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Guest Editor: Jen Morris

Interviewee: Briget Boyle

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Voices of the Ancestors: Transcript

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Hello from Tbilisi. We are super excited for today's guest editor episode. You're going to have such a journey around crunchy vocal music from Georgia and beyond.

Susan Thompson Oh yes. On today's episode, we're shaking things up. So the voices today are not Holly and Susan, your usual hosts,

Holly Taylor-Zuntz yeah. Today, we've handed over the keys to the editing suite, to our good friend, [Jen Morris](#), who you might have heard in our very first episode. Jen leads a vocal ensemble in Seattle USA called "[onefourfive](#)".

Susan Thompson If you're new to the podcast. Welcome. I hope you'll enjoy the women's voices you'll hear. This podcast gives an international platform to unheard stories. You're joining a community of listeners from France to Finland, from Jen's native Bay Area in the States to our beloved Georgia.

Holly We love hearing from our listeners! It was great to hear in our community Facebook group, um, about a new Georgian choir starting up in West London.

Susan And then there was one of our supporters who'd binge listened over the ironing and then bought us an extra cup of coffee on [Ko-fi](#). Um, yeah.

Holly And it's oh, that was another thing this summer. It was thrilling. We met supporters in real life, at the [Omnibus in Clapham](#), London, for our theater show. And then there was the excitement when we got our first ever patron on [Patreon](#). They've helped us get one step closer to funding the next series. So do get involved and get in touch. We'll keep you updated with our stories on instagram and facebook. We'll put all the links in the show notes.

Music: *Mother, Moon*, from *Briget's True Life Trio* album "Like Never, Like Always"

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Jen's guest is the wonderful singer and vocal coach [Briget Boyle](#). You might know her from the women's vocal ensemble, [Kitka](#), I knew of her because I've been going to her online vocal warmups, which she's been running throughout the pandemic.

Susan Thompson

Oh, I didn't know that. So I knew of Kitka because, um, I knew they'd traveled and performed in Georgia.

Um, and they've had Georgian folk songs in their repertoire for years. But the thing that sticks in my mind is they had a designer that worked with them. I'm sure. And they had the most amazing costumes when they performed in Georgia with just little edges of Georgian sort of folk design in them. Beautiful. So it is a real pleasure to learn more about Briget and Kitka.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz

Yeah. It is one of those really open and deep conversations. And one of my favorite bits, um, is when Briget talks about the three sorts of ancestors – spiritual, genetic and I think she called it humanity. And it is good when she touches on the issue of cultural appropriation. Because that's a really kind of live topic at the moment in the UK, around the [Natural Voice Network](#).

So great to hear these two professionals, um, discussing that.

Susan Thompson

Yeah. And there was a bit in there where I was really moved because they were sharing stories about the influence of working with, with teachers from other countries. Um, so like [Tamar Buadze](#) in Georgia and [Svetlana Spajić](#) in Serbia. And they were kind of comparing and reflecting on, on how these meetings were. Well, they didn't just impact on their singing and their approach to vocal work. It really impacted their whole voice, the whole voice and their whole approach to life.

Music: ‘It Will Never Again Be What it Was’, from Briget’s [True Life Trio](#) album “Like Never, Like Always”

jen morris

Thanks very much Holly and Susan, for that introduction, I want to add one tiny correction for our worldwide audience -while I was indeed born in San Francisco, California. And one could technically say that I'm from the Bay area. I currently live in Seattle, Washington, which is two states north of California.

Briget lives in the San Francisco/ Oakland Bay area, where she sings with the Balkan women's ensemble, Kitka and her Balkan American trio, [True Life Trio](#). She is also a solo recording artist and a vocal coach dedicated to helping people find their authentic voice.

When Holly and Susan asked me to be the guest editor for their podcast. I immediately thought about how I could bring the west coast perspective to ‘Voices of the Ancestors’, Briget and I both live on the west most edge of the United States with the Pacific ocean, to our west and mountains to our east. And we are both 11 or 12 time zones away from Georgia, depending on the time of year. When you are a woman who loves Georgia music, who also happens to live 6,000 miles away from Georgia, you pay close attention to when you find your people. Although I don't know Briget well, I knew there had to be a special reason why singing Georgian and Balkan music next to her felt so satisfying. In my interview with her, I think I discovered several reasons why that might be true. Have a listen and see what you think.

