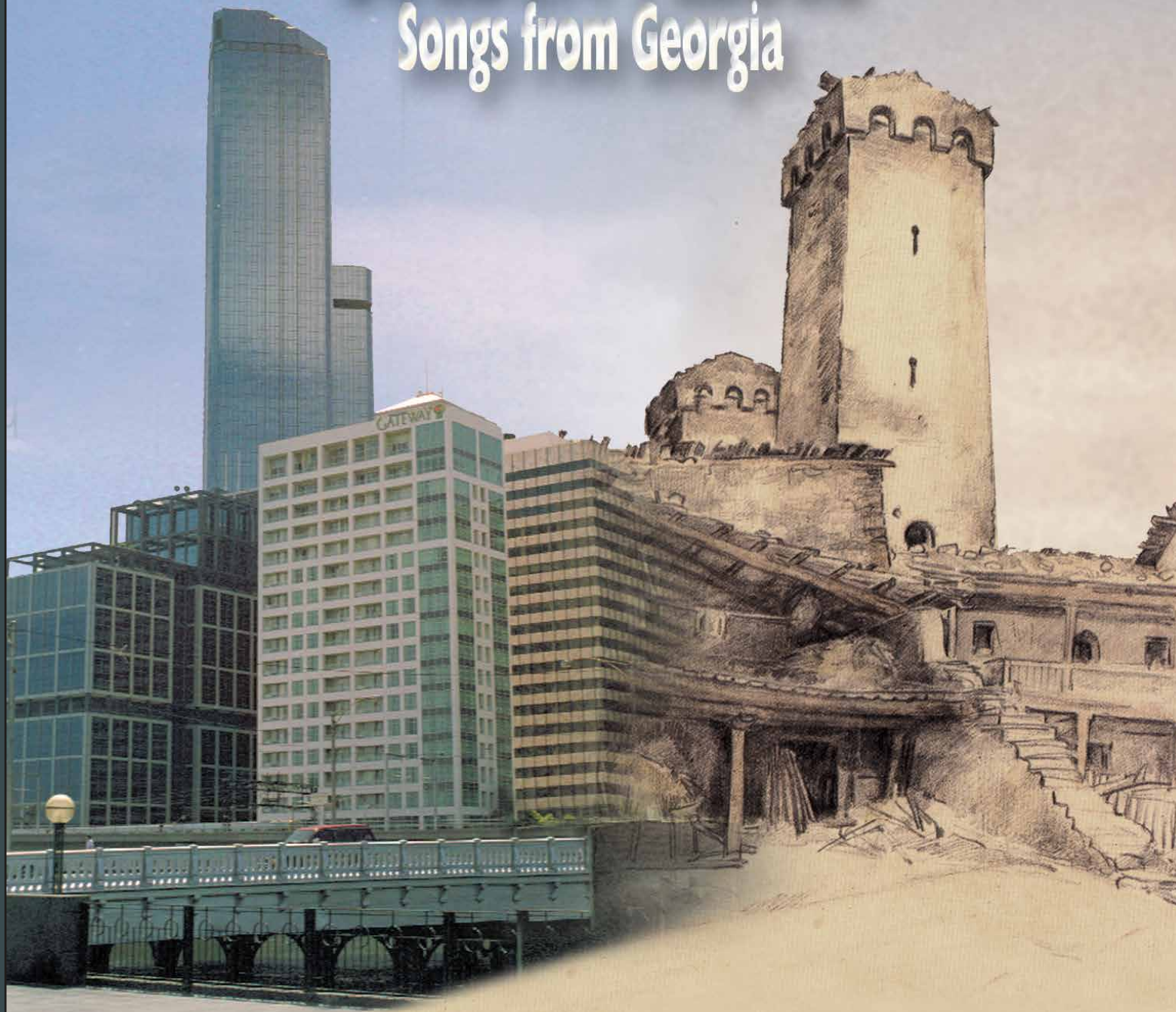


# GOLDEN FLEECE

Songs from Georgia





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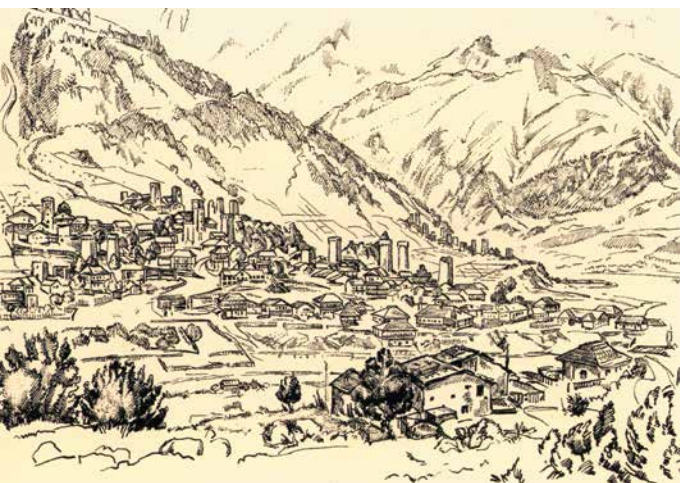
Nino Tsitsishvili  
Joseph Jordania  
Christoph Maubach

- 1 ელესა. *Elesa* (work song) 3'02"
- 2 მგზავრული. *Mgzavruli* (travelling song) 1'46"
- 3 ბატონებო. *Batonebo* (lords) 3'14"
- 4 ალი-ფაშა. *Ali-Pasha* 1'39"
- 5 შაშვი-კაკაბი. *Shashvi-kakabi* (blackbird and starlet) 4'40"
- 6 მივალ გურიაში. *Mival guriashi* (I am going to Guria) 2'27"
- 7 ბატონების სიმღერა. *Batonebis simghera* (the song for the lords) 2'05"
- 8 გურული ფერხული. *Guruli perkhuli* (Gurian round dance) 2'11"
- 9 აშო ჩელა. *Asho Chela* 3'34"
- 10 იმერული მრავალჟამიერ. *Imeruli Mravalzhamier* 2'04"

- 11 ჟამთა და წელთა. *Zhamta da tselta* (epochs and years) 1'44"
- 12 ცხენოსნური. *Tskhenosnuri* (horse riding) 1'51"
- 13 მრავალჟამიერ. *Mravalzhamier* 2'42"
- 14 სვანური ფერხული. *Svanuri perkhuli* (Svanetian round dance) 3'02"
- 15 მირანგულა. *Mirangula* (the name of a woman-fighter) 2'35"
- 16 შინა ვორგილ. *Shina vorgil* (round dance song from Svaneti) 2'47"
- 17 ნანა. *Nana* (lullaby) 2'53"
- 18 კეისრული. *Keisruli* (Caesar's song) 3'27"
- 19 შენ ხარ ვენახი. *Shen khar venakhi*. (You are a vineyard) 2'35"
- 20 ადილა. *Adila* 2'47"

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### **The Republic of Georgia**

Georgia is a small country in the Caucasus. It is located in the junction of Europe and Asia on the east coast of the Black Sea bordering to the north on Russia and to the south on Turkey. Georgia has developed a unique culture with a distinctive alphabet and language, its own customs and expressive arts. Compared to our turbulent western world in which cultures have merged and changed at a great speed over the decades, this part of the world has undergone a much slower change. The past of Georgian culture is still evident and its music remains a significant and proud domain of the ancestral heritage of the Georgians.

