

## ROUND TABLE: MUSICAL TOURISM

**Main speaker and chair: Caroline Bithell**

**With Madona Chamgeliani, Nino Naneishvili, Geoff Burton, Marina Decristoforo**

**Caroline Bithell** – As a starting point for our Round Table, I will briefly summarise the contemporary situation regarding musical tourism in Georgia and I will highlight a set of critical themes and issues that might inform our discussion. I will then invite my co-panellists to elaborate on these and other issues as we examine more closely the motivations, experiences and transformations relating to encounters between song-learning guests and their Georgian hosts, and consider the broader benefits and challenges associated with this particular form of cultural tourism.

Our panellists are:

- **Madona Chamgeliani** – Ethnologist and respected singer of traditional Svan repertoire (with sisters Ana and Eka). Madona came up with the original vision for *Lakhushdi's Singing Village* project.
- **Nino Naneishvili** – Best known to many as musical director of Ialoni. Nino leads workshops in several European countries and has been leading tours in Georgia for the past five or six years.
- **Geoff Burton** – Long-standing member and former musical director of London Georgian choir Maspindzeli and a veteran tour participant. Geoff also sings with London Bulgarian Choir.
- **Marina Decristoforo** – Marina's PhD thesis (2021) includes a chapter titled "The Village Singers and Singing Village". She has experience as both tour participant and tour organiser (in partnership with Adilei).

Matthew Knight also conducted research on this topic for his PhD and he is the author of a chapter on polyphony and tourism for the forthcoming book *Georgian Traditional Polyphony: Modern Trends and Development Perspectives*. Matthew is joining the remote audience for this session. Other tour leaders present may wish to contribute to the discussion later in the session. There will also be many in the room who have participated in study-tours or singing camps, including the pre- or post-symposium tours that have taken place in past years.

### Concepts and Terminology

Before we launch into our discussion proper, I want to put on the table a few relevant concepts from the theoretical literature on tourism, together with questions about terminology. How do we think of those who take engage in this kind of folk musical tourism? And how do they think of themselves?

- Tourist – Traveller – Visitor – Customer – Client – Apprentice – Guest – Friend
- Song master – Teacher – Facilitator – Cultural translator
- Tour organiser – Tour guide – Entrepreneur – Host

### From the Critical Literature on Tourism

Ulf Hannerz (in *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*, 1996) drew attention to an important distinction between tourists and cosmopolitans. He cites Paul Theroux's proposal that many people travel for the purpose of "home plus" (home plus sun or nice beaches, for example), with tourism functioning largely as a spectator sport. Cosmopolitans, by contrast, "tend to want to

immerse themselves in other cultures... they want to be participants”.

Music is often part of the spectator-sport kind of tourism – when tourists encounter performances of supposedly traditional music and dance in hotels or restaurants, for example, or as part of the “visitor experience” at designated tourist sites. Those who wish to avoid the worst kind of mass tourism may seek out concerts and festivals for a deeper musical experience. In Georgia, musical offerings of this kind have increased in recent years as part of the broader development of tourism and this has contributed significantly to introducing foreign visitors to Georgia’s rich musical heritage. But even in the best situations, the performance is still functioning primarily as entertainment, with a clear distinction between performers and spectators. By contrast, the foreign visitors who find their way to Georgian villages and immerse themselves in studying regional song styles and repertoires with local song masters represent a very different kind of traveller, more akin to the cosmopolitan as conceived by Hannerz.

Performances designed for tourists also relate to the notion of ‘staged authenticity’, used by Dean MacCannell (in the 1970s) to describe performances of supposedly authentic village life laid on specially for tourists in what he referred to as the ‘front’ regions, while local residents live out their private lives in the ‘back’ regions. Again, this is a divide that is crossed by participants in singing camps when they spend an extended period living in the homes of village families, being included in everyday activities, and being invited to take part in local festivals that are not normally open to outsiders.

We might also view this phenomenon in relation to the many kinds of ‘alternative’ tourism which have appeared since the 1980s, with labels including cultural tourism, ethnic tourism, eco-tourism, green tourism, sustainable tourism, intelligent tourism, ethical tourism. Many alternative tourism enterprises seek to close the gap between residents and visitors, placing the visitor in the role of active participant rather than passive consumer. This kind of tourism is more beneficial to local economies, since visitors are more likely to stay in family-owned accommodation and support local environmental causes, for example.

In the spirit of balancing accounts of the negative effects of mass tourism, the contributors to the book *Tourists and Tourism: Identifying with People and Places* (ed. Abram, Waldren & Macleod, 1997) aimed to show how tourism ‘can provide the setting for people [in the host community] to reconsider how they identify themselves, and how they relate to the rest of the world’. In *Coping with Tourists: European Reactions to Mass Tourism* (1996), Jeremy Boissevain comments in a similar vein on the potential of tourist interest to promote ‘self-awareness, pride, self-confidence and solidarity among those being visited’, and to give impulse to the revitalisation of traditional crafts and local festivities. These proposals provide a further yardstick against which we can measure song tourism initiatives and their impacts in Georgia.

### **Singing Camps and Study-Tours in Georgia**

Organised visits for groups of singers who come to Georgia specifically to learn traditional songs go by many different names, according to their own publicity:

Musical tour – Singing tour – Folk singing study tour – Study-performance tour – Song master tour – Music retreat – Folk singing retreat – Singing camp – Folk song learning camp – Residential summer camp – Workshop – Musical and cultural adventure

### **There are Different Models for how these Events are Structured:**

- Some involve an extended stay in a single place, most often focusing exclusively on local rep-

ertoire but sometimes also including teachers from other parts of Georgia who accompany the group.

- Some adopt a dual-base model, allowing participants to experience two contrasting regional styles and repertoires: the villages of Lakhushdi in Svaneti and Merisi in Achara are a popular combination.

- Others include shorter stays in three or four places, prioritising the opportunity to taste a wider range of styles and environments over more intensive study.

