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Shifts in Lithuanian Culture of the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries. Folk Music in Vilnius

Zmiany w kulturze litewskiej XX i XXI wieku. Muzyka ludowa w Wilnie

Summary: A modern metropolis is an artificially created landscape brimming with a vast variety of significant places, public spaces that mark the historical past, streets with flows of transport, and internet networks that transmit information at lightning speed; it is a landscape with numerous cultural institutions and even with locations where these institutions are concentrated (cultural industries). Traditional culture lives on in such a complex urban structure yet in modest conditions, small premises, or abandoned spaces. Hardly will a resident of Vilnius, who is not interested in it, detect any signs of its existence, but more curious burghers know that they can visit various events associated with traditional culture. Traditional culture has adapted itself: it has found a shelter and has taken root like moss on a stone.

This research was carried out by participating in the folklore movement of Vilnius, by taking part in various events and carefully observing them. Having scrutinized the musical scene, the author found some connections between the changes that traditional music underwent in earlier times and the historical shifts she has witnessed in her own lifetime.

Key words: urbanization, shifts in culture, folklore movement, contemporary folk music, post-modernism

Translated by Diana Barnard

Streszczenie: Nowoczesna metropolia to sztucznie stworzony krajobraz pełen różnorodnych miejsc znaczących, przestrzeni publicznych, które odnoszą się do historycznej przeszłości, ulic ze sunącymi po nich środkami transportu i sieci internetowych, które przesyłają informacje z prędkością błyskawicy. Jest to krajobraz z wieloma instytucjami kulturalnymi, a nawet z lokalizacjami, w których instytucje te się skupiają (przemysł kulturalny). Tradycyjna kultura funkcjonuje w tak złożonej strukturze miejskiej, ale w skromnych warunkach, w małych lub opuszczonych przestrzeniach. Mieszkańcy Wilna, którzy nie są zainteresowani tym rodzajem kultury, ledwo dostrzegają jakiegokolwiek oznaki jej funkcjonowania. Ci bardziej zainteresowani wiedzą jednak, że istnieje w mieście możliwość uczestniczenia w wydarzeniach związanych z kulturą tradycyjną. Kultura ta dostosowała się: znalazła schronienie i zakorzeniła się jak mech na kamieniu.

Badania polegały na zaangażowaniu w działalność ruchu folklorystycznego w Wilnie, na uważnej obserwacji i uczestniczeniu w różnych wydarzeniach. Po przeanalizowaniu sceny muzycznej autorka znalazła pewne powiązania między zmianami, które zaszły w tradycyjnej muzyce w przeszłości, a zmianami we współczesności, których jest świadkiem.

Słowa kluczowe: urbanizacja, zmiany w kulturze, ruch folklorystyczny, współczesna muzyka ludowa, postmodernizm

Tłumaczenie: Klaudyna Michałowicz

When writing about rural traditional culture, we think it is passed on from a generation to a generation: each generation interprets the traditional heritage anew and carries on developing the part of the earlier culture it finds acceptable. If an interpretation no longer conforms with the needs of the younger generation, its content or form are rearranged. In addition, new and relevant works are being constantly created. However, such a view is somewhat idealistic and fit to describe the culture of a remote location. If we write about the urban tradition, it is obvious that its change is more dramatic, because its bearers find themselves in the very centre of historical events. It also happens that the shifts of urban culture are affected by global processes that cannot be avoided, shut out or withstood in any way.

Sometimes really significant social and technological changes take place, which trigger an obvious cultural shift or turning point (Jameson 1998). Such shifts allow the cultural historians to break down the development of culture of each century into several different periods. The generation that experiences the prominent shift constantly compares their “old” and “new” lives, the “there and then” and “here and now” cultural tradition. The latest shift seems to be the most important and most innovative (in Lithuania, such a shift took place in the last decade of the twentieth century, when consumption-based social relations established themselves and culture turned into a commodity). The impact of earlier turning points in culture, those that might have happened even a hundred years ago, lets itself be felt to some extent as well.

Shifts in Lithuanian Culture

Lithuanian culture as it is now has acquired its shape thanks to several shifts that had different impacts on it. The earliest shift marking the formation of modern Lithuanian identity took place in as early as the nineteenth century when Lithuania was part of the Russian Empire. The dates marking this shift are the following: the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the Polish-Lithuanian uprising of 1863 and the punishment that followed – the ban on the press in Lithuanian characters. Another shift happened in the early twentieth century, when in 1904 the ban on the Lithuanian press was lifted, when the movement of Lithuanian national liberation gained impetus again, the First World War blew over, and the independent Republic of Lithuania was declared on 16 February 1918.