### **Golden Fleece**

Golden Fleece is an Australian vocal ensemble which performs, collects, teaches and researches traditional Georgian music. The group takes its name from the well known mythical object the golden fleece

(**ოქროს საწმისი**).

The trio Golden Fleece consists of Joseph Jordania, PhD (low voices and percussion) and Nino Tsitsishvili, MA (high voices and *chonguri*). Both are ethnomusicologists who arrived in Australia in 1995 from Georgia. The third member of the ensemble is German-born Christoph Maubach M.Ed (middle voices and percussion). Christoph is a music educator, who has specialised in Orff music and movement education. He is a lecturer in music education at Australian Catholic University in Melbourne.

Golden Fleece was formed in January 1996 in Melbourne. Since then the trio has performed concerts and taught workshops at many Australian music events including the Woodford Festival, the National Folk Festival and the Sydney A Cappella Festival. Golden Fleece has performed abroad in Chicago and Los Angeles and some of their performances have been broadcast by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

### **The growing interest in Georgian vocal music**

In Australia the performances and the teaching by members of Golden Fleece have coincided with a growing interest in community singing. Many Australians have been inspired to sing Georgian songs. The ensemble Nana was founded to sing Georgian women's songs. The vocal group Gorani who originally focussed on songs from Bulgaria has made some space for Georgian songs in their repertoire.