- Village Harmony (which held its first camp in Georgia more than twenty years ago) adopts a mixed model, beginning with an intensive, retreat-like rehearsal week during which participants may learn twenty or more songs. They then travel around the country meeting with singers in different localities, participating in short masterclasses with guest teachers, and performing in concerts or festivals, often alongside local ensembles.

#### **Approaches to Accommodation also Vary:**

- Members of visiting groups may be housed with different families, or they may all stay in the same guesthouse.

- In some cases, they now stay in newlybuilt accommodation which is in effect an extension of the family home of their teachers: this is the case for the Pilpani residence in Lenjeri and that of the Turmanidzes in Merisi, for example.

#### **Participants find their Way to these Tours and Camps by a Variety of Routes:**

In the case of Village Harmony, the Georgian camps are part of a broader international programme involving partnerships with singers and teachers in different countries and they often recruit people who have pre-existing connections with Village Harmony's activities in the United States or elsewhere.

- Carl Linich's songmaster tours are designed for those who already have experience in Georgian singing, with participants recruited mainly by personal contact.

- The tours led by Nino Naneishvili, Levan Bitarovi and others have grown out of the workshops they lead in different European countries and the desire of workshop participants to take the next step and come to Georgia.

- The Lakhushdi Singing Village Project originated in a very different concept, which Madona will say more about shortly.

The number of foreign participants can range from as few as three to as many as thirty. Many singers return to Georgia year after year, sometimes returning to the same places where they have developed longer-term friendships and sometimes seeking out new places. Most people still find out about these trips through personal connections and by word-of-mouth, but the make-up of some groups has become more diverse now that it is easier to find such trips advertised online (via Facebook, for example).

The time spent on dedicated song-learning ranges from two hours a day to six hours or more. Sometimes dance classes and instrumental lessons are offered in addition to the main singing sessions. Most programmes include visits to sites of cultural or historical interest and may also include an introduction to making khinkali, churchkhela, Svan salt, cheese or chacha.

The cost of such tours varies widely, depending not only on the length of the trip but also on the mode of transport and type of accommodation, the number of teachers and others who need to be paid, and extras such as entry to festivals and museums. Tours on offer this summer (2022)

ranged in length from 9 to 17 days and ranged in cost from 720 euros (for 10 days) to 1900 US dollars (for 17 days). In the latter case (Village Harmony), there was a discounted rate for young people and, also the possibility of applying for a bursary.

I conclude this introduction with a preliminary list of some of the benefits and challenges we might identify.

#### **Benefits for Participants/Guests:**

- Expanding and refreshing their Georgian song repertoires, whether as an individual or as a member of a choir.
- Studying directly with song masters and culture-bearers.
- Learning a new musical language and new ways of singing with others.
- Experiencing a way of life where singing and dancing still play an important role.
- Gaining first-hand insights into the cultural and historical context of the songs.
- Being welcomed as a guest in a 'normal' Georgian home.
- Participating in the everyday activities of the host family and community.
- Taking part in local festivals and rituals.
- Directly supporting local communities and grass-roots enterprises.

#### **Benefits for Teachers and Hosts:**

- Visiting groups are a welcome source of income (for host families, teachers, tour organisers, translators, drivers, etc.).
- Payments may be used to improve family homes (e.g. installing bathroom facilities) or to fund projects which benefit the whole community.
- Placing guests with local families is a way of sharing financial benefits but also involving more people in the social side of hosting.
- Many hosts look forward to welcoming new guests each year and also value the longer-term friendships they develop with some of their guests.
- Guests may provide the stimulus for reliving or reviving traditional practices.
- Around the supra table, hosts, as well as guests, may experience moments of transcendence marked by a heightened sense of conviviality and affection.
- Those who act as tour guides or translators may be discovering parts of their own country for the first time.
- The guests are living proof that Georgian culture is valued and respected far beyond Georgia itself.
- Spin-offs may include invitations for teachers or local ensembles to give workshops or concerts overseas.

#### **Challenges – Critical Questions Include:**

- Does the introduction of money conflict with traditional modes of hospitality and singing practices?
- Do some hosts feel that they are in competition with others for foreign guests and the dollars and prestige that they bring?
- What happens if some village residents are unhappy with the influx of strangers into what they regard as private spaces?

- Is there a risk of oversaturation in terms of too many visitors travelling to the most popular destinations, or too many tours, meaning that some are unable to recruit enough participants to be viable?
- Is there a risk of the novelty wearing off (for the hosts) and the level of service dropping (in terms of both quality and enthusiasm)?
- What happens when the legendary older songmasters who act as a major attraction pass on?
- Is there a danger of the musical heritage more broadly being reduced to a commodity in a capitalist or neoliberal economy?

Finally, the abstract for this round table includes the statement: 'This relatively new field of cultural tourism needs to be systematized and refined in terms of teaching and management.' Here I wish to ask:

- What might be the benefits of such an approach?
- What would be the risks?

**Caroline Bithell to Madonna Chamgeliani:** In 2011, I was fortunate to be part of the first group who responded to an invitation for foreign guests to come to Lakhushdi and learn the songs and dances associated with the feast of Limkheri and then to join the celebrations. So that's the starting point for some questions I would like to ask to Madonna, who's a very important person in all of this. So Madonna, do you want to start by just telling us briefly about your original vision for Lakhushi's 'singing village' project and what makes this project unique or different from other projects where foreigners come to learn Georgian songs?

