



**Episode Number: 10**

**Episode Title:** Musical Games in a Folk Family,  
with Nana Mzhavanadze Episode 10

**Interviewee:** Nana Mzhavanadze, with singers Rebuli Mzhavanadze  
and Marekhi Mzhavanadze

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*“When I was bought from the maternity house, first time home from the maternity house, my grandmother met me at the door, that was the first thing that she did, she put me on the piano and she said - she is going to be a musician.” (laughter)*

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz:** Welcome to Voices of the Ancestors, where we explore Georgian polyphonic songs and the women who sing them.

**Susan Thompson:** Hello, the voices today are me, Susan Thompson

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz:** And me, Holly Taylor-Zuntz. And we are both in Tbilisi

I'm so glad I can bring you listeners along on my journey through Georgia, I'm making sure to share snippets of life here on Facebook stories for you to enjoy.

**Susan Thompson:** And for the first time in podcast history, we are working In the same room!

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz:** And we are talking to you on our new TULA mic - paid for by you lovely Ko-Fi supporters. Big thank you and MADLOBA.

**Susan Thompson:**

We are now focusing on making the podcast sustainable - creatively, energetically, and financially. Despite our posts on social media, it's not all fun and games!

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz:** Today it's sunny and warm, but we are inside working on this episode for you. To continue the podcast beyond this summer, we need to be valued for our time.

So check out our new ko-fi goal and see how you could help! That's [Ko-Fi.com/voicesoftheancestors](https://ko-fi.com/voicesoftheancestors).

**Music:** *Natvra*

**Susan Thompson:** Now our guest today is Nana Mzhavanadze, this was another first as Holly, Nana and I were all in the same room! And there were several others too. It was a surprise when our guest brought guests.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz:**

Let me set the scene for you. Nana is sat with her uncle Rebuli on one side of her, and cousin Marekhi on the other. So when you hear Nana say 'He' or 'him' she refers to Rebuli.

This is a significant event for their family, they haven't sung together for 10 years or more.

If you've been taught by Nana, or even just heard her sing, you'll enjoy this playful hour where she experiments musically with her family. Enjoy.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz:**

So welcome Nana to our podcast it's so nice to have you here and would you introduce yourself for us.

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Thank you very much for inviting. And yes I am very happy to introduce ourselves er to our audience. It's me [Nana Mzhavanadze](#). I am a musician. I don't know if it is the right English - by birth. And yeah professionally also I am an ethnomusicologist.

So and here I have my uncle Rebuli Mzhavanadze. My father's brother, he's er, now probably 76, he was born in 1945. My math is good enough I've calculated right. And his daughter my cousin Marekhi Mzhavanadze, and his granddaughter, Marekhi's daughter Lizzie - little Lizzie so that's our, part of our family. Unfortunately we don't have with us our very precious old generation like my grandmother, and grandfather and my great grandmother who I remember very well and my great grandfather who I never met ..

### **Susan Thompson**

And were all of your family extraordinary musicians?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Um I don't like to talk about er how talented we are (*laughter*). I think it is not my thing, but for some reason when I er met Madge Bray – when I met her first, first time she er wanted to know about me a lot and um I never told her, um the story of my family because I thought that was a very ordinary thing. (**Susan** Ah) But then she would insist and er make me er tell more and more and then I try to remember things from my childhood about my grandparents about my family and she found them very, very, special. And I thought to myself why is this so special? I did not find anything special about this (**Holly** Mmm) but then I realised er.. probably yes because I was, really was born in a very er musical family and I ..

