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Susan Thompson 0:00

Well, Holly, I feel so lucky to be in Georgia preparing to launch our podcast at the 10th International Symposium on traditional polyphony. But it hardly seems real. How did this happen?

Holly Taylor 0:13

You mean? How did I rope you into making a podcast?

Susan Thompson 0:16

Pretty much! Yeah.

Well Susan.

Holly Taylor 0:23

Welcome to voices of the ancestors, where we explore Georgian polyphonic songs. And the women who sing them.

Remember, when we were making one of those things, a theatre show. One of those lovely things where people sit all together in a nice room, squished up singing and speaking and moving at the same time. And we used to be able to do that before 2020.

Susan Thompson 0:58

I can almost remember Holly

Holly Taylor 1:02

we were trying to make a show about Georgian songs, and the people who sing them. And we were trying to tell the story of this particular family called the Garakanidze family. And that was sort of the origin story of the choir that were in [Maspinzdeli](#), which is based in London. And we sing Georgian songs, only Georgian songs.

Susan Thompson 1:28

And we used to sing them next to each other rather trying to do it over zoom, which really doesn't hit the note.

Holly Taylor 1:37

But we have found a way we found podcasting, which is something we can do in 2020.
Amazingly,

Susan Thompson 1:44

that is true. And I suppose for me, I was really inspired by that. You sent me a link to somebody who said, this is how you start a podcast. And they were saying, make sure it's something that you're going to continue to be excited about and that you want to talk about. And this time next year, you're still being excited and want to talk about it. And I sort of reflected and thought well, ever since I was first taught a song from Georgia, and that was back in the 90s. Hmm. I've been talking about it ever since with whoever will listen, and with anybody that's ever learned a Georgian song

Holly Taylor 2:22

We don't get bored.

Susan Thompson 2:24

No, no, we really don't. And I hope our listeners won't either

Holly Taylor 2:29

No, I don't think so. Because we're gonna have different guests, you know, and they're all bringing something, you know, different flavour each time. Yeah, but they all have that thing in common is it's like, you know, they heard a Georgian song, and that's when it shifted, or they learnt a Georgian song. Yeah. And something changed. It's like, Oh, I think all that other world music could just take a backseat for a second. And I want to know, where these songs came from. And, and I need to go to that small country in the Caucasus Mountains, which I didn't even know existed a few years ago. I'm going to go there, and I'm going to learn the songs and meet the song teachers like that's what I did. And it's changed my life. And I spend a lot of hours of my life now devoted to Georgia in some way, whether it's learning language, or singing the songs or meeting up with my friends who I've met through Georgia singing or living in Georgia. So it's a bit of a bug, isn't it?

Susan Thompson 3:30

It certainly is. I'm really intrigued, you know, as we interviewed people from different nationalities and with different backgrounds, what their interaction with Georgian culture and the songs what it brings out for them. So I remember travelling in Georgia, with someone who'd grown up in China and Hong Kong. So one of the things if you read travel blogs about Georgia, it's always East meets West east meets west. It's this this mix of cultures, it's it's in this very interesting geopolitical space in the world. And I was I was chatting to her, I was brought up in the UK, I've never lived anywhere else. And we're sort of we were chatting, I sort of said, Well, you know, I come here, and there are some elements of here that feels really familiar to me, you know, that I feel at home. I said, what's it like for you? And she kind of went? Yeah, well, that's what it's like, for me. It's like there are certain foods here khinkali, these little dumplings that are cooked in boiling water. And she was saying, Oh, they seem really familiar. I was eating those as a child in China. So for both of us, it felt like home but for completely different reasons. Yeah. So and I

guess, there's something about I mean, we've chosen that title of voices of the ancestors, and we're not talking about my direct ancestors or your direct ancestors. It's more I don't know it's philosophical, which which so much of being in Georgia or Georgian poetry or Georgian song. tends to be there's, there's something that seems very ancient, and there's something, it feels like there's something to be learned, you know, that that the wisdom from ancestors, all of our ancestors wherever we are in the world,

Holly Taylor 5:16

yeah, they are so ancient, these songs, you know, some of them are pre Christian even. And the fact that, you know, the way they get passed down through the generations orally, and, and now they're being passed on to foreigners like us, Wow, amazing to be on the receiving end of that gift.

