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**AUDIOVISUAL DOCUMENTATION AND COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ETHNOMUSICOLOGIST: SEVERAL
INSTANCES OF LITHUANIAN POLYPHONIC SINGING**

The importance of audiovisual documentation in ethnomusicology was acknowledged, as it is well-known, already a long time ago. The methodological importance of audiovisual documentation as a research tool in ethnomusicology was asserted for the first time by Mantle Hood in 1971: “The motion picture filmed in color with synchronized sound is the most powerful medium of documentation available to the ethnomusicologist” (Hood, 1971: 202–203). The need for audiovisual documentation was related primarily to ethnochoreology, instrumental performance of music, and the production of musical instruments. Vocal music, which is considered as “less visual” by its nature, has received less audiovisual research and ethnomusical films (however, Hugo Zemp has produced several films focusing on extraordinary ways of producing sound with the voice¹, distinctive vocal techniques² or exceptional singing traditions³). This tendency is also prominent in Lithuanian ethnomusicology due to the earliest in 1997, film cameras purchased by ethnomusicologists were used primarily to document instrumental music and dances.

By choosing the “audiovisual ethnomusicology” theme, which is very relevant today, in this report, I will concentrate on several instances of audiovisual recording of polyphonic singing in Lithuania. I will analyze the work / creative process of the audiovisual expedition project “One Lithuania – five ethno-worlds”, which was carried out by the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre in 2015–2017. On the way, I will discuss general problems of audiovisual folklore recording, which are determined by different goals and working methods.

The report aims to present different approaches to audiovisual recording of traditional music by ethnomusicologists and documentary filmmakers. By participating in audiovisual expeditions as ethnomusicologist-consultant, in field studies, I combined observation and participant observation methods. They helped me to realize that not only the audiovisual documentation process itself and its results (recorded phenomena), but also a comparison of various audiovisual recording methods could become important for the ethnomusicological objective of the research.

The report is based on the situations observed during filming and on some “miscommunication” between ethnomusicologists and famous Lithuanian film masters (film director Inesa Kurklietytė, videographers Algimantas Mikutėnas and Adomas Jablonskis, sound director Ramūnas Jasutis). It is understandable that complicated communication results from different perspectives on audiovisual documentation (documentation of authentic situations *vs* creation of artistic forms).

Several researchers raised a question concerning differences between ethnomusicologists-researchers’ and filmmakers’ visual documentation. The 7th ICTM Colloquium titled “Methods and Tech-

¹ “Yootzing and Yodelling” (1987), “The Wedding of Susanna and Josef” (1985), etc.

² “Head Voice, Chest Voice” (1987), “The Song of Harmonics” (1990), etc.

³ “Funeral Chants from the Georgian Caucasus” (2007), “Polyphony of Ceriana: The Compagnia Sacco” (2010), “Table songs of Kakheti” (2016), etc.

niques of Film and Video Recording in Ethnomusicology”, held in Bratislava in 1988, has established the distinction between *research film* and *documentary film* in ethnomusicology (Baily, 1988). However, according to observation made by Leonardo D’Amico, “Within the category of *documentary film*, it is also necessary to make a further typological distinction between *ethnomusic* and *ethnomusicological documentary* (D’Amico, 2017: 3). Differences between *cinematographic record* and *a film* are described by Oskar Elschek as follows: “The former is a note book based on shooting, while the latter is an artistic form consciously employing the elements of image, picture, motion, space, time and syntax create a visual message about culture and society.” (Elschek, 1989: 27). O. Elschek’s term “note book” is close to term “fieldwork movie” used by John Baily. When talking about creation of a film, J. Baily draws the attention to filming as to a kind of fieldwork. It can be part of a filmmaking process (Baily, 2009: 59), “the raw footage of the research film is like an ethnographer’s fieldnotes” (Baily, 1988: 196).

However, the presentation of different approaches to audiovisual documentation is not the main scope of my report. In addition to general problems of audiovisual recording of traditional music, I am primarily interested in capturing singing (especially polyphony) peculiarities.