### **Rebuli Mzhavanadze**

*Is speaking in Georgian in the background here, he speaks with Nana.*

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

And I remember when I was born, I was born with music and I heard music all my life. (**Susan** ahha) And when I was born, when I was bought from the maternity house, first time home from the maternity house, my grandmother met me at the door, entrance door, and took me er, she took me from hands of my mother and it was very, very, cold November weather and she took me upstairs, where it was very cold, that was the first thing that she did she put me on the piano and she said she is going to be a musician. (*laughter*) So that was my first introduction or 'touch' with er – physically – with music and er they all sang my – I met my – as I said my great grandmother, my grandfather's mother, um, Mariam Ch'q'onia who was an extraordinary woman in many ways – very talented. And she was also a very talented musician and a dancer and

they say that she could play this little tsiko-tsiko – He also remembers it. You know this very little accordion (**Susan** yes). She used to play this tsiko-tsiko so well. It doesn't have much of possibility this is a very limited er. But she was such a great master, that she made the whole neighbourhood dance (**Holly** Wow) (laughter)

### **Rebuli Mzhavanadze**

*Speaks to Nana in Georgian.*

### **Susan Thompson**

It looks like a toy doesn't it. It's so tiny.

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Yes, but she was an extraordinary woman she made it like a real instrument so that everybody wanted to dance.

### **Susan and Holly - Wow**

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

And she was actually – now he remembers – I interviewed him a couple of years ago and he remembers that she as a little woman – she was a maid in um er a noble family in Batumi. Maybe she was like 10 or 12Yrs old and she was educated there very well by the family she could speak er Russian and Armenian and she sang in a church in Batumi and then when she moved, when she married. And she lived in Ozurgeti where I come from. Er She, that was the time when Armenians and Turkish – this genocide in Turkey. Armenians left Turkey and lots of Armenians moved to Ozurgeti and in our neighbourhood we had quite a bit of Armenian families living and because she spoke Armenian she was er serving the government as a translator for the Armenian community – yep – and I remember her teaching me Russian, (**Holly** Wow) as well she was very special woman. So her nick-name was er 'nightingale' – she had a beautiful very sweet, timbre um in which she was singing beautifully and he sometimes thinks that, he says to me that I remind him of his er grandmother this nightingale. (**Susan** Yes, yes) but I'm not that. Actually what I want to say is my family is very talented – I am the least talented in my family (laughter).

### **Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Well I think some of our listeners remember, if they have met you, that the one thing that they really remember is your voice, I think. Especially – I know people like when you've run workshops in the UK and they say – once you hear Nana's voice you don't forget it. So maybe, maybe we can hear it?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Thank you.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

These three wonderful family musicians in one room – maybe now is a good time for a song.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

OK - *in Georgian vimgerot*

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Is there a song that reminds you of your ancestors?

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

There are so many songs. (laughter) All of them would remind me of my ancestors, er but something that which we could just sing, er, together because we never saw each other like three of us for ten years! Maybe three of us together, for many years, we never sang together...

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Well so glad you could come together for this! (laughter)

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

She is going to be bass. (Susan Aah) (Holly – very good – we like)

He can play between us – I believe he can do very beautiful things

**Live Music:** Marekhi sings bani - Family sing 'Didi khnidan Gagitsani'

(Laughter)

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

It's so funny to have her heady bass.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Wonderful

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

*Ara ushaves*

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Can you um maybe, can anyone say anything about that song?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Speaks in Georgian with Rebuli and Marekhi.

Well the only - The text of the song tells everything about it – it's a love song and er as to the origins it's hard to say, where it comes from or this is something which we never investigated – we just heard, many times and it's something which you can it's called like – as he says something that you could hum, humming – (**Susan** – ghighini?) to sing it ghighini

*Nana speaks with Rebuli in Georgian.*

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Which only he believes it's only Gurians who have this kind of Ghighini songs.

**Nana** speaks with Rebuli in Georgian

### **Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Today you've come down 'from the village' to meet us. And is this the kind of song you would sing on a – everyday – do you sing everyday in the village is it part of your life?