Music: 'and Love', from Briget's [True Life Trio](#) album "Like Never, Like Always"

jen morris

The voices today are Jen Morris and

Briget Boyle

Briget Boyle.

jen morris

So Briget, I thought it would be really interesting to ask you about your experience with Georgian singing. And I know that you sing with [Kitka](#), which is Balkan singing ensemble in the Bay Area, but that you also have experienced singing Georgian music with them and separate from them. Tell me about some of your experiences singing Georgian songs.

Briget Boyle

Okay. Yeah. So thank you so much for having me on this is great. Georgian music has always been such a beautiful, fascinating, Like deep, old, like it's got this gravity to it that I think is unique to Georgian music. And so I, I think my, the first Georgian song I ever sung was Shen Khar Venakhi with [Kitka](#) and through, through the work I did with [Kitka](#), we sang with Carl Linich, we traveled to Georgia and got to study with Tutarchela and Tamar Buadze and multiple other singers in the area.

Music: Shen Khar Venakhi, [Kitka](#) from their album "The Vine"

And I've sung Georgia music with '[True Life Trio](#)'. I've sung Georgian music with '[Temple of Light Choir](#)', which was directed by [Kristine Barrett](#) and which was an offshoot of [Kitka](#) sort of a Kitka community choir. And I've, it's one of those regions of the world where you could spend an entire lifetime, really learning the subtleties of the music and it's also very accessible, it's it's got this really interesting mix of a total beginner could sing it relatively easily and you could spend your whole life learning the tuning system. Just the subtleties and then the regional variations have been super rich and fascinating to dig in on. I think there's something that happens when I sing Georgian music that feels, it feels very rooted to the center of the earth. Like it feels very old and just, it is like a lot of, not all of the songs that I've sung are really old, but a lot of them are quite old and, to connect to that part of humanity, just that like really ancient feeling is it's such an honor, and it's such a, I think also it's an important practice for the modern... people who are interested in folk music, to recognize that, like our history is so complex and old and rich and beautiful. And like, there's something about Georgian folk singing that feel, I feel that when I'm doing it,

jen morris

Mmm-hmm..

Briget Boyle

and the language is super it's such, it's a challenging language, but it's also, it's again, it has this sort of simplicity to it that is really like, once you're able to get the sounds in your mouth. It can be, it just feels so universal in a way. The other thing I want to say is that, like, when I traveled there, I, and seeing the landscape where each regional variations came from, it matched, it was like, when you go to Kakheti, you understand why the ornaments are the way they are.

Music: Mokle Mravalzhamier from [Ensemble Zedashe's album "Our Earth and Water"](#)

And it reminded me of my first trip to the Balkans where I was like, Oh, I get why the music sounds this way. And it makes me wonder as an American, like how can we create music that like sits within the land that we're in? Because I think music is it's this universal language. It's the connection between human and earth and animals. And, it's it's just, I could go on.

jen morris

Yeah. Oh, I can definitely relate to that feeling of, feeling, rooted in the earth and that you can feel the music from the land around you and what you said about the, the landscape or the music sort of mimics the landscape. And that's a very familiar feeling for me. I remember when I was in Guria, I was in Bukhistsikhe and you know, how some of the Gurian parts have, um, the krimanchuli or the top, the top voice, Sometimes it's like dim-di-di dim or dim di di dim wo-o and I swear to God, I heard a bird outside the window that was like dim di di dim wo-o I'm like, WHAT, the birds do that here. Like of course that's what's in the music. It made so much sense. well, let's go back to, um, talking about working with Tamar Buadze and Tutarchela. So that was something that um, I kind of watched from a distance and thought, oh, this is so cool that they're doing. that um, I had been to Georgia earlier that year for the first time with [Carl](#) one of his trips. Um, and we had stayed in the same place where you all were on that, like, infamous, no, very recognizable red couch the red, red velvet couch that goes all the way around the room. Um, and so that was so neat to like I was there, I was in that space and now they're in that space and they're singing with these women. Um, so I guess one thing I wanted to ask is that, um, for me, most of my experience going to Georgia learning songs in Georgia has been learning from men and not only men, but old men.