According to culturologists, a marked turn in the direction of modernity took place particularly in 1904 when Lithuanians recovered the right to use the press (a key

technology in those times), began to meet and voice their opinions in public and to seek cultural and political independence. As we know, the Lithuanian Science Society and the Lithuanian Art Society were established in 1907; these events changed the attitude of educated people towards the folkloristic tradition and at the same time facilitated its survival. If earlier folk songs or fairy-tales used to be perceived as a tradition of a family or a village community, in the period of national liberation they became the heritage of the whole nation, enabling the shaping of a modern national identity. As the attitudes changed, folklore attracted more attention, it was collected and recorded. What the people born in the nineteenth century knew and could do was preserved and did not disappear.

In 1918, the declaration of the independent Republic of Lithuania meant the achievement of the highest aspiration of the national liberation movement. When Lithuania lost its historic capital Vilnius in 1920, new research, educational, and cultural institutions were established and large-scale state-supported events took place in Kaunas, the temporary capital. The Lithuanian University was founded in 1922, the first Song Festival took place in 1924, the radio transmitter Kaunas Radiophone started its broadcast in 1926, the year dedicated to Vytautas the Great was celebrated all over Lithuania in 1930, the Archive of Lithuanian Folklore was founded in 1935, and so on. National culture was meaningfully nurtured and was becoming more varied; different art styles distinguished themselves, and the first phenomena of folklorism emerged. To the intelligentsia, who were working under new and more modern conditions, the lifestyle prevailing in the tsarist times was ever more distant: nobody would have liked to find themselves in the impoverished and dark nineteenth century. As generation followed generation the events of the previous century seemed as if aeons ago. For example, having read the life story of a blind folk singer in the book *Aš išdainavau visas daineles (I Have Sung All the Songs)*, the poet Sigitas Geda wrote:

About the fate of this singer, just like the fates of many other singers and musicians described in the book, one can only say: so terrible that it is even... beautiful! Beautiful not in the sense of how we today understand or speak when we are looking at the things we like. The words “transparent, calm” would be more apt... Like looking at a deep and horrible abyss behind your back, which has been crossed and is no longer dangerous. Such was the life of these people. On the lucky edge of the abyss – in old age, and others while still younger, they passed the treasure of their spirits – folk songs, fairy-tales, tales, proverbs, incantations – on to us... (...) Through a song, by singing, getting closer to it, cherishing, and continuing it, our (Lithuanian) people were saving (and saved) themselves from death. In the literal sense. It remains to be seen how people of other times are saving and save themselves (Geda 1989: 324).

Regretfully, history repeated itself and yet another shift disastrous to Lithuanian culture took place in the last century. The events that caused it were the Soviet occupation

of 1940, the Second World War, and Stalinist post-war repression. The rights and liberties of the Lithuanian nation were trampled upon during this period, and the culture, which was so vibrant in independent Lithuania, was retrained and ideologically restricted. It was only in the 1960s that Lithuanian culture started to recover. The large country, of which Lithuania was a part at that time, dissociated itself from the rest of the world, but industrialisation and urbanisation were taking place in it as well, and simultaneously new phenomena of urban culture were emerging: pop music, cinema, television, modern art, intellectual literature, and urban folklore movement. This cultural expression is defined as “silent resistance”.

Finally, in 1988, the Lithuanian Reform Movement – *Sąjūdis* – arose, and re-establishment of the statehood of Lithuania was declared on 11 March 1990. The last decade of the twentieth century was the time of yet another shift in Lithuanian culture. The collapse of the iron curtain, which for a long time separated Lithuania from the countries of Europe and from the whole world, brought around an enormous amount of written and visual information: books, films, cartoons, television series, news read in all languages, images of distant travels and exotic nature. National culture, which was profoundly important in the years of the occupation, remained only a part of the enormous flow of information that reached the public. Although in the years of the independence it could be nurtured and freely developed, struggle had to be put up not only for the recognition of national culture, but also for its funding. Getting used to a new economic system, just like moving from the socialist system to global capitalism and consumer society, was not easy.

In addition to the major and essential cultural changes, there were some smaller ones that also have a noticeable effect on the existence of culture. It is obvious that the invention of sound recording technology triggered a whole series of changes: contemporaries even suspected that the need for live singing might disappear altogether. These apprehensions were justified to some extent, because people who used to sing for their own pleasure and for that of others turned into listeners. First they listened to music from phonograph rolls, later the vinyl records; after that there appeared tape recorders, followed by cassette recorders. Then people started carrying portable audio cassette players and earphones, CD players, and eventually came to listen to music from their mobile phones.

People’s habits changed with the appearance of the radio. Music lovers of the older generation may recall how the radio programmes of the Soviet period, when all information to be broadcast used to be edited, the news readers were not allowed to digress from the printed text in front of their eyes. They may contrast this with later times, when presenters started speaking in their own words and listeners were able to phone in and

voice their views. Only people who lived in Soviet times know what jamming is, when deliberate noise and interference prevented one from hearing “hazardous information” broadcast by foreign radio stations.