**Nana** speaks with Rebuli & Mareka in Georgian

**Rebuli answers - martla**

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Yeah This could, this would be like a song which could be sung – this kind of repertoire for everyday. (**Rebuli** speaks) Well I've never sung this since I was a child! He says - but we've heard, well now it's less and less when we sing. Well I mean, not we as a family don't see each other – but families don't really sing unless you are a 'singing family' and not er. But it's not the traditional music – it's not as much as it used to be part of everyday life anymore as you know. (**Susan** Yeah) Nothing new about it, sadly. But I heard quite a bit because we had the family which was er the house was full of guests every day, every single day, we had guests and I remember especially in winter it was er not that easy because we had only one room heated. And this was little, like maybe not even half of this er and er can you imagine with television, TV set, table in the middle, and er the fireplace and er maybe ten people around the table, mostly men – not mostly – men. Masculine community and smoking and hardly seeing each other and singing and drinking and I myself because it was the only heated room, er just sitting in the corner and doing the homework for school and from time to time, I and my sister, we would be called by the guests to sing. So we would drop everything and go - sing. (*laughter*) That was, that's my memory of my childhood. This is my childhood - most vivid childhood memory and er the smokey room especially. Singers, singing because my um grandparents were singers, their

friends or the famil.. they also were singers. There was quite a bit of, um, good singers would er come together round this table and they all sang all the time, all the time (laughter) and therefore I don't, I don't learn songs. I don't remember myself sitting, practicing, learning parts. (Susan: Yes) For me it's just memory and er language, which I adopted since I was very little. And I was told that when I turned one year old I sang, at my birthday. But er the same for him I believe, he is more than that because he has more experience and better ear and better musical memory (Susan Aaah) and he just can sing anything. And he mastered this language. And I think I was telling you before, that I remember this photograph of him – which I could not find at home now. He's very little. He was very small. Maybe he is like 4 or 5 Yrs old in this photo. And he is sitting on a high chair, and he has er big I now, I loose the memory of accordion maybe in his hand, and you can not see him. You can see only his feet which is hanging down from the (laughter) and he is playing the accordion he would play anything he touched. And he was fond, of the er, of the er ... he's a fisherman – he loved er water. And he loved er fishing up to now and I grew with fish. I remember fish was my main dish. And our family had almost every day we had fish. But sometimes, sometimes, he would not be a good boy and he would use this er

**Susan Thompson:**

Explosives?

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Yes and one day he lost his fingers.

**Susan Thompson**

I know, I saw.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Speaks with Rebuli. But he plays with it, with this. He still pays – he plays chonguri, he plays piano – if you don't see, look at him you wouldn't tell he doesn't ...

**Susan Thompson**

My goodness.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

And um because he had this special talent my grandparents took him to the musical school but the music teacher couldn't do anything with him. And she said um I can't – this is impossible, he was um he was not the person who could sit and um just. You couldn't make him sit and do something and also they could not teach him anything. And then they told my grandparents to take him to er the er special school in Tbilisi which is called the - er by Conservatoire – I think it was the school for talented, musically talented children. And he went there and they left him

there. But he could not – he dropped everything, in about, in a few months and he ...left. And he came back because he was missing water, er he was missing this crazy er kind, type of life, he couldn't fit in with er the discipline er that was not him. But er later when I went to the college, the musical college, I met this um man who was the er deputy director of the college and er when he heard I was er Mzhavandaze he er asked me about Rebuli and he turned out to be Rebuli's class-mate. And he said "are you as talented as him?".

### **Susan Thompson**

I wanted er. Were you a student of Edisher. Did you meet Edisher?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Yes, I'm met Edisher. And I'm very grateful. I was his student. You know what? What he taught me? What? No, he was supposed to teach me to transcribe the music. (**Susan:** Ah, okay) to notate. And, but we never had that. (**Susan:** Okay?) No, but we had just he led me, gave me complete freedom, he would never tell me how to do things, or what to do, he would just give me freedom. And once I remember when they finished when I graduated, then I got back home. I remember one winter day, a guy who, let's say he was a kind of a singer, not singer, but he loved folk, traditional singing. And he came visited us in my house in Ozurgeti. And er we hosted him and he had some, he never had been to, to us before. So he had this, I don't remember what kind of request about folk music. And maybe it's like, now I probably am self praising. Because, but in a way, yes, I'm self praising. But it's more interesting, in from the perspective of Edisher or about Edisher, what kind of personality he was. And he had a question about Georgian traditional music. And he said, he asked Edisher for help. And Edisher, I told him, that - Why would you come to me? You have Nana there. I was very surprised, because I had done nothing, before. I didn't understand why, how Edisher could know what I could do, and how I could do things, but he somehow made me - my name somehow. He was this kind of very, very, very modest, humble personality, unbelievably humble, and talented. For me. Personality matters more than... sometimes more than talent. And I think they are quite, they should be quite balanced. Or somehow they are balanced.