Briget Boyle

Yeah.

jen morris

What was it like learning these very old, very traditional songs from women? And was that different in any way?

Briget Boyle

Oh, absolutely. mean, yes. I'd say it was. And I think part of what was different was that I think Tamar really comes at music from like a revolutionary place. You know. And I'm just getting chills. Wow. She's so powerful in her vision of what Georgian culture can become and how women singing traditionally male men's music. Can she's breaking all the rules, like she is just I just don't know. I'm just going to do this because this music is amazing. And I don't, and I feel like I barely even remember what songs we learned or like the actual musical exchange. But I remember, and this is something I've recognized from working with so many mentors over the years. I remember, the like messages about music, more than the music itself sometimes. And from her, I just remember her saying we sing, we sing like men. But we sing from this feminine like we are empowered women and we're, we're shifting the model of how Georgia music is expressed and it's beautiful, it's, it was so powerful to be around. It was like, I just remember sitting in that living room, I do remember sitting in the living room and being surrounded by this, like, incredible group that they open their mouths and the sound was, it's I can't even describe it. It was so like, integrated, like instantly integrated.

There was no question of anything. Everybody knew their role. Everybody did their role. Everybody held the song. It was like the song. You could feel that the song was the center of the energy. Like it wasn't about any individual. And I love that about Tamar. I feel like her, she carries, she's a song carrier, you know, and that her connection to it is so deep and beautiful. And then the other thing I want to say about Tamar that I've seen over the years is just her interest in, like cross-cultural exchange, and that folk music, like, while, being careful about cultural appropriation and all those things is super important. It's also really important to exchange culture, and learn about other cultures and seeing music from different places so that you have a little bit, maybe better understanding of what the human experience is from different angles. And, we could talk about that whole cultural appropriation topic for an hour, but but I think that what she does, and I've seen this with other singers, Eastern Europe in this area where there's like this interest in okay, this is, I'm so deeply steeped in my folk culture. How can we find the ties between my culture and this other culture or whatever? the work she's doing is super fascinating and she's facilitating singing for so many people, she's a great teacher. she's really kind, and Kitka got to work with her during the pandemic a little bit. We did a couple of Zoom calls with her. ([jen morris](#) Oh nice nice.) It was really lovely. And in a way like that was one of the biggest silver linings of the pandemic was that we all, you know, we got to sing with people over all over the world. she's so grounded and I want to be that grounded, you know,

Music: 'Espanur-Laz' by Tamar Buadze and Teona Kutsia

[jen morris](#)

It's interesting for me to hear you say all those things about Tamar um, because for me, she was one of the, she possibly was ,uh, Tutarchela, I think was the first all women's group I saw or heard in the very early days when I was like, just getting excited about Georgian music. And at that time there was not a lot on Google or YouTube or Amazon or anywhere. Um, but I remember finding this movie called [Like Air To Breathe](#), which the translation is not great in English, but it's something like, like the air that we breathe. It's like, it was the film in German, and English. No, It's not in English at all. This is in German and Georgian and it's a DVD. Yes. So it came out in probably like 2008. And that's around when I was getting excited about Georgian music and I had, so I had a friend in Germany who was able to order it, he ordered it and then he sent it to me and then I get the DVD and I'm like, I got to watch this. I don't speak German or Georgian.

[Briget Boyle](#)

Hahahahahahaha..

[jen morris](#)

So a third of that movie is Tamar and Tutarchela and them singing their songs and then a, uh, their rehearsal in Rustavi you see them sitting in the kitchen and singing together. And I printed, I printed out all the lyrics. that's basically how I learned how to read in Georgian was by reading the titles of the songs that Tutarchela sings. So like, I have this very special place in my heart. That's like, what, what is happening over there? Um, like, it was obvious that it was something really deep and really special, even though I was only getting it through the language of music and not through English you know? Um, and that's something that's, you

know, I'm sure you've experienced too, that where you can share something through music with other people where you don't share a common language. You can still have this connection.