The trio Golden Fleece shares its love for Georgian music with the groups Kartuli Ensemble and Kavkasia from the USA. And similarly with the choirs Marani in France, Darbazi in Canada and the Cardiff Georgian Choir in Wales.

### **The mythology of the golden fleece**

According to a Greek legend the golden fleece was taken from Greece to Colchis, present day western Georgia. A ram with golden fleece was brought by the cloud goddess Nephele to her son Phrixus who used this ram to escape from his step-mother. Phrixus safely reached Colchis on the other side of the Black Sea, sacrificed the ram and hung up its fleece in the grove of Ares. Later, headed by Jason, the Argonauts went to Colchis to find and obtain the golden fleece. Greek historical sources position the centre of Colchis, Fasis, near the river Rioni which today is the harbour town **Poti** in Georgia.

The Argonauts were met by the King of Colchis, Aeetes. In response to Jason's request to obtain the golden fleece, King Aeetes asked him to fulfil several challenging tasks. With the help of Aeetes' daughter Medea who fell in love with Jason, he managed to fulfil the King's assignments and returned with the desired golden fleece.

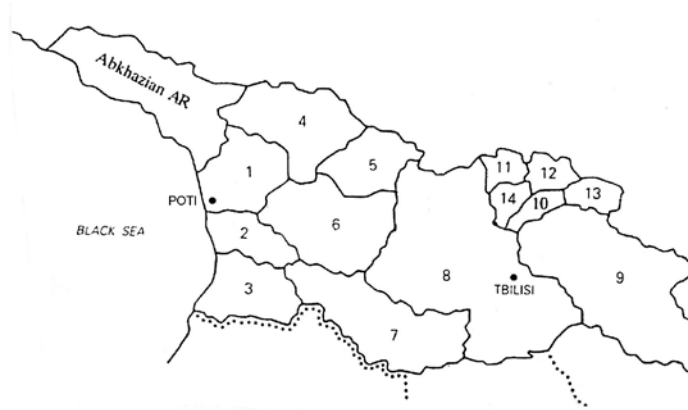
There are other historical and literary explanations about the golden fleece; Greek historical and literary sources of the 4th century BC describe the golden fleece as a book about chemical technology of

gold-mining written on a sheep-skin. The ancient Greek historians Strabo and Appian wrote about a method of gold-mining in the gold-bearing rivers of Colchis with the help of a sheep skin. 20th century Georgian ethnographic studies illustrate that in Svaneti's Caucasian mountains, a region of Georgia, people still mined for gold in the 1930s-1940s with the help of a sheep skin. Another Greek author has claimed that golden fleece was gold script on parchment. Still another version says that golden fleece was medical knowledge and that the word "medicine" was derived from the name of Aeetes' daughter Medea. Indeed, archaeologists and ethnographers agree that goldsmith manufacturing and medicine were highly developed in the ancient country of Colchis in the territory of contemporary western Georgia.

To the members of our ensemble the golden fleece suggests the culture which we have brought from The Republic of Georgia to Australia. The golden fleece reflects the idea of ever-travelling knowledge, wisdom and music which survives and develops in a new soil and which is sought after by many.

### **Historical and cultural conditions of Georgia**

Georgia is one of the earliest Christian countries in eastern Christian development. Georgia officially adopted Christianity in 337 AD. Muslims live in the regions of Achara and Abkhazeti. Despite its orthodox Christianity many



ancient Georgian customs, beliefs and cultural expressions have retained pre-Christian features. Throughout its history this region of Caucasia has developed in close cultural and economical contact with ancient states of West Asia, including Sumer, Babylon, Assyria, Asia Minor, ancient Greece, Persia and Turkey. These connections resonate through archaeological and written sources. The 10th-12th centuries represent a golden age in the history of Georgia. At that time the politically unified country was ruled by King David the Builder and later by his grand daughter King Tamar, who is glorified in many Georgian folk songs. From the end of the 18th century the Georgian Kingdom became subordinate to the Russian Empire and via Russia it was exposed to Western culture. Since 1991 Georgia exists as an independent Republic.