### **Susan Thompson**

So I've ..So I know that you teach – you teach many people. Do you teach little Lizzie here?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Liz No

### **Susan Thompson**

No you never taught her?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

No I never had any opportunity to spend any time with my family at all. And actually when we talk about teaching, I did not teach music even to my children. Because I've never been taught. (**Susan** yes, that's where I ) And for me it is a little bit ..

### **Susan Thompson**

Strange?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Strange thing – yes. I thought that um, people who are musicians, they just are musicians. (*laughter*) That was wrong – I now regret I did not do that with my children, very much because maybe not all of them have this opportunity to be brought as I was in a very natural environment.

Yes I remember when I was little I hated to go to sleep. My parents found it very difficult to make me sleep. So it was a big ritual for them and er hard. And er then they introduced a method to make their lives easier for them. And what was this method? My grandparents would tell me OK let's go and play. Let's go together and we can play. And that was something magic for me and I would go because - what the game was about was that er I knew that they would put me among, between themselves. And they would start to sing, and I was supposed to sing, so – three voices right (hmm). The third voice, one of the voices, and er the essence of the game was that they would switch the voices and I would have to hear and I would have to find my place. (**Susan** Wow) And I loved that - obviously. I don't remember how old I was, I was very young, but I can't remember how old exactly. Before school. (**Susan** Yeah) And that was the way for them to um have er . She hears her mother, may be not as much as I did. As I told you I have heard um so many people singing, everyday. It's changed now so. We have to teach them now.

### **Susan Thompson**

So for you, teaching Georgian songs, not in Georgia, but in other countries, to other nationalities, in the style of a teacher - What is that like?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

It was very difficult. Especially in the beginning because er, for me, because I had never learned songs and was suddenly exposed to a group and they expect me to teach may be with ? voices which I don't know myself. And then I start to force myself – what happens is that when I teach one song a couple of times then it's easier. But sometimes, and quite a lot of time, and I like this kind of challenge, for myself, I don't like to go through the same route again and again. Sometimes I put myself in this kind of – it's like a test. This is a challenge – So I just take a song which I never sung in my life before, but I heard. So then I, I'm in front of the group and I start to hear it in my head, but all the three voices. Then I have to extract one voice out of this and teach. And, and at the same time, nobody should know what I am doing.

**Susan Thompson**

*Clapping* You are so naughty! *(Laughter)*

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

And I am experimenting like that – and sometimes it - I succeed – and it's good - and It's such a relief. But it depends on the song as well. And sometimes I struggle. But still I should make sure that they don't know that I struggle. So now I am getting used to it more and more. It is like training for myself. I always say when I teach I learn – I teach myself. I teach others and I learn.

I'm not er the person who er thinks that Georgian music is the best er thing in the world. I love Georgian music, I love to play with that and experiment with this but I don't feel. I don't like when we put ourselves on pedestal and say that Georgian music is everything.

Because music is er a wonder and this variety makes me like a heavenly ... Therefore I have my own, my, the, the times when I enjoy this kind of music and I want to experiment with that and sing something from that culture or tradition.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

So when you're um going to other countries either as a teacher, or maybe you are touring with Sathanao...do you feel you are also learning songs from those countries? Do you also pick up songs...

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

I love that. I want to. (Holly: Yeah) And if I have time and luxury to do that, I'm very happy. And I don't want to all the time talk about Georgian music when I meet other people. Or want to sing only Georgian music and make them listen to .... I want to listen as well. Maybe more than.