Technological shifts are accompanied by stylistic changes. One could write a lot about fashions of one period or another, about the voices of rock or disco singers, characteristic sets of instruments, arrangements, various special effects that help to distinguish between different styles. All these smaller or greater details arrange themselves into a certain sequence in our memory: from them we shape the images of one period or another, and they help us to figure out is the speed of the cultural change that we are experiencing.

Cultural Shift of the 1960s

In Lithuania, a pronounced cultural shift took place in the 1960s when the pressure of the communist ideology somewhat relaxed and a sort of political “thaw” began. The economy was growing, and a consumer society – different from the one in the free world, but still – started emerging in Vilnius and other larger cities.

Urban dwellers of the 1960s were invited to a variety of cultural events. Since tickets were not expensive, in the evening one could go to a concert or a theatre production, or visit a cinema or a sports competition. There was no shortage of entertainment: in 1959, the first luxury café Neringa was opened in Vilnius. The café had a modern interior and consisted of four communicating spaces of the entrance hall, the bar, and the large and the small halls; its walls were decorated with frescoes and high reliefs, and there even was a decorative pool there. The café, where jazz used to be played in the evenings, attracted the artistic elite of those times (Jonušaitė 2014). There were other restaurants and cafes in the city, and what we call mass culture today started gradually emerging.

The image of advanced and prospering Soviet Lithuania was facilitated by its musical groups: the Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, the Lithuanian Quartet, the *Lietuva* song and dance ensemble, and the *Sutartinė* ensemble of folk instruments. *Sutartinė*, which consisted of five perfected *kanklės* (a Lithuanian plucked string instrument) and a quintet of *birbynės* (a Lithuanian reed pipe), performed with such well-known singers as Virgilijus Noreika and Vaclovas Daunoras. This professional group promoted Lithuania at important concerts in Moscow and all over “the wide motherland”; it was successfully exported, gave concerts of Lithuanian music abroad, and garnered positive reviews of the Lithuanian émigrés. Opinions about this kind of musical activity differed. On the one hand, it was referred to as obeying a political order or as creation of national kitsch;

on the other hand, it was seen as promotion of Lithuanian culture in the years of the occupation and nurturing of a new genre of professional folk music.

A rally of choirs – the Song Festival – was organized in a specially built amphitheatre in Vingis Park in Vilnius. It was creating the image of Lithuania as a land of songs. The obligatory ideological songs were included in the official programmes of the festivals, yet there used to be also several folk songs which were sung with genuine feeling. Since during the years of the occupation, the anthem of the independent Republic of Lithuania by Vincas Kudirka was forbidden, it was the song *Lietuva brangi* (*Dear Lithuania*) to Maironis' words that expressed the deepest love for the homeland. To be performed in public, it used to be censored and the third stanza, which mentioned God, was omitted. This beautiful song became the unofficial anthem of Lithuania (Šmidchens 2014: 180). At the end of the official programme the singers would not disperse and carry on singing their favourite folk songs. The choice of songs was somewhat freer at the festive procession, which was also an occasion to express suppressed national feelings (Šmidchens 2014: 105).

Along with official representative culture of the capital of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, there existed the hidden alternative culture. The interesting thing is that alternative culture thrived even in the city's main street, Lenin Avenue. It goes without saying that groups of young people did not gather in elite cafes – they had other places: they would sit on benches in squares, would make up their minds to see a film in cinema or visit the city's record shops; some attended the drama group in Trade Union Culture Palace, and so on (Oginskaitė 2009). Rock music found its niches in suburbs as many rock bands rehearsed in factory clubs, which supported the musicians in the acquisition of instruments and sound equipment. Meanwhile, the participants of another alternative culture – the folklore movement – would gather in cosy Old Town courtyards and made use of the spaces in the institutions of higher education: they would sing in the halls, classrooms, corridors, and student hostels.

The city's identity is best felt in the old town, which distinguishes itself by the network of streets that evolved in the course of many centuries, by the castles and church spires, and other ancient buildings. The folklore lovers, who were concerned about the preservation of the national identity, mostly concentrated in the old part of the city. They upheld the existing traditions of the city by participated at the annual St. Casimir's fair (lovingly called *Kaziuko mugė* in Lithuanian), lingering in the vicinity of churches on Palm Sunday (even if demanded by the regime to be atheists), and buying and bringing *verbos* traditional palms of Vilnius to their homes. A new event – the folklore festival *Skamba skamba kankliai* – was first launched in the Old Town of Vilnius in 1973. The courtyards

of Vilnius University were the venues of folk music concerts and ad hoc singing, and numerous lovers of folklore could be seen in the adjoining streets and squares.