### **Georgian traditional music**

Georgian traditional music is unique because of its sound qualities, melodies,

harmonies, polyphony and modes. The famous French writer Romain Rolland wrote about Georgian music at the turn of 20th century: "lucky are the people who have created such a beautiful music". The distinguished composer Igor Stravinsky expressed astonishment and admiration when he heard the traditional Georgian polyphonic songs. He thought of Georgian music as one of the most powerful impressions in his life, and considered the spontaneous creativity of Georgian singers to be a stimulus for the development of modern Western music.

Georgian songs accompany the most important moments of a villager's life: birth, the naming of a child, wedding ceremonies, work in the fields and at home, religious festivals and secular celebrations, death and burial, illness and everyday life. Men and women in Georgia are involved in separate spheres of music-making: women are mostly involved with the ceremonial songs, lullabies, indoor or outdoor work songs and entertainment songs. These often include the instruments *chonguri* and *panduri*. Men sing mostly at parties and during various outdoor work activities. They also play various instruments. An exclusive feature of Georgian folk music is its A cappella style polyphony which flourishes in the villages.

### **The singer in the traditional society of Georgia**

Good singers were held in high esteem in the Georgian traditional music and were



very much appreciated by the community. Parents marrying their daughter in Guria (western Georgia) in the 19th century would inquire about a fiancée's musical abilities; a positive candidate would receive appraisal from the bride's relatives. Men also tried to marry women from musical families so that their children could inherit musical talent. Despite such high regard for a singer, the provision of music in the villages never became a professionally paid job and has remained a source of spirituality and a symbol of ancestral wisdom.

#### **Transmission of music and customs in Georgia**

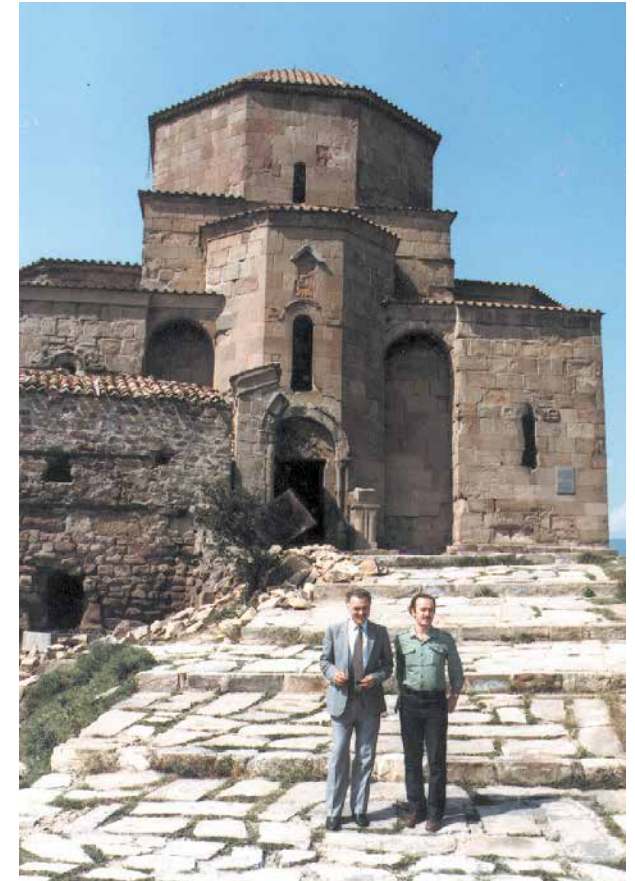
Georgian folk music is an oral tradition passed on from generation to generation through active music making. In some parts of Georgia special chanting schools were established for young people. These schools aimed to prepare professional singers and composers, usually monks, for service in the Christian church. Often parents sent their gifted children

to famous singers' homes for musical education. Many outstanding Georgian singers of the 19th-20th centuries were trained at these schools. Chanting was taught by means of *neumes*. These signs used in the European medieval music notation indicated the general movement of voices. Folk singing was passed on orally. The musical education of the younger generation was an important responsibility of elderly singers. Young people were encouraged and expected to learn through listening, imitating, improvising and creating their own variations. Often singers' groups carefully listened to each other at parties and, as the natives would say, "stole" songs from each other.

#### **Aspects of polyphony and tonality in Georgia**

Georgian traditional songs consist of one, two, three and four part vocal harmonic textures. Most songs are in three parts. The traditional singer usually knows immediately how many parts are in a song and which part is assigned to his or her own voice. One-part songs are always performed solo. Unison singing occurs on rare occasions in particular dialect areas. Four-part work songs, *naduri*, can be found in Guria and in Achara dialect areas of western Georgia. According to the tradition, the upper parts of a polyphonic song are sung by individual singers while the bass can be sung by a group of singers.