**Susan Thompson**

I, I understand. *(laughter)* It's the reverse here but er. And, and, do you create music yourself?

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

I am hopeless with that. My dream is – I want to so much because I have such desire to, to compose. And I have no, zero talent. *(laughter)*

**Susan Thompson**

And is that the same for all the family?

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Speaks with Rebuli in Georgian. *Ara*

No

**Susan Thompson**

No?

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

I tried once. I remember at school, because I sang and they would make me sing for every single occasion. (**Susan:** Of course) And they decide that I could make music and er one teacher asked me to write er a song for something – that was some occasion they wanted me to write a song and I could not say no. And I came back home and I looked for the lyrics and I found something and I wrote a song. – Horrible! They loved it. (*laughter*) They loved it but that was the worst thing that I ever heard and I ever sang in my life – and I said no I am never doing this again. But I want to ..

**Susan Thompson**

So interesting.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

It's so strange, it's very strange. But that is how it is. So you have to have the talent. To write music.

**Susan Thompson**

'Cause I've always found it very curious in the folk world, sort of the idea that folk songs are written by many people, by a village. I'm never sure – can that be? Surely a song is – one person creates a song, perhaps the village then changes it, modifies it but ...

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Depends on what kind of er...it depends on the context. I think there are communities where people are so much together that they can be like very spontaneous birth.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

*Tu ginda ... Speaks with Rebuli in Georgian - about experimenting.*

I just thought maybe we could experiment with something what he can do. (**Susan:** Great idea yes) In two voices.

*Speaks with Rebuli in Georgian*

Patara Sakhvarelo

But he says that we need sometimes bass so he will, he will insert (**Susan:** Yes – play the game) ... He will run – back and forth.

**Live Music:** Nana and Rebuli sing Patara Sakhvarelo in 2 voices

(Note from Nana - Patara Sakhvarelo This is a Gurian (polyphonic) male trio repertoire. The lyrics are related to the theme of love. This variant is close to Vladimer Verdzenishvili's variant...).

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

I changed the mode. (*Speaks in Georgian*) And he said you shifted one step higher. I never know where (*speaks in Georgian*) But then I got back to the (**Susan:** oh good) home.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

I love to see the intense listening between you two.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

We need to.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

but also the game - you're playing a game together.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

He tried to catch up with me (*laughter*) because I was off the road a couple of times. And it is Especially difficult when you do it in two voices. This is actually what - this is, interesting problem or a question. You touched on this, when you, when you, when you said something about how music can be born. Yeah, it's a very, very special um problem. I mean, the answer to it is very difficult to find. But yeah, I think it depends on the context, but we can talk about this later.

**Susan Thompson**

We only have three of you here for a short time and it would be sad not to hear more singing.

**Live Music:** Nana, Rebuli and Marekhi sing Mival Guriashi

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

I think maybe we can just sing one song. Yeah, not folk but in folkstyle (Okay) but you've probably heard this like Alilo song from the movie. Georgian movie. Christmas - not Christmas season but yeah. *Speaks in Georgian with Rebuli.* By very, very talented Georgian musician, orchestra director and the composer and the singer Jansung Kakhidze ჯანსუღ კახიძე. And I think also his son, I think they did it together. I'm not sure

**Susan Thompson**

it's another story.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

No, I mean, both are the author's he definitely

*Music:* Nana, Rebuli and Marekhi sing Alilo - Otsdakhutsa Dekembersa

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz/Susan Thompson**

Madloba, didi madloba.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Bye

**Susan Thompson**

I'm so happy - see you when we have finished - soon.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Yeah - see you soon

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Well thank you because you've heard us sing again together.

**Susan Thompson**

That's what's so special that you are in the room together finding each others

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

It's you're doing. Thank you. Yeah, we have to go back to singing, when I come to the village more, maybe we can come together,

Actually with this online sessions, I want to involve them to record not not only myself as a teacher, but also these, those individual voices. Because the Rebuli can do miracles, with the voices. It will be sad. Because sometimes I feel guilty that I bring the songs to the west, which I owe.