It shows that in the 1960s and later, a varied urban culture existed in Lithuania and especially in the capital city Vilnius. In the field of music, there was the state-supported official academic music and folk music performed by professionals, and along with that, there emerged jazz, rock, and authentically performed folklore. The emergence of such a diversity of Lithuanian culture and music styles should be seen as a cultural shift, and the above-mentioned decade as a distinct period of change in earlier traditions and of the birth of new ones.

The Change in the Existence of Folklore

Lithuanian folklorists, the witnesses to the cultural shift of the 1960s, have noticed that the ways of existence and transfer of folklore are changing, that new media are used for spreading it around, and that it is gaining similarity to professional art. Stasys Skrodenis wrote about folklore and folklorism¹, about the first and the second existence of folklore. Depending on how natural was the environment in which folklore was performed, he divided the newly emerged groups into ethnographical and folklore groups. According to him, ethnographical groups performing “raw folklore” existed in villages and small towns. These groups produced programmes that illustrated the old customs. They would be shown in the yard of a larger homestead or a town square, the dialogues, songs, and dances would be performed naturally without much acting, and attempts would be made to engage the audience in the action (Skrodenis 2005: 140).

As for the groups that originated in Vilnius and other cities, Skrodenis referred to them as folklore groups or ensembles. Their programmes were also thematic (almost all of these folklore groups attempted to enact the folklore and customs of a wedding and calendar rites). However, the groups led by ethnomusicologists more often preferred the concert format, and not a performance. One of the first programmes of this kind was *Lietuva – dainų kraštas* (*Lithuania, the Land of Songs*), produced by Laima Burkšaitienė, the director of Vilnius University folklore group Ratilio. Songs and singing were brought forward, while joining elements such as customs and rites were omitted (Skrodenis 2005: 144).

¹ “Scholars have thus defined the essence of folklorism: (1) elements interesting in their form or emotional content are selected from popular historical or relevant traditions; (2) they are presented in an authentic or less authentic form; (3) situations are sought in which these elements could be displayed as authentically as possible; (4) in this way, the content of material is withdrawn from the natural carriers of folklore and the performer is dissociated from the audience (recipients). This would be like the sequence of a stage variant, but folklore is re-created or its elements are used in literature, other arts, and in public life in general” (Skrodenis 2005: 20).

When the old songs came to be sung on stage, they hardly changed stylistically. The repertoire of folklore groups was dominated by the old genres of folk music: polyphonic *sutartinės*², work and calendar songs, tunes performed by wind instruments and *kanklės*. The songs were performed in the authentic manner, diligently singing the ornaments of the tunes and preserving the dialect of the region from which the songs originated. Folk music was as if “cleansed of the crust of later periods”: romances, tangos, or foxtrots were unwelcome. Performers of urban folklore groups even avoided the accordion as a late imported instrument, although village musicians could not imagine their groups without this instrument. Therefore the most outstanding shift was that folk music found a new niche for its existence: there emerged a layer of urban dwellers interested in it and willing to listen to it.

The technological and stylistic changes of the 1960s are best reflected in rock music. Its performers started using sound amplification and electric instruments, and sometimes stage lighting as well. The din of electric guitars and electric keyboards, thrashing percussion, and loud singing into the microphone had such a strong impact on the listeners that they were unwilling to listen to anything else. Stylistic changes were also extremely marked. Rock music possessed such performance energy and such enlivening two-beat rhythm that its devoted listeners ceased to like the tunes of waltzes and operettas, and were no longer moved by a three-beat rhythm. For opposite qualities they were not too keen on classical and avant-garde music of that period, which appeared too complex, rational, and dry. Yoko Ono, the wife of John Lennon of the famous The Beatles, speaks about it with her friend Jonas Mekas, an Lithuanian artist in exile:

I realize that, sort of, electronic music was somehow out of touch with people. There was some miscommunication, you know. And the reason was not only because it didn't have the personal, animalistic aspect that I was concerned with, but it also sort of went further and further away from the real heartbeat rhythm. Because heartbeat is the most basic, intimate rhythm that we have, you know. One-two, one-two, one-two (...). And so classical music in the beginning was one-two, one-two. Then it went into one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three, sort of waltzy rhythm. It went into all sort of complex rhythms, went further and further away from our body. And,

² “Polyphonic songs *sutartinės* contain a whole system of the elements of archaic musical and poetical expression. The diversity of their vocal performing depends upon the distribution of their parts: chanting them interchangeably by two pairs, stepping in on the canon principle, or using other ways of performing that are more complex. The parts of *sutartinės* move across third intervals whereas seconds usually sound between them. The modal contrast between parts is still more strengthened by contrasting rhythms. Two different formulas of the rhythms are matched in the parts of *sutartinės* the interchange of which is reminiscent of a game. (...) The texts of *sutartinės* sound in a stereophonic manner. The text that is narrated by short segments is frequently interjected by refrains. According to semantic analysis, onomatopoeic words commonly serve as imitators of various sounds and rhythmic movements: the blowing on musical instruments, stamping and swinging. Yet meanings of some refrains remain unidentified” (Nakienė, Žarskienė 2004: 39–41).