**Madona Chamgeliani:** Thank you Caroline, it's a bit hard to talk about all this from here, but I would like to recall how the idea came about. In 2011, when I was working on some topic, I came to Svaneti and saw that in my village, which was full of living folklore before, only old people participated in rituals, and I thought that when these old people were gone, this village and the rest of Svaneti would become just a region with beautiful views and no traditions. At that time, I met Mrs. Madge Bray, a Scottish lady who was interested in Georgian folk music and was at that time attending Islam Pilpani's master classes in Lenjeri. I met Madge together with ethnomusicologist Nana Mzhavanadze, who made a great contribution to the development of this project, and told her about the rituals, traditions of my singing village, etc. My goal was to create a group of musicians, ethnomusicologists and interested people who would attend public celebrations, not as tourists, but as participants, learn all this and inspire the youth to preserve these traditions. Madge was very interested in the idea and we started working together in 2011. The first group was comprised of 23 people. At the beginning, we were all tense, had no idea and kept asking each other, for example, how we should host foreigners, etc. However, they were so enthusiastic that in just 10 days we became a family. I think that one of the main achievements of this project is making friends with the people from all over the world. This is how the project "Lakhushdi's singing village" was inceptioned, through which we have got to know a lot of musicians who come in groups and teachers who accompany these groups. It is noteworthy, that the project is not for business, it is more of a social project and justifies itself. We aimed at involving local elders in the project, who are excellent singers, but have no teaching "skills". Nana Mzhavanadze, Zoe Perret and other musicians helped them in this. Their involvement proved to be very important for the local youth. The result of this is that now we do not have the problem of youth passivity, on the contrary, we do things together. Currently, with our people's help, we are creating "Singing House", the place where the villagers and guests can communicate in one large space, learn and teach songs and many other interesting activities. Regarding the fact that tourism is a positive event in every way, I cannot say that it is so. I remember when we were just starting the project Caroline interviewed me about what I

expected from it. From this perspective, I think when you do something good with one hand you spoil something with the other hand, so there needs to be a balance because we deal with ritual, prayer and sacred actions. It should not turn into a commodity for sale, and it is sometimes difficult to do, because the number of guesthouses and official tourist locations have already increased in the village, and it cannot be stopped; but if it is put in the right direction, we will probably survive in this regard.

**Caroline Bithell to Nino Naneishvili:** You've developed a very different model for the tours you offer, compared to the Lakhushdi model. Can you tell us more about why you decided to arrange to arrange the tours in this way, visiting different parts of the country and with different singers as part of your tours?

**Nino Naneishvili:** My idea for making singing tours – the first time, I think, 5 or 6 years ago, it was in Racha region, mostly. And when I met with local performers, I was so emotional that I decided to buy a house in Racha. I was thinking about it, and our big family soon had a tragedy: we lost a young uncle and nephew and my place in Samegrelo was closed. And when I think about [the] next tour, I realised that I didn't need to buy a place in another region: it's my place, it's just closed and starting to be destroyed. And it was [a] very strong desire and when I went to my village it made me sure about it. My friends from UK, from Maspindzeli, supported. Mostly they were from Maspindzeli on my next tour, also some people from different countries. All the money/income we used to renovate the old place, which belonged to my grandparents. It was a very important thing for me, and still is. You know that I spend my tour days not just in my village in Samegrelo, but two or three days every time we are there, and we will be, I hope.

This was my first impulse, why I changed the geographical direction. And on the other hand, when I was in expeditions I met these mostly old people – sometimes not old, but [someone] who is an amazing singer, but they have no space to share it, they haven't enough students so-called, and unfortunately not a lot of people are interested in folk song in Georgia still. I've always mentioned that this kind of tours and each foreigner who is interested in our culture have a big influence – on us also, not just on our young generation. Because it's a kind of mirror when you feel and when you hear opinions about each cultural thing, [whether] it's a museum or just a nature view or kind of ritual or just singing. It makes you think about it more and more deeply. And in my case, particularly, I needed so much, and I don't know how my friends would agree, but I think that the people, foreigners who are interested in Georgian music, it's more intellectual people than others, because it needs more background ... which makes a person possible to feel it, to catch this mood and to go far away. Also, on one case when I had ladies from Switzerland in my village – it was the only tour which was located just in my village, because they choose one space to work more about songs – after the concert [which] we made in my yard, my villagers whom I knew for more than 30 years, they started to ask me to make workshops for locals and it was such a big thing for me.

**Caroline Bithell:** Do you just want to add a little bit more about how important these tours are for you in your own life as part of the many other things that you do?

**Nino Naneishvili:** Of course: it's very important. Except [apart from] the financial benefit, it's very important for me to have this – social communicating about singing, about different things, and with local performers also and with foreigners which I never met sometimes, and which I met again and again. You know, each day it's a new page in our life and our attitudes also changed, and it's so interesting. Sometimes I think that it's so heavy to be kind of in exhibition. When you feel and it's circulated, this aura of music and relationships, and it's a very big richness and I think I'm so fortunate to be in this circle.

**Caroline Bithell:** Thank you. I just want to also remind you of a couple of things that you said when I interviewed you recently that struck me. So, at one point you talked about how when you look at a foreigner's eyes, you see what makes them happy, and that that's also valuable for you. And you said because sometimes we need to find out ourselves what we lost and what we need to renovate or be more careful with. You also told me stories about how often, when you're planning to visit older singers, people say: Really? Will I be interesting for these foreigners? And you must persuade them. And then afterwards they're so happy and they ring you up and say: How are our foreigners? Have they got home safely? So yeah, those sorts of things you said, it's a kind of sparkle on their lives.

**Nino Naneishvili:** Yes, it's very emotional for me. Just one case this summer, also spring, the last tour, when one lady from the Kolkhuri Trio, Bela Qamadadze, she rebirthed from COVID because everybody thought it was her last days last year... And she said when she visited my village and when she starts to sing, and it was so hard form of COVID that she starts [like a] kind of baby to walk and to talk and, also to sing. And she said with tears in her eyes: You make me sure that I'm interesting again. And it's so often, when I met in Guria, for example, Merab Kalandadze, an amazing bass, and Rebuli Mzhavanadze and others, and when they call back to me in other parts of the year, not in the tour period – and they share their emotions and ask about each of you who participated: How is this? How is Susan? How is Caroline? Say them regards from me! They need it, they need to know that they are important for not just Georgians. They motivated them and I'm sure it's for them kind of plus life energy.