**Susan Thompson**

which have come from so many people,

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Many people. Also from the field work, I heard them and they, nobody knows them. And it's sad that they know only me. And I'm like a second hand. Teacher, but behind me, these people who are beautiful singers and masters, and you don't know them, and it's sad, in a way I feel guilty because of that so...

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Well, maybe that's something good from the pandemic, then because on zoom, you can take a computer or something to these people in the village, in very remote places, and people all

around the world could see them and know and learn from them. Yeah. And maybe that wouldn't be possible. Otherwise.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Yeah, that would be Yes, absolutely. And also, when I am paid for my work, I could also share this with them, not only myself, because as I said, I learned from them. I hear this music from them.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Yeah. That's such a nice idea. It's, it's sort of paying it back. Yeah. Right.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Not only paying the tribute, but also a little bit financial motivation for them too Yeah,

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Yeah, I'm paying it forward as well for the next generations to learn from them as well.

**Susan Thompson**

Yeah, I was so happy that Elizabet was here. It's like it just felt so right that she was here. Hearing you three and hearing that your family stories, from, from her family. It's like yes. I'm so pleased, yeah.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

So I would love to know about Sathanao, actually, that's an ensemble that you're part of, and you've been part of it for a long time. I think?

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Yes and no, I mean in a way because, yes, we started when I was a student of conservatory in the 1990s. And then a few. Well, it started from Anchiskhati choir actually, then, anchiskhati boys. (Yeah) choir

**Susan Thompson**

Martve?

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Anchiskhati with Malkhazi. (**Susan:** Ah Anchiskati's not er er...) They recovered, revived the as you know, church music. They discovered this on the shelves of the archives, and they recovered this music, and they put them back to life. And they made it available, accessible to everyone. That was big thing.

**Music:** Sulo Chemo, Anchiskati

And we girls, the students, we were friends with them, and they it was actually Malkhaz who had this idea, maybe and they started to sing in Anchiskhati and Malkhaz said maybe you could also

do this as girls group and we went to Jvaris Mama, you know, [Jvaris Mama on Leselidze Street](#), the very first church down. And we started to sing there. Actually, we were the first women's choir in Georgia to start singing, who also revived church, church music and started singing in the church. Sathanao is the later name, but the first group of girls and I was part of that. They we were the first women's group who started singing church music in the church. And in parallel with Anchiskhati boys.

**Music:** Sulo Chemo, Sathanao

And then the later with this very hard and I would say tragic historical events with the Civil War. And so on, we parted and I left Tbilisi because I was from Guria and I went back to Guria and that was impossible. That time was so difficult that we lost connections and it was impossible to communicate and but some, some of the girls who were from Tbilisi, or in Tbilisi, they continued singing together in Anchiskhati. Later, in 2004, or 5 or something I don't remember exactly. It was actually Malkhaz's idea to, to re-unite. But I was still in Guria and what happened, the girls have been united. And they would ask me to join them if they had some gigs or so I would go there from time to time. And that was very special because I hadn't seen them for years. And suddenly, we came back again. And then they decided to really start a choir, but not in the church. We didn't sing in the church any longer, but just the choir to sing both church music and the folk music. And they, one of our friends, we. It was not the only group, the group only from the old church choir, but it became wider so some other girls joined in and then one of the girls brought the name Sathanao and we became Sathanao and then I moved to Tbilisi. And then I started with the I moved to Tbilisi, upon invitation of [Madge Bray](#). And that's how I got back to music. Otherwise, I had, I had been doing completely different things like working for non governmental organisation about health, in projects related to health, something about health, reproductive health, the rabbit farm, and so on. And so then, Madge brought me back to music. That was very special time for me to make this decision, to leave everything and go back to Tbilisi and Madge brought me to, that was the first time, the first country, England and Scotland where she took me to introduce Georgian music to the community. She knew different communities in, in, England and Scotland, so and then I started to, before then I had never taught and I had never even sung in, properly, I mean. This music except those little, I sang church music with the girls but not folk music until very late. My Church. My folk music experience is related to my family. And that's only about hearing, just hearing.