I perceive filming of singing as the process that happens uniquely each time, here and now, as an integral part of individual vs collective life, rather than documentation of individual work (song). In more recent times, folklore researchers are paying increasingly more attention to the phenomenological approach, which helps a singer to unfold his / her personality, revealing the singer-creator’s approach to singing. As folklorist Giedrė Šmitienė notes, “the boundary between what is considered as mere personal speech and what is regarded as a work of folklore is conditional, determined by the researcher” (Šmitienė, 2010: 80). Even if songs are recorded as separate from speech stream, according to the researcher, “the question concerning their autonomy in relation to life remains” (ibid.). In further development of this theme, the following observations made by Albert B. Lord are significant. The researcher conceptually prioritizes singing as an action rather than a song, i.e. the researcher transfers the focus from the result to the process (Lord, 1995: 3-4).

During the process of audiovisual singing recording, various issues, that could be relevant for further research on singing, can be conceptualized in different aspects: ensemble of singers as a kind of social group; internal relationships within the group of singers, hierarchy of singers, leadership; communication of singers during singing and in intervals between songs; aesthetic provisions of individual singer’s vs group of singers in relation to songs vs singing; etc.

In order to make all of these singing contexts stand out, close communication between the recorder and the singer is essential. Specific aspects typical for ethnomusicologists (song researchers) in field studies should be recalled here: to establish close contact with singers; to get used to sound / video equipment (when attempting to record almost unnoticeably or vice versa when familiarizing oneself with capabilities of the equipment, etc.); to enable singers to sing what they want at that time; to request to sing something that is considered as the most valuable for future research; to suggest to try to exchange vocal parts; to capture singers’ narratives; to carry out informal interviews; to communicate with listeners; etc.

Most of the aspects listed above were completely invalid during audiovisual expeditions in 2015-2017. It is worth reminding you that the cycle of expeditions was originally conceived by me for the Year of Regions in Lithuania. It was planned to create an ethnomusical film for each region. By inviting famous Lithuanian filmmakers, it was desired to qualitatively capture the most typical features of singers and musicians from various regions who could represent local musical culture the best and reveal the identity of the local community. It was expected that good quality recorded

video and sound would draw the attention of the “general public” (several researchers wrote about quality as one of the distinctive marks of a documentary film) (Elschek 1989; Simon 1989; et al.). It is understandable that once given the task of creating ethnographic films, filmmakers are in charge of taking control of everything during audiovisual expeditions. Ethnomusicologists (me and Varsa Liukutė Zakarienė) became business consultants, intermediaries between the people being filmed and the filmmakers, etc. The following text of the report will be associated with my experience, which I gained during audiovisual expeditions.

My Reflections after the Filmmaking Process

Preparation for filming, the start of filming. From the very beginning, fundamental differences in the activities and working methods of ethnomusicologists and filmmakers became apparent:

- **Ethnomusicological fieldwork:**

Communication with singers in order to try to establish as close as possible relationship (most often to renew an old connection, which was established during previous multiple visits and long conversations); presentation of filmmakers and description of the purpose of the filming; getting used to the filming environment, audio and visual equipment used in the process (the information presented here is based on the experience from extensive field studies, the knowledge that majority of singers compete to sing in front of the camera, behave unnaturally, and due to these reasons, the quality of singing and video suffers).

Several moments of the singers’ preparation for filming are captured in the photos (Fig. 1–5).

- **Filmmakers’ work:**

to select the best space for filming; to create a beautiful “shot”, a certain “picture” for upcoming filming by using certain spatial and visual elements (this process is the most time-consuming and exhausting for singers).

For instance, it was chosen to film singers from Lynežeris village outdoors (even though it was already late autumn, quite cold, and it was difficult for singers to sing outside), by creating a “moving picture” impression (Fig. 6; video ex. 1).

A lot of attention is paid to the creation of individual singers’ portraits, and the extraction of special lighting (cinematographer A. Mikutėnas is known for skillful use of light, colors, and shot composition). For instance, the character of singer Petronėlė Kurulienė from Nibragalys village was successfully and artistically convincingly presented (Fig. 7).