of course, our mind is so refined that we have very complex mind rhythms. So the minute I met John, I saw why rock and roll is popular, no wonder. Because people are actually very honest, you know. (...) You can't deceive people with intellectual, sophisticated, electronic music in a phoney way. You can't do that. You see, people like rock and roll because there's that heartbeat bum-ba, bum-ba (Ono 2015: 389).

The younger generation was no longer fascinated by the popular music of the 1930s and its love stories that looked like from a film or a postcard. In the same way the lovers of rock music distanced themselves from old folk songs and from the metaphorical language characteristic of them. When it became usual to sing of one's feelings openly – "O aš taip myliu, aš taip myliu" (And I love so much, love so much) – it did not appear modern to speak of a girl like a flower: to describe a happy girl in love "like a rose in blossom", and describe her "like a withered mint" when she was disappointed or sad.³ A song about somebody's love, about a young lad and a girl did not sound as appealing any longer because one could now sing about "you and I" in a rock song.

Today the swinging two-beat rhythm and open speaking about oneself are ordinary things and appear quite banal to the contemporary song writers. In the 1960s, however, it was a sharp stylistic change that influenced song writers both in the city and in the country. Aušra Žičkienė, who studies the work of lesser known authors, notices that although with a noticeable lag from the city, a revolution in the rhythmical pattern of songs took place in the country as well.

Today, a syncopated rhythm in the process of spontaneous song creation "betrays" song writers of the younger generation born after 1950. People of that generation "accept" syncopation both into the repertoire of the songs that are establishing themselves and gaining the traits of folklore and into the set of the elements that multiply in creative work. It means that, half jokingly, syncopation could be attributed to a set of cultural ideas that spread, with constant delay and adaptations: once from high society to the people, and in this case from the entertainment industry to the periphery stage, and from there to the consciousness of music writers of peasant (or very recently peasant) mentality (Žičkienė 2012: 352).

Cultural Shift of the Late Twentieth Century

While the period of "mature socialism" was continuing in Lithuania in the 1970s-1980s, Europe and other countries of the world entered late capitalism. The industrial epoch was being gradually replaced by the post-industrial one, and modern art was

³ "The symbolism of a folk song conveys very little to the individual of the younger generation who is used to receiving direct information. Let us say, *rūtų vainikas* (a rue wreath) and *rūtų darželis* (a rue garden) and the symbols of their destruction, which outlined the moral standards of a village girl (the removal of a rue wreath or trampling the rue garden down meant the loss of innocence and at the same time an objectionable violation of moral norms) would be a poetic image with hardly any meaning" (Skrodenis 2005: 174).

supplanted by postmodernism. Capitalism and postmodernism came to Lithuania after 1990. It happened suddenly, like some atmospheric phenomenon, and all spheres of economy and culture experienced the difficulties of the transitory period.

A pronounced cultural shift started taking place after the re-establishment of the independence of Lithuania in 1990, with the rejection of the Soviet past, the return to the Western understanding of culture, and changes in the models of funding and existence of culture. However, the change did not start at once. Lithuania, the first Soviet republic to leave the USSR, had to cope with an economic blockade; later, in January 1991, the USSR resorted to military action and tanks rolled out into the streets of Vilnius. When independence was under threat, it was a song that once again united people, strengthened their spirit and saved them from death. On the hardest night of 13 January, when unarmed defenders of the homeland circled and protected the parliament, the TV tower and other objects of state significance, when attacks of special military units of the USSR and the looming danger of death was real to everybody, people sang. Vytautas Landsbergis, the then head of state, thus spoke to the people who kept vigil that night:

In case these come to attack you, to throw something at you or to beat you, our strongest weapon would be if you restrained from reacting in the same way. You are our shield, but not a sword. We have always won by withstanding. Let us sustain it. (...) Dear people in Independence Square and at the palace of the Supreme Council! Today is a day of sadness and wrath. Our brothers perished, they perished because they were defending Lithuania. We already know the names of some of them and have mentioned those. We will learn of the others. But today, like never before, the fate of Lithuania will be decided, whether we will be capable of stepping closer to independence. (...) Probably in your hearts many of you are carrying mortification and anger at those rascals who treat Lithuania like this. And yet, do suppress your anger, turn your backs to them, look at one another and not at the enemy. Look in the eyes of your next of kin, of your friend, and sing. A song has helped us, has been helping us for centuries. So let us sing now, let us sing holy hymns, just let us not rant or swear, and let us not get involved in fights. Let there be more peace, more light and faith in our hearts (Landsbergis 2012).