Georgian polyphony features a variety of styles. Georgian music theory has



identified two groups from these styles:

- Drone polyphony in which two solo parts develop against the background of a group pedal drone. Drone polyphony flourishes in Kartli and Kakheti dialect areas of eastern Georgia which border Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this form melismatic and ornamented solo parts alternate and merge on the background of a continuous sound (see track #5).
- In contrast to this, western Georgian music features polyphony in which all three or four parts are equally active

## Mival guriashi



without any discrimination between leading/solo and backing voices (see tracks #4 and #6).

The modes used in Georgian songs are linked to their harmonic-melodic and polyphonic properties. Many Georgian songs are based on the parallel movements of triads, fifth and other harmonies which include the interval of the perfect fifth. Thus pentachordal modal structures may occur as outlined by the Georgian musicologist Vladimer Gogotishvili. It is impossible, however, to separate the melodic-modal (horizontal) and polyphonic-harmonic (vertical) principles of the songs.

### Native terms and concepts

Georgian rural folk music was an exclusively oral tradition; no written theoretical contributions were left for us. Nevertheless, the people of Georgia have developed native concepts and terminologies reflecting their peculiar aesthetic perceptions and values. For example, the Georgian terms for singing *simgheris tkma* [lit. to say a song] and *shemodzakheba* [lit. to call] suggest how much music-making and speech communication were related in the villager's concept. A special terminology denotes each part of the polyphonic songs: the *mtkmeli* or *damtsqebi* [lit. one who says or starts] starts a song; the *modzakhili* [lit. one who calls, sings after] joins the

*mtkmeli*; *bani* [lit. bellowing, lower part] which is the bass. In western Georgia the high voices may feature particular characteristics: *krimanchuli* [lit. distorted falsetto or distorted jaw] is the term for yodel; *tsvrili* [lit. slim, skinny] is the term for an certain high voice and *gamqivani* [lit. cock-a-doodle-doo] is the expression for falsetto singing.

Improvisation is an intrinsic attribute of Georgian music-making. According to the outstanding Gurian singer Artem Erkomaishvili (1887-1967), it is impossible to repeat a song precisely. Good singers are expected to improvise and develop songs. The technique and concept of improvisation is revealed in the following native description recorded by ethnomusicologist and Rustavi Choir director Anzor Erkomaishvili from his grandfather and teacher Artem: "a singer predicts and hears the end of a song from the very beginning. There is one ultimate goal and it does not matter which path you take to get there." The Georgian aesthetic concept of singing is revealed in another native comment: "A good singer should twist a voice, but if he twists too much it will sever like a rope".

There are plenty of unusual and biting chords in Georgian songs. However, Western concepts of dissonance and consonance are not applicable to Georgian singing. To the Georgian singers harmonies of dissonant and consonant qualities have the same value. This is easily audible as one listens to the



Georgian men singing a Table Song

succession of various chords. Singers usually prefer to finish the songs in unison or fifth intervals.

### The songs on this CD

The songs on this CD come from different dialect areas. They were transcribed from fieldwork recordings of village songs over a period of several decades earlier in this century. Almost all of the songs are performed without any additional musical arrangement in order to be close to the traditional style. However, with a few items we have made some slight changes. For example, we have added the opening call at the end of *Elesa* in track #1. We have attached repetitions to the songs *Adila* and *Ali-Pasha* in tracks #20 and #4; we have added drums and drum patterns to one section of the *Guruli perkhuli* (#8). The text of *Tskhenosnuri* (#12) has also been altered. Some original texts have been shortened in several songs (tracks

#4, #9, #18). By doing so, our ensemble has demonstrated its own approach to the current CD project. We consider Georgian music a living tradition and heritage. We have brought *Songs of Georgia* to Australia to develop Georgian music in a new soil and to inspire the joy of singing with all people. Our approach also reflects a multicultural migrant spirit inherent in the ensemble. Most of the songs included on the CD belong to the singing repertoire of Georgian men. However, *Batonebis simghera* #7 used to be a traditional women's song and *Shina vorgil* #16 and *Mirangula* #15 were traditionally performed by men and women together.