Authenticity (re)Creation

Authenticity in the field of audiovisual documentation vs ethnographic filmmaking is discussed quite extensively (Baily, 1988; Simon, 1989; Fiol, 2010, D’Amico, 2017, et al.). According to Artur Simon, in terms of ethnomusicological film this would mean “a documentation of music and dance in their authentic cultural context or setting as an essential part of festivities, ceremonies or communal life” (Simon, 1989: 43). However, it is quite difficult to define “authenticity” due to “authenticity” concept itself is diverse and modified when it comes to creation of “natural” situation by filmmakers, the image constructed by them, repertoire selection for singers and much more. Therefore, the boundary between what is authentic and what is artificially created (recreated) is very fragile. At this place, it would be appropriate to recall Oskar Elschek’s idea: “We must understand that there are not strict borderlines between the so-called documentary (with authentic, objective, realistic shooting) and artistic film work” (Elschek, 1989: 32). Leonardo D’Amico after discussing ‘real’ and ‘fake’ dilemma in

filmic representation, claims: „Indeed, every representation of reality is no more than a fiction in the sense that it is an artificial construct, a selective view of the world, produced for some purpose and therefore unavoidably reflecting a given subjectivity or point of view.” (D’Amico, 2017: 6).

During the filming, I noticed quite a lot of artificial “authenticity” creation cases. Most of them are related to the filmmakers’ perception of the “authentic” village image. For instance, singers from Žiūrai village (Varėna district) were filmed in the garden where they were “framed” between two apple trees, and the natural image was complemented with fabrics, which were hung on/between trees (the director thought that it would look “more natural” in this way) (Fig. 8). For a village man, on the contrary, those fabrics would seem to spoil the filming image.

Another paradoxical case is to bring a turkey walking around the yard to the filming “frame” (Fig. 9–11). By wanting to add a village-like “authenticity” atmosphere to the situation, the director only undermines the process. By placing a turkey between singers on a bench, the director makes them feel strange, even fearful (everyone knows that turkeys sometimes attack humans). The situation is completely unnatural. Besides, by doing so, the attention is diverted from singing and the quality of the singing definitely suffers (video ex. 2).

Ethnomusicologists also face authenticity problems while recording “daily” videos during field studies. The fact that many ceremonial (calendar holidays, weddings, etc.) songs, also field-work songs, and laments are most often filmed not in a contextual setting but simply in a farmhouse, prevents us from discussing the full authenticity of the filmed phenomenon. However, authenticity is a significantly broader issue, which will not be discussed in depth in this report.

Filming of Singing, Communication with Singers

When there is enough time for communication and filming during field studies, ethnomusicologists allow singers to sing what they like the most in the beginning. Of course, it is different when one arrives with a specific goal to film what is disappearing the most rapidly, what, according to ethnomusicologist’s opinion, is considered to be the most valuable for future detailed research, etc. Lots of time is also dedicated to capturing singers’ narratives about life, customs, songs, etc. In this way, they are allowed to speak out and express themselves. Informal interviews are also carried out.

While filming with film masters, it became apparent that one of the biggest troubles was lack of time. Filming used to take place in 2–3 different locations during the day. Besides, as was mentioned above, perhaps the most time is spent on the choice of filming place and for the creation of the best “shot”. Ethnomusicologists’ responsibility is to select the repertoire, which has to be filmed. Almost no improvisation and very little communication with singers, especially when filming outdoors.

Ethnomusicologists interview singers while being “behind the scenes”. Communicating over a large distance does not create a cozy atmosphere that helps singers to open up. One of the solutions to improve communication could be the interviewer’s presence in the frame. However, it contradicts the filmmakers’ aesthetic of creating a beautiful, “authentic” image.

The songs being filmed become a kind of separate concert numbers (which absolutely contradicts my perception of singing as a process *vs* part of life filming). In fact, in this context, I am talking more about the inner state of singers, the determination to sing a song in front of the camera without mistakes, just like in a responsible concert.⁴

⁴ The image of the filmed songs, once the final version of the film will be edited, it is likely to be non-static (close and distant plans will be installed, video overlays will be added, etc.).