**Susan Thompson 49;16**

Yeah. So that would be G, Gurian music.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Not only, but most of, most of them. Yes. mostly Gurian. Yes, Guria. Actually, it's interesting, because once we were recording, Tristan, Guri Sikharulidze, Tristan Sikharulidze and my, my uncle also was there for the New Year celebration. And they sang lots of lots of Gurian songs and at the end, I asked them to finish with the Mravaljamieri which was not Gurian Mravaljamieri, but Khaketian Mravaljamieri, and I remember I never forget Guri suddenly getting

he was a sweet man. But suddenly he got angry. And he said, what I would look like I wouldn't like to do this Chinese rubbish. And that was shocking he was a beautiful musician. But that's so interesting that he found the non Gurian music not quite 'quality' music, not the quality for him was just Chinese in very negative connotation. But it does mean that he was not good musician enough. He just, his language was Gurian. And he found it foreign language somehow, musically. (**Susan**: Yeah.)

### **Susan Thompson**

But you've managed to step outside of that, musically, because you've been, you've just come back from Germany, I say just - a few months ago. And there you've been working with Svan music.

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Yeah, that was my dissertation thesis. (Susan Aah) And I, I say I joke, joke, that I become like, almost like Svan, half Svan. Because I've lived there for quite er, for quite a long time. I have my Svan family. They are Chamgelianis families, my family now. I have a room there. And they often say I am their fourth sister. And yes, before I went up there, I was not in Svan music at all. But now I feel so much into it. And I, I understand this music. So, so much deeper, almost like Svan almost.

### **Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

And you're introducing that to international people or you have in the previous years with the singing village project, right?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

Yes, you've heard of that. We started this project in Lakhushdi who stayed in 2011. Actually, it was a game Madge Bray initiated her an idea. And I think it worked very well. And funny thing is that two years ago, I was in the United States in Washington, I was doing a workshop with a small group there. And after the workshop one, we talked, they wanted to relax and we chat, had a chat. And they said one of the workshop participants, she said that she's been to Svaneti a couple of times, and they said, where is it? And she said, I don't think you would know. Because it's quite remote village and where is it Upper Svaneti and what, what the village is, and she said, Lakhushdi. And that was the village, which nobody knew before 2011. And now this is a famous village, and I was so happy to hear that and so proud. And that was so strange that in Washington, somebody tells you that you wouldn't know, Lakhushdi. But she knew - it was beautiful.

**Music:** Natvra

### **Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Why is it? Why was it important? For Sathanao to be women? In this time when you said about Anchiskati, it was a boys ensemble? Why was it important to have a women's parallel group? And why is it still important?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

I don't think it was about women, really. It was just it was a small group of enthusiasts. And some of them were boys, some of them were women. And because boys, it's originally it's the music for men. (**Holly:** chanting.) Women would not do that. And traditionally, unless you were part of the monastery nunnery or so therefore, this music would be sung by men. So men started because that was very natural, but they wanted to make it um, to, I don't know, to publicise, no, what's the right word to popularise, to spread it to, to make it er, to they wanted people to hear it more and to get back this music. So there were not many men to do that. And they said maybe because you're also interested in this music. Maybe you could also do that. That was very, very practical reason nothing else.

### **Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

There wasn't some idea that women were like less good at singing or less talented or some thing?

### **Nana Mzhavanadze**

No, it's I think that I think it's about just this the I don't know what the, Canonics of the church require men to do this music, traditionally. Not because the men are more talented, they are more able. No, this is like an unhealthy thing. But now, this is not that important. More important now today is that this music is sung in the churches.