**Caroline Bithell:** Yes, it's related to health and happiness and wellbeing, isn't it? I found that very moving when you talked about that as well.

**Caroline Bithell to Geoff Burton:** I'm just going to move on to Geoff now. So, some different topics. Geoff, you've taken part in many different types of song learning trips to Georgia, some of which I know about and some I don't know about, over several years. So, do you want to say a little bit about what you have learnt or valued about the experience, apart from simply learning new repertoire? And if you want to give an example or two, that might be a good way of answering.

**Geoff Barton:** Well, I thought you had quite a good list on your presentation. I guess one thing that ... as well as all the song learning, the meeting the other people, what these kinds of tours give to a foreigner like me is a way across the language barrier with these old Georgians – they're not always old, but often they are – and for me, some of the most inspiring times have been with older singers who've never taught anyone other than their own choir before. And like Nino was saying, we're kind of bringing them out of their shell. An example that really comes to mind for me is Suliko Sinauridze, who was one of the leaders on the tour that Carl organised in 2010, and by the end of the two weeks, I think he looked ten years younger than at the beginning. There was so much joy for him, and that was a beautiful thing to see. And another benefit you didn't touch on: there's a whole kind of international networking aspect of it. When I arrive on one of these tours and I don't know any of the other guests, or maybe one or two, there's always an excitement as to: who are these people, what are they going to sound like, are we going to be friends, and so on. And that is one of the attractions of them. There is a kind of network of people all over the world who are part of this world and have connections with Georgia, and most of them have connections with each other as well. It all feeds in.

**Caroline Bithell:** I also wanted to ask, I know that you've been on some trips either exclusively or as part of a bigger group with other members of Maspindzeli, so I wanted to ask: how important have these trips been for developing your choir's repertoire but also helping develop Maspindzeli as a community in London?

**Geoff Burton:** I would say that the ones I've done more recently where there's been perhaps one or two other people from Maspindzeli on that trip, I don't think that's made a significant difference. I guess the difference is that each of those people has now experienced Georgia, and that gives them more context about where the songs come from, more understanding of the culture. And the trips that Maspindzeli went on as a choir: We had a workshop, a residential with Levan Abashidze in 2006. I think we were the first group in Bukistsikhe with Malkhaz Erkvenidze and some of Sakhioba. And those trips that we were on all together, all of us who were there, that had much more impact, because we then had a common repertoire and experience, and certainly some of those songs went straight into our repertoire and some of them stayed there.

**Caroline Bithell:** And as a participant, do you have any concerns about how things might develop? Or would you like to share any ideas you have about what would be good new additions to the way in which things have developed so far?

**Geoff Burton:** I guess one of my concerns is a kind of monopolisation. If you meet a foreign singer of Georgian songs and you ask them about Acharan songs, the chances are the songs they know come from Merisi. Because the Turmanidzes have been so successful and have a working setup, the groups will go there by default. And so, they're learning songs from the Turmanidzes, but no-one's learning songs from other villages or other groups. And the same is probably true in most regions, where the hosts who have been successful – nothing to say against them, but it has an impact on the repertoire that people learn. So, I do see that as a bit of a risk, a bit of a downside.

**Caroline Bithell:** I know that some places are booked up with one group after another. A trip I was on recently with a group of people from Belgium, we were following hot on the heels of a group that Zoe led, of people from France: they were in Lakhushdi and then we were in Lakhushdi, and they were in Merisi and we were in Merisi. And you sort of think how many more groups are going to come after us this year? On the other hand, when we were with Nino back in June, we did go to Oladauri and we did learn with Avto Darchidze, so sometimes individuals are going to different places. Is Levan Bitarovi here? I did an interview with him earlier this week and he was talking about how he likes to go to a new place every time and there's something very fresh about staying with a family or in a village that hasn't ever hosted before and they're learning to do it in that moment. And there is something spontaneous about that that also works really well, even if it's a little bit rough at the edges the first-time round.

**Geoff Burton:** I think Carl has the same approach as well. He likes to have one safe person that he knows and can rely on, and something else that he doesn't really know and is a bit riskier, as a way to keep things fresh.

**Caroline Bithell:** And also going to two different places means that different people will like different things, and if one seems somehow not quite as successful the other one makes up for it, so ... There's a lot of thought that goes into it from the organiser's point of view when they're thinking about how it's going to work for the participants, so that's something I've explored in more depth and look forward to writing about at some point.

**Caroline Bithell to Marina Decristoforo:** I'll move on now to Marina so that we have time to have a general discussion afterwards. So, Marina, again, you've got perspectives on this topic as an anthropologist and a recent doctor. Excellent dissertation, by the way: read her thesis, it's really good. Also, a tour organiser and a tour participant, as I said. So, based on what you've written in your PhD and thought about since then, what do you see as the most interesting aspects, from an anthropological perspective, of this whole phenomenon?



**Marina Decristoforo:** Thank you for the recommendations. I also wanted to add something to the previous discussion, since you brought up Levan and I worked with him. The first tour that he did was with Adilei and me, so we had this approach that we were going to kind of recreate the experience I had as a researcher when I had come to Georgia and then became friends with the group, and I would go wherever they were going. So, they wanted to learn some songs, or they wanted to see if this singer was good, or they heard there was some singer somewhere they should visit. So, we tried to recreate it in terms of having the whole band there, or as many of the band members as possible, which is not a lucrative model by any stretch of the imagination, but it was nice because then everyone got *something* and, also everyone was involved and you were traveling with a band, basically, so it was a different experience. But I do remember us thinking, OK, let's go and see if we can bring a group to this village, where we brought a group to a village in Lower Svaneti. And they'd never hosted anyone before and some of them didn't have showers. And Levin was about to have a heart attack when he found this out on the day we arrived, but the people staying didn't care. And they said: No, it's great. We've already had some chacha. It's fine... So, there was this element where, yes, it was a risk and we had to go and vet the places ourselves, but then there was this like, 'there isn't a shower' moment.