The method of defence was the same as in earlier times. Calm, composed, and singing people as though gave themselves auto-suggestion. Although folk songs could not turn into a sword, they were a shield. Their sound in the square brought back what had since the late nineteenth century united the Lithuanians: cultural resistance and the tradition of nonviolent resistance.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, state-funded cultural institutions and art groups had to adapt themselves to the free market. Having lost permanent funding and incapable of sustaining themselves, many had to change the nature of their activities or end them. What revived the art creators going through various difficulties was the new information, translations of seminal twentieth-century texts into Lithuanian, and the

opportunity to get to know the émigré culture that had not been accessible for quite a long time. The possibility of free travel abroad, expansion of one's outlook, and presentation of Lithuanian culture at various international events were also a cause for joy. Lithuanian music as an example of original, outstandingly national culture of resistance was performed at a great number of festivals of contemporary music. Highly popular works by Bronius Kutavičius, Osvaldas Balakauskas, and Feliksas Bajoras revealed to the listeners the hopes for independence and metaphorical visions of Lithuania's future that had been nurtured for many years. In 1991, the festival of contemporary music Gaida was launched in Vilnius, which featured symphonic and chamber music, as well as electronic music by foreign composers.

The world music style began to spread in Lithuania in the late twentieth century. If in the earlier centuries different styles of music travelled to other countries only together with migrants and performers, in the twentieth century the dispersion of music became much simpler: it spread via musical recordings. Music recorded on a record or a tape could reach the opposite part of the world like a seed and successfully take root in the new soil. And when the internet became widely accessible at the end of the twentieth century, the spread of such invasive sorts of music became even simpler. Musical styles of different times and of different nations were flowing like from a cornucopia and various hybrids were created. A professional involved in the music market did not have to be a composer: it was enough if he or she was a well-informed music arranger with a good taste.

As can be expected, none of the genres of the 1960s faded into obscurity in the late twentieth century: jazz, rock, pop music, folk music, and even avant-garde music were still here, branched off and intertwined, and gave birth to a vast diversity of varieties of these genres.

Postmodernism and the Polyphonic Tradition

It so happened that Western art, which was supposed to be in a state of permanent revolution, reached a limit beyond which it could no longer move "forward", but had to move "backwards"; therefore everything that materialized later was "art after art". This turn in the works of culturologists was perceived as transition to Postmodernism. Consumers of culture-as-commodity no longer had to live in modernity, instead, just like consumers of other goods, they could choose.

When culture and art became products and part and parcel of consumption cycles, the status of the art creator and of the individual act of creation, which were established in the times of modernism, lost their meaning. Novelty, substantiality, and uniqueness were replaced by otherness, strangeness,

or “diversity in identity”. The ideology of modernist art forced artists to express themselves, that is, to create their unique styles or forms. As the subject is affected by the centrifugal force and starts crumbling, and as the combinatorics of signs prevails, a quest for a unique style no longer makes sense (Rubavičius 2003: 220).

Contemporary art is characterised by unusual variety and change. The market of artefacts is becoming ever more international; it involves miscellaneous cultures and artistic practices thus dissociating works of art from a particular geographic location and time. As the scheme of perception of historical progress disintegrates and history seems to have lost its “depth”, all cultures have become contemporary in that they all have come to participate in the market of artefacts (Rubavičius 2003: 190).

There is no doubt that folklorists had questions: how about traditional culture, is there space for it to unfold amid this diversity? At the conference *Ethnic Culture in the Re-established Republic of Lithuania*, which was held in Vilnius in 1996, outstanding folklorist Norbertas Vėlius thus addressed the audience:

Today we should rethink the diversity of the existence and functioning of our ethnic culture during this period of the painful turning point by understanding this culture that manifests itself in the traditional manner through its traditional forms in traditional life. I have in mind the people’s interpersonal relations existing in our hearts, our Lithuanian ethic, morals, and our folklore: our fairy-tale and our song, and the heritage of our mythology, which, although sometimes is hard to perceive to us, is living in our hearts. Here we must rethink our secondary ethnic culture, which comes to our homes and to our children via a book, the radio, and television; also, that ethnic culture which is intertwined with current professional culture, with art, and with literature. (...) And we should not whimper and lament but understand the laws that govern our ethnic culture of these days and see how our traditional culture manifests itself in the new life, in modern life under the modern conditions, and how it is transformed into our culture. And we must see what the state attitude to this culture is (Vėlius 1997: 7).