Differences between Directed and Non-Directed Filming.

On more than one filming, I observed the following situation: after a tense, directed filming outdoors follows singers' relaxation time. It is feasting and singing at the table in an uninhibited, spontaneous way.

During initial expeditions, documentary filmmakers were also inclined to relax after the filming, therefore it was necessary to convince them that the singing at the table must be filmed. The result of the first video recordings was the poor quality of the filmed material (there was no time to prepare for it), but the effect of the natural environment on singing is obvious. Besides, in Samogitia, several feast songs were filmed probably for the first time in the authentic environment – at the table (video ex. 3). On the other hand, singers from Lynežeris village performed a song at the table in a completely different way, with more impact (Fig. 12–15; video ex. 4). From the perspective of ethnomusicologists, the recordings, which were discussed above, are much more valuable. The naturality of these recordings was even recognized by filmmakers during later interviews. A comparison of such recordings carried out at different locations is worth the attention of individual researchers.

I noticed that the neutrality of singing and communication during recording depends to a large extent on the characters themselves. Some of them manage to stay calm as if they do not feel the filming cameras. Especially, if they are being filmed at home, in a regular environment, while talking to close people. One such successful example of “opening up” to filmmakers is singer Petronėlė Kurulienė (1924–2019) from Nibragalys village who sang together with her daughter and niece. I consider the moment when singers, before they started to sing a wedding song, first of all, adjusted to each other by singing something in half-voices until they eventually started singing as very successful (video ex. 5). With the help of this video, we have an opportunity to analyze the entire harmony of the singers' voices (during folklore expeditions, it is usually attempted to record a song in a “neat” manner: if singers fail to sing well from the beginning, they are stopped and asked to start a song from the beginning).

Communication with Listeners (Evaluators).

Communication with listeners would be a very important objective for both documentary filmmakers and ethnomusicologists. Unfortunately, there is often a lack of motivation and time in order to communicate. While filming in Lazdiniai village, Švenčionys district, I noticed a few curious village residents who came to listen and watch, at least from a distance, what was going on here (Fig. 16, 17). In the picture (Fig. 16), it is noticeable that women not only listen but also discuss the filming live. It is a pity that we also lacked time to interview and film them.

Final Remarks

This report does not intend to be an object of detailed analysis of audiovisual documentation methods and theoretical generalizations. These are just my initial observations, which emerged over three years (2015–2017) while participating in audiovisual expeditions. There, different ideas and methodological approaches of ethnomusicologists and filmmakers became apparent. Nevertheless, both sides had to look for compromises in order to achieve one common goal – to qualitatively film and show the most outstanding singers and musicians to the general public by presenting their individual and regional identities in the best possible way.

Various experiences, that happened during filming, encouraged me to rethink the relationship

between investigative film and art documentaries. It turned out that despite above-discussed difference between “scientific” research and “documentary film”, there are many similarities. J. Baily noted this already in 1988 when he claimed: “There are important respects in which the two kinds of filmmaking overlap. Documentaries are part of a research process and often contain footage that can be used for research purposes, while so-called “pure research films” may turn out to be structured like documentaries. In considering these broad categories three interrelated factors have also to be taken into account: the conception and intention of the filmmaker; the methods of shooting and editing the film; and the destination of the footage.” (Baily 1988: 194).

I assume that L. D’Amico’s term *re-presentation* of a musical event is applicable in order to define ethnomusicological documentary and its relation to reality and fiction, and it would be partly appropriate for audiovisual field studies carried out by ethnomusicologists. According to L. D’Amico, “Regardless *how* it is made (the techniques of shooting and editing, staging, etc.), *what* is its aim (research, teaching, dissemination) or to *whom* it is destined (the general public, scholars, etc.), a documentary is not *the reality* but a *re-presentation* of it.” (D’Amico 2017: 18). After all, ethnomusicologists also film not *the reality* but a *re-presentation* of it when invade the space of a singer, messes up the usual daily routine, and asks to sing songs of different genres *here* and *now*.