Anyway, that's just an anecdote, I guess. As an anthropologist, I am really interested in the questions of liminality, or I guess borders. There is a border between something being a practice and a product, someone being a tourist and a guest, perhaps, or a friend. When do you become one or the other? Is it the exchange of money that defines that? If you are someone's friend, they perhaps don't expect you to pay money if you will visit them, you're just visiting them. But if you're a tourist who is coming to stay, then you probably must pay. So that's one aspect of it. I'm also interested not only in ... I mean, I'm interested always in looking at, you know, when it's a song tour, singing tour, and there are all these people and they're all singing and they're all trying to learn. There are also different practices among the participants. Of course, there are different practices among the hosts. And sometimes it's very competitive, sometimes it does become kind of rehearsed and hot: I have a thing that I'm selling. And I don't blame anyone for it necessarily. It is a product of our time and condition, and because there's only so many people who will come in summer you kind of end up having to see if you can get those people to come to you.

But also, the practices amongst the actual participants vary, right? Some people are there as customers. And I understand: you pay a lot of money, you want to learn the songs, you want to have a certain experience. And some people are there just because they're there, and they are maybe not singing so much and they're just enjoying their time and they're enjoying being with their friends. And then there's basically a range between these sorts of not extremes but ends. And I do think that the approach of the participants does very much influence what the host will get out of it and what kind of hosts you will get, and what the next time will be like for somebody else, perhaps, as well. I have been on tours where we're learning a yodelling song and five people are yodelling at the same time, and at the end no one really learned the song, because there is a sense of like I must grab this now and this is the part that I sing and so I will sing it, even if someone else is doing it already. I will not wait my turn necessarily. I will not sit back and just listen and make the recording and maybe talk to the teacher later or ask somebody else to sing with me. It's more effort, I understand also where this comes from. But it can have this very negative effect for then no one gets to learn, because everyone is so focused on their own voice, on getting the song themselves, that they're no longer listening. And that I found to be the case sometimes, not always. Since I never saw myself as a singer, really – I mean, I do it when I must. I was here as an anthropologist, as a researcher, but I also felt a lot of the

time that I had to prove that I could sing and then I would be taken seriously, which is just part of the circumstances. But if you think about it, I could have been a very good researcher without being able to really sing, I guess. It adds a different understanding, of course, and the moment of being in the song together is something different, it does help you transcend language barriers, it does help you connect with people more easily and on a different level, I suppose. But it's also, for example, for someone looking at social aspects of song, it's not a necessity, and the aspect of like, oh, here we are, all of us are foreigners – and that's also a weird term, right, and there's this us and them, there's the 'other' kind of discourse that comes into play here. We're also a little bit competitive with each other, right? And I think maybe that's human nature and I think a lot of people try to not have this. But you do compare, oh, that person doesn't sing so well, or that person's off, or whatever it is.

And so, I'm also really interested in what these practices are in terms of people who are participating. So, I don't know if this makes sense. There's a lot of thoughts and a lot to say, of course.

**Caroline Bithell:** If we just switch back to the hosts again – you said a little bit about the perspectives of the hosts or the motivations of the hosts – and one of the things I was struck about reading your dissertation was when you were asking whether these singing practices are now part of a global capitalist economy. You were talking about how the presentation of authenticity plays a part in the marketability of the experience provided and the disparity between marketable and unmarketable places.

**Marina Decristoforo:** In my work I organise things by model, right? There are different hosting models that people have, and they vary based on where you are hosting people. Are they dispersed among the villagers, are they in a guest house, how much of the family is involved, is it just one person or is it everybody, how open is your space generally? And then there are several different ways in which that can go. But in terms of the capitalist market, I think it is a valid question to think about, because this *is* part of the tourist economy which *is* tied to the capitalist economy in which we all live, and there was a switch towards the capitalist economy in Georgia, right? So that's what we're experiencing now in terms of also how much things cost and what you're expected to get – some people arrive with expectations of what the conditions are to be, and it can be an exchange of services for money. If we really reduce it to that, it is this. Yeah, I come, I offer money, you give me songs. But I think all the hosts and all the organisers would very much protest. It's not what you are trying to do. You're trying to keep it different. You're trying to keep it as something else. I think people are trying to make this something like Madonna said, a social project, involve the community, use the funds for something, visit older singers, discover new places, bring people together – have all those other elements. But there is a way if we systematise everything and put it in a kind of programmatic way that it does kind of become this exchange of services for money or votes or whatever it is. That's just the opinion that I hold. And in terms of marketability, in my discussion of it I was mostly referring to, for example, what else you can do in the place. Is it beautiful? Can you go hiking? Are there nice facilities? Is it set up? Because it's much easier, of course, to bring people to a place like that rather than somewhere where it's not necessarily the case and then you're spending a week in a location, and you don't really have anywhere to go. And that can be tough and then you are kind of ... I think there's a difference sometimes between the people who go to various kinds of places. Because people would have to be very, very determined to learn a particular type of song to go to a place where you don't have access to anything in terms of entertainment or hiking routes or whatever it is. I think those people would also go to the other places that are more marketable, quote unquote, but other folks might go as well. Like yes, this is a nice thing to learn, but I also ... And this isn't a comment on the people or the hosts or anything like this, just kind of the reality of how these things work, I think. I hope I made sense. I don't mean to be over critical ...

Yeah, there are a lot of questions, right, because everyone wants to keep these things... I mean, I don't like the word authentic because I don't really know what that means.

**Caroline Bithell**: There's a lot of choice...

**Marina Decristoforo**: Yeah, but there isn't really a choice. And who decides what is authentic? That's always the question. Who is making these calls? ... So, I think there is a drive to keep things going and to keep people involved that is there, that I think we saw with everybody who has spoken and probably most people who are sitting here as well. That's a good thing.