Although the state support to ethnic culture was more of a declarative than real nature, the folklore movement did not run out of steam thanks to the active stance and dedication of its participants. Along with the tradition-nurturing folklore groups, there appeared more and more groups that changed the traditions, and the interpretational attitude to folklore was becoming ever more pronounced. Aušra Zabielenė divided the folklore groups of the twenty-first century into three categories. The groups that belong to the first category are usually based in villages. Their members wear authentic home-made clothes and perform the folklore of their area, and it is they who bring the songs and narratives into the repertoire of the group. The groups or ensembles of the second category are based in towns and cities. The members wear specially made national costumes and look for interesting folklore in song books, archives, or folklore expeditions. They perform folklore of different regions of Lithuania. The groups of the third category are also based in the city environment; however, they distinguish themselves by a more

creative attitude and their desire to adapt folklore to the present. These tradition-changing groups fuse folklore with other musical genres, such as jazz, rock, electronic and popular music; their stage clothes combine the motifs of the national costume and contemporary fashion (Zabielienė 2010: 101). Of the groups open to multicultural and multi-stylistic musical combinations, mention should be made of such groups as Atalyja, Žalvarinis, Kūlgrinda, Spanxti, Virvytė, Sedula, Sen svaja, and others.

Since the epoch of postmodernist art is a witness to free associations of various historical and cultural signs, the old multipart Lithuanian *sutartinės* came to be combined with other styles of contemporary music. An unusual programme consisting of *Sutartinės Party*⁴ by the composers Linas Pulauskas and Linas Rimša, and *E-Sutartinės* by Antanas Jasenka was performed at the 2003 Berlin festival of contemporary music and later in Vilnius. The young composers thought of saving the ancient songs from extinction by transforming them into electronic. Another original programme – *Lino laikas (The Time of Flax)* was performed in 2006 by the group Trys keturiose and the video artist Jurgita Treinytė.⁵ The programme consisted of *sutartinės* sung at work; white-clad women were walking slowly on the stage, turning in circles, and imitating various flax-related activities, while the patterns of Lithuanian woven fabrics and images from old photographs were changing in the background of the stage. The programme was based on the parallel between plant vegetation and human life depicted through the means of music and contemporary visual arts. More similar projects were designed, performed, and published in later years.

As for the urban environment, not only the members of the folklore movement but also art creators in other spheres – jazz and rock musicians, visual artists, cinematographers, IT specialists, theatre actors – were concerned about the preservation of folk music. There are no strict boundaries between traditions continued through joint efforts. For instance, the anthology of themes by Lithuanian jazz musicians *Nuo bliuzo iki sutartinės (From Blues to Sutartinė)*⁶ was published in 2013. Such examples aim to demonstrate the ingenuity of jazz musicians, their ability to combine the means of expression of traditional jazz, folklore, and contemporary improvisational music.

The thoughts of Domantas Razauskas, a well-known song writer, are a good reflection of the mindset of an individual brought up in a polyphonic environment and open to various influences. This is what Razauskas says about himself in one of the interviews:

⁴ Slightly improved, this musical project was recorded on a compact disc: *Sutartinės Party*. Linas Rimša, Linas Paulauskis. Vilnius: Bėgantis mėnulis, 2009.

⁵ *Lino laikas*. Atlieka Sutartinių giedotojų grupė Trys keturiose. Daiva Vyčiniene (management, text), Jurgita Treinytė-Jorė (photography, videos) (book + DVD). Vilnius: Kronta, 2008.

⁶ *Nuo bliuzo iki sutartinės. 33 Lietuvos džiazo kūrėjų temos*. Compiled and edited by Jūratė Kučinskaitė (book+CD). Vilnius: Muzikos informacijos ir leidybos centras, 2013.

When my uncle gave me my first guitar as a gift – now I call them “malkos” (firewood) – and showed the first five chords to me, I was in sheer ecstasy and sat for days and nights learning to play it. Sometime later I started seriously learning to play the classical guitar. This gave me a good foundation in technique, of course, but I abandoned these studies as I became fascinated by the blues guitar. The two different schools, as well as different lifestyles, were incompatible to me. I needed full freedom of improvisation, so I delved into an unpredictable creative process in which I still am, I think...

To me, just one genre is not interesting; I cannot restrict myself by one style. I listen to reggae, blues, jazz, classical music, metal, punk rock, folk, and devil knows what else. I have never found the genre definitions important, and I sometimes find it ridiculous when somebody boasts: “I am playing the music of bards!”. No matter what the name is, it all influences me in one way or another, makes me move forward and do something new. I cannot restrict myself and stop, I cannot describe myself as a punk or a metal musician, a poet or a bard, a Catholic or a Buddhist, a journalist or something else. Therefore the variety of song styles is so natural. I even find it hard to imagine that it can be otherwise (Razauskas 2006).