**1** ქლეზა. *Elesa* (work song). From Guria and Achara. For the Georgian people singing and work fit together very well. The farmers believed that singing speeds up the work process. The song *Elesa* was sung when the men carried heavy logs from the forest to the village to be used as building materials or for making a wine press or wine containers. The men often walked long distances through mountains and valleys with those heavy loads. The word "*elasa*" has

no meaning in the Georgian language or in any of the Georgian dialects. However, the song's opening call and response phrase, organised the workers' toil in the mountainous terrain. Particularly through the call '*elasa*' the leader beckoned the group to get ready for the next work action which was performed during the response from the group. The workers started to sing faster when they had left the difficult mountain terrain behind.

**2** მგზავრული. *Mgzavruli* (travelling song). This is a horse-riding song from Imeretia which reflects the domination of men over women in Georgian traditional society: "*Orero rero rero rero ranina*, my smart horse likes only pretty women, he offers his saddle to every woman he likes. Oh girl, it looks so good when you come out on the balcony, I will abduct you and marry you in autumn".

The word "*orero*" has no meaning. Georgians use many nonsense-syllables such as "*adilo, aba-dela, vorudila, nanina, ramaida*" in their songs. Some linguists suggest that such words had a sacred meaning in ancient times. However the villagers have no memory of this.

### Excerpt from Adila



**3** ბატონებო. *Batonebo* (lords). This healing song from Guria was sung to children when they fell ill with German Measles, Mumps or other infectious diseases. Originally a women's song, *Batonebo* gradually became a song for the men's repertoire. The lords to whom the singers appeal, are evil spirits who reside in the bodies of sick children and may even take their lives. In order to protect and heal the children, relatives and neighbours would decorate the ill child's bedroom with red fabrics and flowers. They would also light honey candles and sugar-coated walnuts for nice smell and ambience.

The singing of *Batonebo* was usually accompanied by the *chonguri* (see photo). The *chonguri* is a plucked string instrument. Playing the *chonguri* was an honourable skill for women. The text of this song offers the following words: "O lords, calm down, you are beautiful. Violets and roses are spread on your way. We sacrifice roses and violets... (...) Lords please leave the child".

**4** ალი-ფაშა. *Ali-Pasha*. Guria and Achara dialect areas share many songs and singing styles. Ali-Pasha is the name of a historical figure who led Gurians and Acharians in the war against Russia. Eventually, however, he betrayed the Acharians. The text of the song says: "Ali-Pasha betrayed us and handed us to the Russians". However sad the story might be, it is hard to sense this from the music. As Gurians explain, the music of *Ali-Pasha* actually comes from the harvest song *Khelkhvavi*.

## Batonebo

1. Ba - to - ne - bo, mo - u - o - khet,  
2. Te - tri tskhva - ri, da tkhis jo - gi,

mo - u - o - khet ba - to - ne - bo. ma - i ba -  
mor- bis tsi - ka - nma i - khtu - u - na. ga - u - khar- da

to - ne - bi - a i - a - da var di e - ni - a  
ba - to - ne- bsa da u- tsbad i - ri i - bru- na

**5** შაშვი-კაკაბი. *Shashvi-kakabi* (blackbird and starlet). This is a table song from Kakheti. Celebrating a feast (*supra* [lit. table-cloth]) with much wine, plenty of good food and long toasts around the table is a central part of cultural life in Georgia. In the olden days *supra* was not just a place for entertainment, but a whole set of traditional values and standards.

Toasts were proposed in an established order and followed by table songs. It was believed that singing kept the men sober, or at least made them look that way. Today people are more reluctant to observe this old tradition and *supra* has become mainly a place for gathering and chatting at birthday parties, naming ceremonies or any other occasional



parties. Traditional songs have been replaced by modern popular music. Table songs are exclusively a domain of the male and often involve competition between two singers. The text in this song says: "One beautiful morning the blackbird and the starlet got into an argument, they had a difficult battle and the blackbird won".

**6** მივალ გურიაში. *Mival guriashi* ("I am going to Guria"). This lyrical song from Guria is accompanied by the *chonguri*. In this gentle song, performed usually at the dinner table, a man tells how much he adores his beautiful country: "I am going to Guria, but my spirit has passed me by. I tried to run after my spirit, but it did not turn back and I could not even bribe it. My love is here and I'll come to you soon, indeed I won't ever leave you alone"

**7** ბატონების სიმღერა. *Batonebis simghera* (the song for the lords). From the Racha region. We have transcribed this women's healing song from a field recording which was made Mindia Jordania in the nineteen sixties. The song has a similar purpose

and context to that of the *Gurian Batonebo* (#3). But in its invocation this Rachian song is slightly different referring to Nana, the goddess of fertility and reproduction in ancient West Asia: "Violet Nana, rose Nana, iav naninao. May your way be happy, I will spread roses on your way".