Susan Thompson 5:42

Absolutely. And I also from, on a personal note, I feel slightly challenged, because there was a moment in Georgia where a singer said to me, fairly late one night at a feasting table, there may have been alcohol involved. But nonetheless, the sentiment was true. It was, the songs are like links in a chain. And if you're from the west, the chain, you know, the past is behind you. And the future is in front, if you're in the east, it's the other way around. But each of those links for us is perhaps a teacher teaching to a student, and that student may be a grandchild, or it may be a student in a school, you know, teacher student can mean so many different things. But his challenge was, you know, you as a foreigner, you are here in, in Georgia, you have learnt the songs, you can sing the songs at the table, you can speak about them with heart. And you see the importance of continuing the chain and continuing to teach them and continuing to share them. Now, please, please, please say this so my countrymen can understand the importance of our folklore, our folk songs. And so for me that there's something quite serious, in a way about this whole opportunity with the podcast, to cherish and to, to value the songs from this country.

Holly Taylor 7:15

Hmm. Yeah, it is a responsibility because if we're transmitting these songs, and we're not Georgian, we need to make sure that we're doing it right. And I guess there's a, there's a chain, there's the links in the chain. But there when you were talking, I was thinking it's also kind of like this virus that's going around in 2020. But in a really lovely way, because one person has the virus, they can pass it on to so many more people, like they can at the moment, they can pass on to 14 people. So if I learn a Georgian song, that's not just me, I can then pass that on to so many more people, and it just multiplies and multiplies. And that's how these songs have survived, of course, with the help of amazing ethnomusicologists, who, you know, wrote down the songs and saved them, especially in the Soviet times. Before then, you know, the oral tradition was so strong, and I hope that we're helping to keep it alive.

Susan Thompson 8:34

I mean, I know we're gonna go on and sort of give our listeners a clue as to where we think this podcast series is going, you know, the sort of people we'll be interviewing and the episodes but

one of the things I'm sure we're going to find comes up is that so many people I've spoken to about singing Georgian folk songs, these ancient songs is that somewhere in that journey for each of them, there's usually a moment of transformation. There's something in that ancient polyphony. Not necessarily in the text, it's more, it's, it's something visceral in the vibrations that the chords make the music makes when you're sounding them, that somehow seems to foster moments of transformation.

Holly Taylor 9:22

Yes, yeah. So we're gonna be hearing those stories of transformation, moments of transformation from singers and from choir leaders who were going to be talking to, on the podcast. You're gonna be hearing how they've taken that excitement that they had from learning the songs into their own communities and spread that joy and made very, very close friendships and relationships with people because of Georgian songs.

When I first heard Georgian songs, I really was stopped in my tracks. About three years ago, I went there for the first time on a singing tour. And I was the only one who'd never been to Georgia. I was the youngest one and the baby of the group. We were three women. And from you know, different continents, I was from Europe, someone was from Australia, someone was from America. And we were taught by all men we were taught by Malkhaz and his group Sakhioba. Okay, and it was just an amazing experience to be in the beautiful country and learn the beautiful songs and be hosted by local families. But that dynamic really stayed with me the the men and women female male perspective that I picked up on. So that's how I came to create a theatre show about Georgian songs.

Susan Thompson 11:28

Ah I always wondered where your inspiration came from.

Holly Taylor 11:33

Yeah, so that was kind of focusing on the gender constructs. It was a piece of research, but it was also a theatre show - the gender constructs within Georgian songs and the polyphony and how it's all linked together. And that was one of those lovely things where we were all crowded round a supra table. It was an immersive thing. I mean, I think supras are immersive whether they're part of the show or not really. And there was lots of singing and toasts. So I'm looking forward to our show and getting back to those days.

Susan Thompson 12:06

Well, the time will come for our show, Holly The Voices of the Ancestors, The Show. COVID won't be with us forever. We'll get back to singing and sitting and toasting and being close to people again.

Holly Taylor 12:18

Yeah, and in the meantime, it's the Voices of The Ancestors The Podcast.

Susan Thompson 12:22

It sure is.

Holly Taylor 12:30

Thank you for listening to **Voices of the Ancestors** with Holly Taylor-Zuntz And Susan Thompson. Music was by [Jaloni](#) and [Mtiebi](#). **For more information about this and other episodes, visit [voicesoftheancestors.co.uk](https://www.voicesoftheancestors.co.uk).**

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