As we know, the twenty-first century witnessed an even steeper rise in the economic power and cultural importance of cities. In Vilnius, too, there appeared features of a metropolis that can be seen from afar. Buildings much taller than those built before sprang up on the right bank of the Neris River; the glass-clad skyscrapers accommodated Vilnius Municipality, Scandinavian banks, and other institutions, while in the middle of this new city centre a square was laid, which was called Europe Square in honour of Lithuania’s accession to the European Union in 2004. On the esker of *Šeškinė*, a picturesque elevation that took its shape under glaciers thousands of years ago, a huge shopping centre with the pretentious name of Akropolis was built (up until the last decade of the twentieth century, the residents of Vilnius used to go skiing or have picnics here).

According to the urban researcher Tomas S. Butkus, “urban spaces were inhabited by the society of spectacles the identities of which were developed in shopping and entertainment chains and, facilitated by the media, established themselves as a consumerist lifestyle” (Butkus 2011: 80). The previous notion that cities are distinguished by the individuality of their plan, impressive buildings, and well-maintained parks has become correct only to some extent, because the attractiveness of a contemporary city is associated not only with architectural monuments but also with events: exhibitions, concerts, theatre performances, and other events. In Butkus’s opinion, tourists, for whose attention the large cities in all countries compete, experience the city as a cultural event: be it a holiday visit or a meeting or a conference, it is at the events that they get to know the local spirit and national culture. Meanwhile, festivals and celebrations offer an opportunity to the local residents to experience the city in the same way. In Vilnius, a merry event of this kind is held in early September when people return to the city after summer. Ready to return to work after their holidays, residents of Vilnius are welcomed back with

Sostinēs dienos (Days of the Capital) with concerts in Cathedral Square and with a multitude of events in Gedimino Avenue.

Since 1995 impressive fire mysteries have been held in Vilnius on the occasion of the autumnal equinox: while listening to folk music, people watch straw sculptures set on fire one after the other, flames dance and sparks flicker. From 2005, the Neris River turns into a shining band winding through the city on the solstice day: traditional patterns of Lithuanian sashes are formed out of candles on river quays, and people spending the evening at the river listen to the sounds of music. Since the folklore events in the capital are held as close to the calendar of the traditional agricultural cycle as possible, concerts of traditional music and other events are organized at Christmas, Shrovetide, and Easter.

Thus the calendar cycle followed by our farming ancestors is still important in our days, and the life of the urban dwellers revolves around it. The number of holidays, commemorative days and events has even grown in the modern circle of the year. Some burghers still follow the traditional church calendar. People who are more affected by the consumerist lifestyle move in the circle of the commercial year, which is similar to the traditional calendar. Yet there exists a third circle, that of recurring cultural events and festivals. Every year Vilniaus festivaliai (Vilnius Festivals), a municipal company established for this particular purpose, organizes a dozen of festivals; various events are also organized by independent managers. In this way, it is not only the melting snow that lets the city dwellers feel the change of the seasons, but also Kino pavasaris (a film festival held in spring), and not only the falling leaves, but also Muzikos ruduo (a music festival organized in autumn).

Conclusions

The tradition of the twenty-first-century city is multifaceted and multi-layered. Its continuation constantly creates links between different musical styles and between communities that nurture those styles. Continuation of contemporary musical traditions resembles a multipart score in which the voices often interlace. Traditional culture of the twenty-first century is nurtured not only by family members or neighbours, but also by communities of strangers and even virtual communities. The successors to the tradition are no longer farmers attached to land and nature, but “free artists” for whom traditional culture is not a repertoire accumulated and preserved in memory, but a freely-chosen set of cultural signs and meanings, which is often enriched by signs and meanings of other cultures.

Like any other music, folk music is part of the pastime for urban residents. It is performed in beautiful concert venues and in shabby and small pocket halls, and when

it is warm the music is right there in the streets. The members of the folklore movement give concerts in various spaces in the Old Town of Vilnius, which have adequate acoustics, serve as impressive stage set, and are cosy and comfortable for the audiences. There is not just live music, but also that from the loudspeakers and screens; music that fascinates by original performance, new interpretations, and modern technologies to render it more impressive. Nowadays folk songs, instrumental music, and traditional dance are often fused with visual arts and quite often the visual aspect of an event is even more important.

Thus the predictions of the folklorist Norbertas Vėlius have come true: Lithuanian culture that manifested itself through traditional forms in traditional life became a culture of modern forms in modern life. Folk music of a contemporary capital of Lithuania is of rural origin but its renewal no longer requires the live spring or keeping in touch with the village. In the recent decades, the soil of this music and the spring that refreshes are right here in the urban environment. Folk music proved to be extremely strong and vital, and, more to that, became one of the most appealing layers of the urban music.

Translated by Diana Barnard

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Photo 2 The performance Wedding of Kupiškis (1934)



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