**8** ბურული ფერხული. *Guruli perkhuli* (Gurian round dance). From Guria. The *Perkhuli* is a dance song performed in a circle. The word *Perkhuli* comes from the word *pekhi* [lit. foot]. *Perkhuli* are performed at various sacred and secular ceremonies such as weddings and religious festivals. Feasts and celebrations traditionally ended with round-dance songs. Georgian ethnographers believe that circle or semi circle dance formations symbolically reflect the people's beliefs about the relationship between astral

bodies and the life-circle on earth. The text used in the *Guruli perkhuli* consists of nonsense syllables: "—hei-da, alal-valali, vodeli, vodela".

**9** აშო ჩელა. *Asho Chela*. (here: Chela). From the Samegrelo region. In the song *Asho Chela* a bull-cart driver is talking to his two oxen Chela and Buska about their endless labour. The gentle melancholic melody and striking harmonies of *Asho chela* are typical of the Megrelian songs.

**10** იმერული მრავალჟამიერ. *Imeruli Mravalzhamier*. This table song is from Imereti. Originally derived from the Latin "Polychronios", *Mravalzhamier* [lit. many happy years; many happy returns of the day] became one of the most beloved words of blessing in the Georgian culture. This gutsy song wishes you health, wealth and joy. This version of *Mravalzhamier*



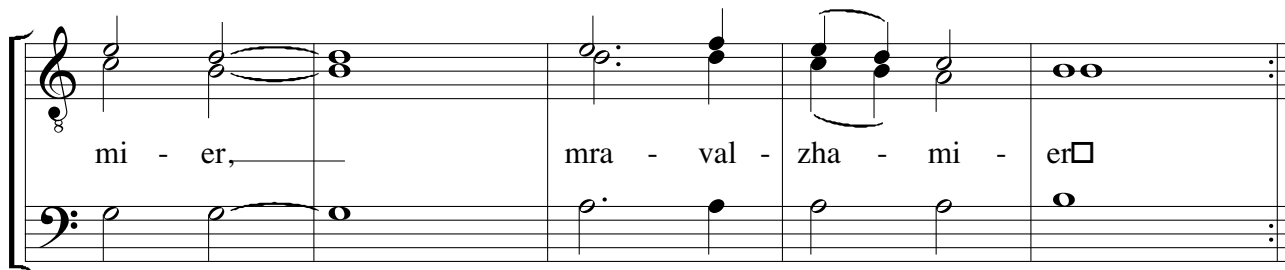
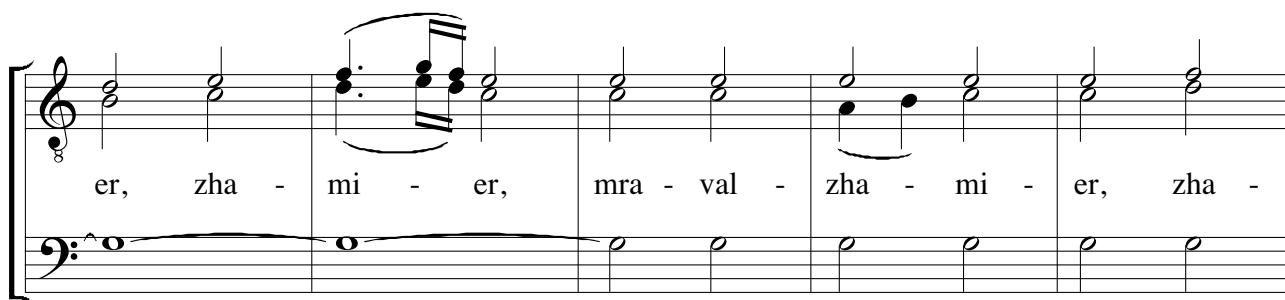
was first recorded and transcribed by ethnomusicologist Malkhaz Erkvanidze.

