedish Princess Ingerd (Ingrid, Inkeri) on 5 October.

9 The kantele is a plucked zither of Balto-Finnic peoples.

10 Translation to English was made by the author from the Russian version of the text provided in *Ingrian Folk Songs* [1974].

11 If the songs of Kalevala-meter poetry are found mostly in the repertoire of Izhors and Votes, the rhymed songs are attributed to Ingrian Finns who brought them from Savo province in Finland and the Vyborg District [Kiuru 1974: 19]. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the ancient runes were almost forgotten by Ingrian Finns and had been replaced by rhymed single- and multi-verse songs of the so-called “new style” brought by Ingrian Finns from Finland and which were later heavily influenced by styles of the neighboring ethnic Russians [Kiuru 1974: 19].

12 The “Votian and Izhorian Folk Songs” digital project presents a selection of recordings of Izhorian and Votian folk songs from several vocal genres. In addition to archival recordings, translations of lyrics to the Russian and English languages, and comments about the melodic details and historical context of the songs, the website contains short biographies of Izhorian and Votic singers: <http://www.folklore.ee/pubte/eraamat/vadjaisuri/en/index>.

13 Luutsa is located in the Kingiseppsky district of the Leningrad Oblast.

14 Krakol’e was a village in the Kingiseppsky District in Leningrad Oblast. Now, it is a part of the Ust-Luga village.

15 In this quotation, the authors use the term “Ingrian” to refer to Izhors. There is a lack of consensus among scholars regarding the usage of the word “Ingrian.” Some associate “Ingrians” only with the Ingrian Finns [Karanov 2015; Rappu 2008], some with the Izhors [Kuznetsova, Markus, and Muslimov 2015; Kalinitchev 2011; Kurs 1994], while still others identify all of the indigenous population of Ingria as “Ingrians” [Nissilä 1961 and Grünthal 1997 quoted in Rappu 2008]. In this article, I use “Ingrians” as a common name for all three groups (the Votes, the Izhors, and the Ingrian Finns) that are associated with the historical territory of Ingria.

16 The music transcriptions are made by the author.

17 This term was used by Mazhuga in an interview with the author [2019]. Based on my observations, the term “ethno-folk” is ambiguous in the Russian context and mostly relates to the fusion of contemporary genres with traditional music. Those fusions became popular in the 1990s in many former Soviet republics and Russia. “Ethno-folk” can refer to both the genre of “world music,” when musicians adapt the traditional musics of other cultures and to the genre of ethno-music which, in the Ukrainian context, as described by Maria Sonevytsky, is the combination of “local sonic markers” and “global popular music styles” [2019: 7].

18 A different spelling of Karelia.

19 Also spelled Untamo. In the note to the Izhorian *runo* song, Kiuru et al. indicate the alternative spelling—Untoi as a short version of Undarmoi and Kalervoi as a short version of Kalervikko [1974: 261].

20 <http://kmn-lo.ru/Document/1410902985.mp3> (consulted June 2, 2020).

21 The construction of the international trade port of Ust-Luga in Leningrad Oblast, the land inhabited by the Izhors and Votes, is perceived by the indigenous population as a threat to their traditional way of living and can result in elimination of some of the Votic villages. For more information on the topic see the articles of *Радио Свобода*: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/26615458.html> and the platform *Заповедник*: <https://zapovednik.space/material/more-eto-kak-chlen-semi> (consulted June 1, 2022)

22 For more information of the topic see the note in *The Village*: https://www.the-village.ru/shorts/rosphoto?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=ob-etom-soobschaet-finskoe-izdanie-helsing (consulted June 1, 2022).

23 <https://lenta.ru/news/2022/10/26/oxxx/> (consulted April 16, 2023).

24 https://vk.com/narodniy_zov?w=club140038254 (consulted April 16, 2023).

25 For more information on the *runo* song, “Oi dai,” see [Heidi 2020].

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