I remember one funny thing when we started doing this music it was so strange and so unusual, because the, the aesthetics, it's not something which you immediately understand. So it was foreign in a way for us. But then we had these two schools, Western and Eastern schools, chanting schools. And because I was Gurian, for some reason, I had this kind of singing style in my head Gurian, a little bit like folk music, dila vo dila. You know these kinds of aesthetics or articulation or treating the phrase like that. And when we had to do something from Guria, that the church songs, we, we felt that we had to do it in Gurian style. So we sang it in a way like Chven Mshvido - like this aesthetics wasn't this was slightly focused that is. So one day when we were doing something long from Guria, one of the church songs, the priest was so shocked. And he just left, he stopped service. He looked out, what are you doing there? Are you doing Shavi shashvi?

Are you singing shavi, shashvi? You know shavi shashvi (**Susan:** the blackbird)

Because it sounded nothing at all, like church music. But no, like, I wish

### **Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

But you wouldn't have known because, you know, this was a new thing. Yes. These church songs I see. Yeah.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

And what does Voices of the Ancestors mean to you? This phrase 'Voices of the Ancestors'..... Or have you already shown it? With your family ...

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Voices of Ancestors...

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

That's what our podcast is called

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Voice of the Ancestors. For me, it can be a really, very much literary voice. Because this voices in my head, has been in my head. And one of the voices I remember very vividly. This is really literary music, singing voice, let's say so singing voice, physically singing voice and I remember my grandfather, because I told you, we had lots of guests and they had to drink quite a bit for hours. And then my grandfather would get drunk. And he loved to - he would not go back to bed immediately. And my grandma, mother would drag him begging to go to bed and drag him to bed and eventually he would go to bed. And I remember the voice of my grandfather - the image I still have this image in front of me. Um.. We had this - we had the rooms, bedrooms next to each other and because we were afraid of staying by ourselves in our room, they would open the door so that we could feel that adults are there just there with us so open and I often would be, would see my grandfather who was sleeping. But sometimes he would just slightly raise his head. Dil a vo, dil a vo (*laughter* - **Holly**: Singing in his sleep) Absolutely. That was so much. I mean so typical, so common. And this is the voice of my ancestors I have in my head. I don't want to philosophise here. (**Susan**: It's not necessary) I don't want to make up something. My, my ancestors' voice is about love. My ancestors' voice is about tradition. My ancestors' voice is about loving the country, so and so on. It's about values - yes, because you are brought up with values which you inherit via the voice of your ancestors. That's, let's say it's philosophical part of it, partly. But the literary and physical. This is my grandfather's image. Dila vo dila vo....

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Love it.

**Susan Thompson**

It's wonderful.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

That was repeatedly. That was kind of repeating until he got sober. In the morning he was already sober. He would not do that then. A couple of times during the night, was a night until I got sleep. I could hear that a couple of times.

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Brilliant. Thank you. Thank you for that answer. I love all the different answers. We get into that.

**Susan Thompson**

I know. That was magic. Yeah.

**Music:** Natvra

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

*Movidivar*

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Yes, I think that's our sign.

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Yeah, fine. Ready?

**Nana Mzhavanadze**

Thank you, Nana, for being our guest and I look forward to hosting you and thank you very much.

**Music:** Natvra

**Holly Taylor-Zuntz**

Thank you for listening to VOA with Holly Taylor-Zuntz and Susan Thompson. Our guests were Nana, Rebuli, and Marekhi Mzhavanadze.

We didn't have time to talk about everything. Nana especially wanted to let you know about her research work with Frank Scherbaum at Potsdam University. There's a link to the Seismo-soundscape lab on our website resources page. It is well worth a listen - not just for academics but for also for singers - it has lots of recordings and a new way of seeing svanetian song.

The music in this episode was by Ialoni, Anchiskhati, Basiani, Sathanao and our guests! Sound production was by [Johnny Darifi](#).

For more information, and to see a transcript of this episode, and all our episodes go to [voicesoftheancestors.co.uk](http://voicesoftheancestors.co.uk). And to help us achieve a sustainable podcast click on donate.

**Music:** NATVRA

Transcribed by Susan Thompson and <https://otter.ai>

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