**Caroline Bithell**: I think that's a good point at which to open up the discussion, so thank you very much Marina, thank you to everybody who's spoken so far. I just want to put one more concept on the table before invited questions. So again, Marina in her dissertation is writing more broadly about culture and is it a product, and so on, which includes professional performances on stage, not just this thing we're talking about. But you ask this question, is there a middle way, is there a third way? I think that's also a useful thing to bear in mind when we're considering pros and cons and benefits and challenges, alongside the fact that there are so many different models and different opportunities and different varieties that people tend to find their way to the thing that works for them, sooner or later. So, on that note, I'd like to invite any questions or comments from the floor.

**Frank Scherbaum**: My mind is spinning and I'm thinking [out] loud... I would like to add a question to the hosts. I can answer it for my side from the visitor and course participant on many of those things. When I go back, I miss this, And, then I asked myself, what do I actually miss? And there are several things. And I would like to pose this question to you as always. What do you miss when we are gone? When we have gone back to our countries, can you somehow specify what it is [that] you miss? And I know from experience, when I come back, I'm greeted like a part of the family, for example. Madona, I consider some sort of family, in a way – I don't know if this is the right word. But what is it what you miss?

**Madona Chamgeliani**: Thank you Frank, it's true, on the first day of the tour, everyone is a stranger to us, and at the end of the tour, they leave as part of our family. This separation is especially difficult, as if the village is getting empty. And then the villagers reminisce among themselves: who was what, how red-haired Caroline behaved, and we miss her sometimes. I don't know how it is anywhere else, Merisi and Lenjeri are very good, but I think „Lakhushdi” is a different project. If elsewhere it is a family business, in „Lakhushdi” entire village is engaged in this business. For example, in the morning my guest may go to have breakfast with someone else, that is, there will be rotations, and this is natural. Our guests often say: “We feel as if we are returning to the village of our childhood.” It's really like a comeback, neither we nor our fellow villagers play. Everyone is received as a guest and not as a tourist. This is probably exactly what you and we miss.

**Nino Naneishvili**: The most thing that I miss when my guests leave ... it's a feeling that we need more to think about each other... And it's so difficult because, I don't know from where it comes, maybe from social and economic problems in Georgia. And maybe you as guests think that we are the most hospitality country, but unfortunately inside our country it's different kind of relationships. Sometimes we miss so much, sometimes it's so dry. Sometimes we can't meet with our best friends in more than months because it's crazy life, everywhere I think it's like this. But I think we need to learn from you, from foreigners, not only foreigners – kind of your persons who are full of harmony and try to be balanced and so on, you know what I mean. We need to catch this feeling and keep it with us. And I want to say also about one amazing family in Cambridge. It's Ashlyn and Miranda... When I visited them several years ago (it was kind of Christmas or Easter

time, I don't remember), and the last day Miranda put in my bag money: it was a lot of money, and said, please, give it to Gigi's family. And I was so surprised. I felt that I can't say no because it's not mine, but it was so unusual feeling. And I asked how, why, and what can I say? [They said]: they know about it. It's more than 10 years we do this, all our income from our concerts we send to Georgia. And I couldn't talk, I remember, and I cried and asked how they do this and where from this comes, because unfortunately it's less and less in our country. And they told me one amazing thing. We learnt it from you, from Georgians. And it was for me a very nice thing but a tiny bit... and I wish so much that it will be more [valuable?] for me for my Georgian friends, because I know that for foreigners Georgia is more beautiful from outside than it is really inside. Sorry to say this, but it's a very painful for me atmosphere, and thank you to bring it us for all time when you come back here. Also, I'm so happy and in my honour that you come back every year. It means that it is real what Ashlyn and Miranda told me, you find out here something what is so valuable, what we maybe not lost but what about we forgot so much.

**Caroline Bithell:** Thank you so much for sharing that. I think Baia had the next fast hand up in the air.

**Baia Zhuzhunadze:** Thank you. I agree with your statement and with Marina. And so (my questions come from Marina's suggestion. And I have a question to Nino, to Madona, and to Zoé as well. Are we reviewing all these trips and leaving feedback from customers? Do we have such a topic as well? Because as for Georgians, for me personally as well, we are not a people who just looking for the feedback and critiques... Zoe is partly an insider and partly outside as well. So, are you reviewing and what was advantage and what was disadvantage, and something must improve or change?

**Nino Naneishvili:** I just started to collect the emails from my foreigner friends, and I dream one day – probably when I will be older and freer – I dream to print it, because it's really heritage..., it's so amazing ideas about Georgian music, not just personally about me or somebody else.

**Baia Zhuzhunadze:** But I was asking maybe do you have any forms where [there are] questions, for example? When I book using booking or using Airbnb. So as a customer, just ordinary customer, at bank of TBC. So maybe if they do it, just try to have some forms.

**Zoé Pere:** I don't have a formal formula or something like that, but I do ask all the time at the end of each workshop what they liked, what could be improved... discussion and round table at the end. I'm going to say that the benefits are so much larger than the risk and the pros are so much bigger than the cons in general. It is true that some key is some places that are longer than others... Going back to what Geoff said: It is true that some places tend to have more guests than others... I've been doing this for 10 years... go to some of the same places... People in new places don't realise they have something to offer... After doing this for 10 years, it seems that every group is special... And there are so many places to be discovered... I would encourage more singers to do this... Because the people do experience something very special and when they go back to their houses, they miss something, they miss each other as well... This is something we miss in our everyday lives, it's something we don't experience normally... About this border between tourism and guest, for me I consider these people, participants as part of a lifelong learning process... People are here to learn and to learn from each other... My form of workshop now is more related to that to the learning process... [Something about] make more connections with the people.

**Nino Razmadze:** I know everyone who conducts workshops and hosts them in Georgia, but for me „Lakhushdi” is a truly particular social project. Therefore, first I want to thank Madona. I think she is the most special and I think everyone else should follow her example. I would like to

add concerning Merisi, I just discovered that I've never had a tour, but I do have a little distinct experience with popularization. For 10 years I worked very actively to popularize Merisi. I never had any financial interest in this regard, and I always tried to convince them that there could be someone with no financial interest but just interested in promoting this village. I do not know how I did it, but I tried hard.