**11** შამთა და წელთა. *Zhamta da tselta* (epochs and years). This church song from Guria is in memory of those who have passed away. One may feel a streak of medieval asceticism in the emptiness of the parallel fifth intervals. However, Georgians feel free to sing this commemorative church song at a dinner table.

**12** ცხენოსნური. *Tskhenosnuri* (horse riding). From Imereti. The men in Imeretia surely love horse-riding. The horse is a kind of personification of their manly dignity. Nowadays cars have substituted for their horses, although car-riding (!) songs still have to be created. The topic of the song *tskhenosnuri* combines love and travel. The first part of the traditional text version describes how a man mounted his horse in Chiatura (a small town in Imeretia) and went to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia. Keeping up this travel topic, we have changed the words “Chiatura” and “Tbilisi” into Eurasia and Australia. Thus we are describing our immigration journey from Tbilisi to Melbourne: “I left behind Eurasia to arrive in Australia, I loved you, I thought you were mine, but now you turned back on me”.

**13** მრავალჟამიერ. *Mravalzhamier*. This version of *Mravalzhamier* reveals some urban influence. “May God give you a long life”. The simplicity of the polyphony and the uplifting character of this table song fit well with the meaning of the words.

## Mravalzhamier



**14** სვანური ფერხული. *Svanuri perkhuli* (Svanetian round dance). From Svaneti. The Svaneti region is very high up in the Caucasian mountains. This is the area where according to the ancient myths Prometheus was chained to a rock by the gods. The people of Svaneti speak their own language. Today Svanetians officially subscribe to the Christian religion. They have however preserved many pre-Christian legends, customs and songs

in which the people of Svaneti worship nature, the sun, and the deities of well-being and fertility. *Svanuri perkhuli* is one of those songs which can make the hair on your back stand up, particularly when you imagine its resounding echo among the Svanetian mountains.

**15** მირანგულა. *Mirangula* (the name of a woman-fighter). From Svaneti. The Georgian people are known for their respect for the spirits of the deceased. To



please the spirits, they observe special customs. The song *Mirangula* is a mother's genuine wail about her brave daughter who died in an unequal fight in a family feud.

**16** შინა ვორგილ. *Shina vorgil* (round dance song from Svaneti). The courage and dignity of the Svanetians is revealed in a strict flow of harmonies at the start

of *Shina-vorgil*. When the singers reach a climax, *Tseruli* (dance with toes) begins. Men dance with gusto with swords hanging from their belts, often calling out in emotional exuberance.

**17** ნანა. *Nana*. From Samegrelo. "Nana" in Georgia means lullaby. The term encompasses the idea of putting the child to bed and securing a healthy

sleep for her. Sung with the *chonguri* accompaniment, *Nana* originally was a women's song, but eventually entered the men's singing repertoire. The three-part polyphonic structure of *Nana* is an indication that it is no longer a lullaby.

**18** კეისრული. *Keisruli* (Caesar's song). From Imereti. This horse-riding song belongs to the genre of the *Mgzavruli* (travelling song). Men used to sing *Keisruli* to build up their spirits while riding horses in the mountains and through the forests. Some music historians suggest that *Keisruli* was sung by men-soldiers while going to war. This could explain why the song is called "Caesar's". However, the words are very peaceful: "I love megruli patskha (small house in Samegrelo woven from young tree branches) on a small mountain top".

**19** შენ ხარ ვენახი. *Shen khar venakhi*. (You are a vineyard). From Kartli-Kakheti. This church song is a good example of blurring boundaries between the secular and the sacred in Georgian culture. Originally a church song, today *Shen khar venakhi* is performed as a blessing for the bridegroom at wedding feasts: "You are the vineyard, young, fresh, blossoming in Eden". Although vineyard is a symbol of St. Mary, the words avoid mentioning her, transcending her Christian image into an earthly idea of the eternity of nature.

**20** ადილა. *Adila*. From Guria. According to one story, in the early morning people would set and spread the table in the front yard and start singing "ha dila". In

Georgian this means “the morning has come”. *Adila* usually is followed by the song *Ali-Pasha* and is called accordingly *Adila-alipasha*. In this recording we have included the *Adila* part and the final section of *Ali-Pasha*. Like *Ali-Pasha*, *Adila* features the *Krimanchuli* (yodel).

Program notes: Nino Tsitsishvili, and Christoph Maubach, Joseph Jordania, Stella Mulder, Silvija Strode.

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