In any case, the experience of audiovisual expeditions that I have discussed was very useful for business communication and further cooperation between ethnomusicologists and filmmakers. Meetings with several characters left a very profound impression on filmmakers. Some of the singers even became characters in separate films, for example, director Inesa Kurklietytė created the documentary film “Gražuolės Pyplytės” (2017) about 5 Pyplytės sisters.

Video examples

1. Singers from Lynežeris outdoors while preparing to sing for a concert number (Folk Music Archive of Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, further – LAMT).
2. Unnatural singing with a turkey placed on a bench (Folk Music Archive of LAMT).
3. Samogitian singing at the table, Valerija Mizinienė leads (Folk Music Archive of LAMT).
4. Singers from Lynežeris village sing the christening song at the table (Folk Music Archive of LAMT).
5. Wedding song performed by singers: Petronėlė Kurulienė (leads), Valė Skiotienė-Kurulytė (sings 2nd voice), Vida Grikšlienė (boss – sings 3rd voice). Recorded on 10.10.2015. (Folk Music Archive of LAMT).

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სურათები 1, 2. მომღერალი ძუკიადან აძლევს ინტერვიუს ვეისეიას რეგიონული პარკის დირექტორს, ლინა ჟუკაუსკიენეს (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 2016).
Figures 1, 2. The singer from Dzūkija being interviewed by the director of Veisiejai Regional Park Lina Žukauskienė (photos by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčinienė, 2016).



სურათები 3, 4. სამოგიტელი მომღერალი ვალერია მიზინიენე ცდილობს ადჭურვილობასთან ადაპტირებას (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 26-09-2015).
Figures 3, 4. Samogitian singer Valerija Mizinienė tries to get used to the equipment (photos by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčinienė, 26.09.2015).



სურათი 5. მომღერლები სოფელ ლინეჟერისიდან ღელავენ ღია ცის ქვეშ გადაღების წინ (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 24-10-2015).

Figure 5. Singers from Lynežeris village are nervous before upcoming filming outdoors (photo by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčiniene, 24.10.2015).



სურათი 6. მომღერლები სოფელ ლინეჟერისიდან (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 24-10-2015).

Figure 6. Singers from Lynežeris village (photo by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčiniene, 24.10.2015).



სურათი 7. მომღერალი პეტრონელე კურულიენე (1924-2019) სოფელ ნიბრაგალისიდან (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 10-10-2015).

Figure 7. Singer Petronėlė Kurulienė (1924–2019) from Nibragalys village (photo by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčinienė, 10.10.2015).



სურათი 8. მომღერლები სოფელ ჟიურაიდან (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 24-10-2015).

Figure 8. Singers from Žiūrai village (photo by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčinienė, 24.10.2015).



სურათი 9. ალსედუიას სოფელ სკირპსჩიას ფერმაში გადაღებული ბუნებრივი სცენა ინდაურით. (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 26-09-2015).

Figure 9. A natural setting of the filmed farmstead with a turkey in Skirpsčiai village, Alsėdžiai (photo by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčinienė, 26.09.2015).



სურათები 10, 11. რეჟისორს მიჰყავს ინდაური და განათავსებს მომღერლებს შორის. ალსედუიას სოფელი სკირპსჩიასი (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 26-09-2015).

Figures 10, 11. The director brings a turkey and places it between singers in Skirpsčiai village, Alsėdžiai (photos by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčinienė, 26.09.2015).



სურათები 12-15. მომღერლები სოფელ ლინეჟერისიდან ისვენებენ ოფიციალური გადაღების შემდეგ (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 24-10-2015).
Figures 12–15. Singers from Lynežeris village relax after the official filming (photos by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčiniene, 24.10.2015).



სურათები 16, 17. მაცურებელ-შემფასებლები სოფელ ლაზდინიაიდან (დ. რაჩიუნაიტე-ვიჩინიენეს ფოტო, 29-04-2016).
Figures 16, 17. Spectators – evaluators from Lazdiniai village (photos by D. Račiūnaitė-Vyčiniene, 29.04.2016).