Carl Linich's group was first to visit Merisi; later the members of Carl's group conducted new workshops there; Then Zoe got involved in this process very actively. Regarding the paucity of the repertoire, I wish there was more practice of inviting other singers. Carl had a particularly good experience when he went to Svaneti, with him he took Tristan Sikharulidze from Guria and Polikarpe Khubulava from Samegrelo. Polikarpe accompanied his group in Merisi too. In Merisi, we tried to involve chiboni players, which was also very interesting. Thanks to Nino for making other people, in addition to the Turmanidzes, more popular, for example, the Darchidze family. It should be noted, that together with Frank we had an attempt to conduct a workshop in Chvana.

In the end, I would like to say that our side, i.e. the organizers, should and do work very hard to ensure that the repertoire is more diverse, so that visiting foreigners have the experience of meeting more new people. I would like to thank both Georgians and foreigners for popularizing all this, and I would like to thank both Georgians and foreigners for popularizing all this, and I'll end with what Madona said, that actually main thing is not the amount of new songs they learn, but these relations, which even after 15 years, give Miranda and Ashley the motivation to still be in such relations with their Georgian friends. In short, thank you very much for today's discussion.

One more question, when we had conference, we had opportunity to invite 2 singers to have a workshops here so we would like to ask you maybe for the next symposium we also can make some workshops for scientists during the conference and I am more interested of what do you think?

**Caroline Bithell:** I think this would be great! For participation thank you Nino. One of the significant things for me that is really important is that this is very much a grass-roots initiative, individual initiatives straight from the source, and most of the contacts are being made by word-of-mouth, personal contact. Nobody's policing it, nobody's having to pass any tests, and I think that's the power of this kind of phenomenon.

**Holly Taylor:** I want to draw a few threads together about this idea of transnationality, and also the idea that the people on the tour make the tour... You can pay the money; you can go on the tour: there's no questions about what kind of voice or experience you have... Would regulation be a good thing or a bad thing?

**Caroline Bithell:** It's interesting looking at the difference in the size of the tours. With some tours that have 25 or 30 participants, there are lots of options for different combinations [of voices] to fit together. On some smaller tours, that's not quite why people are there: they're there for other reasons. It is the case that in Village Harmony you don't have to pass an audition but they try to get a balance of voices, and they also ask about your musical experience, your sight-reading skills, how long have you sung, what voice do you sing, and sometimes they definitely want more males, for instance, so there is a little bit of trying to get a balance in that case.

**Geoff Burton:** Carl, as well, is always keen to have only people who have experience of singing Georgian music. For the people he doesn't know, he's kind of asking the people in between what these people are like... So, it's a kind of informal vetting.

**Caroline Bithell:** It's interesting that both of those things are quite hardcore or high octane and you jolly well learn a lot of songs very fast and in Village Harmony's case you then go on to

perform concerts, and you're meant to know the words and the music and get up there on stage and do it, which is a big motivation for actually getting deeper in, but quite a challenge at the same time.

**Caroline Bithell**: Should we take a question from the chat, from our remote audience? Baia, do you want to select something?

**Penelope Sanz Gonzales**: First, something about scientific and cultural tourism. And second, is there some type of ethical code?

**Caroline Bithell**: I can answer from the perspective of Village Harmony again. In the information they send out in advance, they have some advice about good ways to behave in Georgia, local customs, that kind of thing. Not so much an ethical code of practice, but there could be a space for that, I guess ... we expect people to behave with courtesy and that kind of thing, if that's what you meant. Marina, would you like to comment?

**Marina Decristoforo**: I'm an outsider... So, my role was largely explaining and giving cultural context. We would always send something out before the tour... and then I would have a first meeting with everybody to go over a few things. Carl also has a thing that he sends, I think a lot of people so, Zoé does as well... In terms of the institutional involvement, I think that we run the risk of veering into Soviet territory. I think that there's already so much institutional involvement in practices, in terms of ensembles and so on, it's kind of nice to have this be on its own. Word spreads, so if someone does a horrible job, everyone will know. So, I think there is a standard being maintained by virtue of their being a lot of things on offer and people all, as Geoff and others pointed out, being connected.

**Caroline Bithell**: Thank you very much. I'll just say briefly that I'm pleased to see that Matt is listening in. So, thank you, Matt. And I also want to give a plug to Matt's dissertation, which is also really excellent. So, Marina's PhD, Matt's PhD, you can download them online and there's some great discussions in there. So were you going to jump in there, Zoé, and then we can see if there's another online question.

**Zoé Pere**: It would be good if we as organisers could somehow connect more... It seems that everyone has their own private connections and there's not so much sharing.

**Holly Taylor**: Tours are posted on Voices of the Ancestors website.

**Caroline Bithell**: Some slip through the net. I think I collected about twelve this year.

**Geoff Burton**: One of the primary factors of making a choice is the date.

**Ekaterine Diasamidze**: [Has been following papers on Zoom] Now speaking of workshops, I think we all talk today about the importance of workshop tourism, which is undeniable. But it's even more important why we think how a researcher can find some jewel (?) through workshops. For instance, I see Sofi here from Finland any and I remember that during the XXX conference in Helsinki we led a few workshops... One of the things I was going to suggest, one of the reasons I came today, is that the symposium absolutely needs workshops, especially for world music. Refers to the workshop I held some years ago on Corsican music: they were so incredible. I would strongly recommend that we do the same programme and just make everything much more wonderful... I think not just for ethical reasons and the singing practice, but for the research. I think it's crucial for people to be able to hear and be in the atmosphere of the sound of traditional music of different people in the world... So, let's do singing workshops as part of the symposium. I think many more people, many more Georgians included, are going to cheer up and show up.

**Giorgi Kraveishvili**: I listen carefully to your discussion. Sometimes financial issue came up, sometimes the issue of accessories, and I had the impression that we forgot about polyphony and music and got lost in the discussion. Now, regarding my proposal to the organizers of the symposium-

sium, ethnomusicologists and performers well-versed in Georgian music: don't plan tours only to Svaneti and Achara. What's wrong with, say, Baia Zhuzhunadze's native Meskheta? Which has a very good ensemble, and I think that it will be very interesting for foreign ethnomusicologists to get familiarized with Meskhethian folklore. What about Racha? The same can be said about Samegrelo – Martvili district, as far as I know, has very good tourist places. I don't know what ensemble there is in Martvili, but the Folklore Center will definitely have information about it, and there will surely be very good connoisseurs of Megrelian songs there. It is also possible to bring foreign ethnomusicologists to Khevi and record indigenous Mokhevian songs, etc. Finally, I will put a special emphasis on the village of Sarpi. Lazeti is in Turkey, but the village of Sarpi is the only Laze village in Georgia; we have singer Lili Abdulishi – a benefactor of Laz folklore, we have very good Laz ensembles in Sarpi, and there also are very good tourist places in the neighbourhood, one such is Gonio Castle... In a word, let's do what we do in Svaneti and Achara, in other parts of Georgia, including Sarpi. Foreign ethnomusicologists know Laz folklore mainly from Turkish standpoint, and we can present it from Georgian perspective. This is my proposal.

**Caroline Bithell:** I'd just like to say that in fact there have been tours to most of those places that Giorgi has mentioned... I think it's just by chance that Svaneti and Achara have been mentioned a few times in this discussion, but... I can map it out some time, but there have now been dozens and dozens and dozens of tours, stopping in different places, and one of the things I want to do next year is to map out those places.

**Teona Lomsadze:** I just wanted to respond to your question. You partially responded already to it, but I wanted in Georgian clarify for Giorgi. Giorgi, at this Round Table we are not talking about research. We are only talking about learning; in this case about learning Georgian folklore by foreigners and I absolutely agree it will be exceptionally good if this map is extended. As Caroline pointed, there have already been tours to several other parts and regions, but I would also like to agree with Geoff that if there is less monopolization of specific places, families and so on, certainly, this will be a very positive process; this can be initiated, on the one hand, by us, local residents, and on the other hand, by the intermediaries who convey this information to the people who come here. Luckily enough, we have such wonderful intermediaries who are already engaged in this practice.

**Giorgi Kraveishvili:** I would wish the same in my native Imereti and all parts of Georgia.

**Caroline Bithell:** Shall we take one more question from online?

**Matthew Knight:** Maybe if I can get a read on one thing: Caroline mentioned early about over-saturation, and we've had some discussion recently about going to less common areas and finding new places to bring people. But I'm curious, especially for the people who have had a programme running for quite a while now – Madona, for example. Are you getting a lot of new people every time? Do you get a lot of repeat customers? Do people ever say, oh, I feel like we've learned in these songs before? I guess I'm interested in how renewable this market is, or if it's something that really appeals to a narrow group people who mostly have already been to Georgia a bunch of times.

Caroline Bithell: Who would like to comment? Do you get a lot of repeat visitors? Is there a sense that they're learning the same songs over again?

**Madona Chamgeliani:** Matt, we miss you and hope to see you soon. As for what the “Lakhushti” project caused in Svaneti. Many imitated us in the full sense of the word, and I am glad that this has been expanded, but from a different aspect. All tourist groups have added folklore to their services, if we call it extension. However, I personally, don't really like this very much, as inviting a musician or a singer is now regarded only from the standpoint of financial benefit. This trend is

evident, fortunately, or unfortunately.

**Caroline Bithell:** Zoé, are you bursting to make a final comment and then I'll just make a couple of comments to wrap up so that we can go to the next paper.

**Zoé Pere:** Every time out of 13 people, I get about 12 who are for the first time in Georgia. Normally they are so happy about the trips and their experience that they talk about it to other people back home, and this is how word-of-mouth... It would be good to have new places... but also [established] places like Madona's... There is the question of pedagogy to be raised, how to teach, and this is something that I would love so much to be able to share with other teachers ... I think we can learn a lot from each other.

**Caroline Bithell:** We should finish for now because we have another paper to hear. Okay. I just wanted to leave concluding thoughts on the table. So, my thoughts here are that this phenomenon that we have been discussing, may be viewed more productively, not through the lens of tourism, but through that of intercultural encounter, that it challenges notions of cultural appropriation or exploitation. We are looking more at a case of intercultural exchange based on models of friendship, reciprocity, and community. These events retain a strong connection to traditional customs of hosting, with the risk of these customs being disrupted by the introduction of a monetary economy and business model. So, this is something to keep an eye on perhaps, and there may be challenges with regard to sustainability and the need to avoid being brought drawn into processes of commodification on the one hand and memorialization which again a Marina has written about on the other, so other things to bear in mind. But on a more positive note to end I'm just repeating a thought from earlier on that I think this phenomenon, and I think we're agreed from what all the comments that have been made over the past hour and a half, that this phenomenon has particular potency as an informal, do Decentralize grassroots subculture that provides a counterbalance to more formal top down government funded and managed programs and we should celebrate it as such.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This phenomenon:

- May be viewed more productively not through the lens of tourism but through that of intercultural encounter.
- Challenges notions of cultural appropriation or exploitation – more a case of intercultural exchange based on models of friendship, reciprocity, community.
- Has potency as an informal, decentralised, grass-roots subculture that provides a counterbalance to more formal, top-down, government-funded programmes.
- Retains a strong connection to traditional customs of hosting, but with the risk of these customs being disrupted by the introduction of a monetary economy and business model.
- Faces challenges regarding sustainability and the need to avoid being drawn into processes of commodification and commercialisation on the one hand and memorialisation on the other.

So, thank you to all the participants. Thank you particularly from our panel members, and congratulations to everyone who was added to this meeting.

*Transcription – Nino Veshapidze,  
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