Yeah,

Briget Boyle

Hundred Percent.

jen morris

That sort of leads me maybe to thinking about. Uh, Kitka uh, you and Kitka hosted Svetlana Spajić during a like early pandemic zoom class. Um, and for me, I sort of had that same feeling of like, oh, this is a woman singing songs about the earth and she is deeply rooted and just roaring about it. And I don't know that much about Serbian singing, but I could, I could feel that same connection with what I know about um, Georgian music. Can you talk a little bit about either your time working with her yeah.

Briget Boyle

Yeah. I'd be happy to --Svetlana Spajić is one of the most yeah, you said she's so grounded and like earth bound. And honest and like, she just, you never hear a word from her that you don't believe, you know, like, she's so connected.

It's really deep and rich and low and you know, rangeful for sure. So. My history with her, Kitka worked with her gosh, in 2000, maybe 10 or so or 11 for a program called Singer of Tales. And she, wow. Just thinking about it. It's making me a little, emotional it was so beautiful. She was somebody who really pushed Kitka to think about how we could bring our own language to folk music, to like traditional singing styles from Serbia, which was super interesting. I was really resistant to it. I was like, you can't sing Serbian style music in English. And not that I hate English it's I don't know. There's something about the way that the phonemes work in English that I, I find it hard to make it work in traditional singing. Like it just, I don't know. It's interesting. I have a weird relationship to it. So we did this project with her and she had Kitka work on. I think it was what is the style? It wasn't *na bas*. It was the,

jen morris

Was it the Rusalka cycle?

Briget

No, no, no. That was [Mariana Sadovska](#). Oh no, there's this one style. I wish I could remember the name of it right off the top of my tongue, but there's this one really super dissonant, like really gritty, gritty style of singing. And she had Kitka make up lyrics to it, that was like San Francisco bay and like blah, blah, blah. It was so trippy! . But I think what it, what it did for me is it made me recognize that folk music comes from your surroundings. Like she is somebody who really pushes that message and that's why I think she, teaches songs about the earth and harvest songs. And, and like I noticed when we worked with her last year in September and she taught the rain song. She didn't really teach them. She just kind of sang them and was like, here they are. Take them.

jen morris

Know, right.

Briget

It didn't feel like here's the notes. And here it was very much like, here's the song, take it if you want it. Use it if you want it and felt like that kind of like, very utilitarian use of music in a way.

The other thing I want to say about her and the kind of music that she teaches and collects is she's talked about the fact that she'll go to, to villages. So just a little backstory on, on Svetlana's work. So she, collects music from all over small villages in Serbia and learns from, like old people who are carrying the traditions. And then, she has, you know, a vocal ensemble that performs these traditional, like these sort of dying out traditions. Right. And she talks about when she's learning the songs, like she'll go and she'll learn a traditional. I mean, and the songs from the villages are like really, really dissonant. Yeah. Just sort of like wackadoodle, like they're just, clearly people were like, let's have fun and make notes really close together.

And she was saying that, the people in the villages couldn't even break out, like what the parts were, you know, it's sort of like, you sing your part by yourself. And the person was like, no, I can't because this song is two voices.

jen morris

Yes.

Briget

And I loved that. I had never. As a teacher, as somebody who, you know, shares the music I know with other people, it's so much about breaking down each part, right? And it's so much about, like, getting super specific on each part. And I love the idea that a song is not a song, unless it has both the parts. And these are the sort of like really, really traditional village pieces. The work with Svetlana has been really fascinating. I also took a private lesson with her in the fall and. She just, like, called me out, you know, like, she's like, you have such a beautiful voice and, I need to feel you, , I need you to dig deeper and, don't, don't dress it up. Just sing. And you know it was, really eye opening for me, you know, to, to really kind of come from a place of like feeling my feet on the ground and feeling the sound coming from low in my body and, and, and not trying to sound like anything, but me. (**jen** Yeah.) That's interesting about her, you know, she teaches very specific music and she wants you to sound like you.

jen morris

Right, right. And that, you know, that's, that is a sign of a good teacher, I think making you kind of take that step further and, and. Make the song yours and find it within yourself. And, and then it sounds better too. It's more interesting to listen to, you know, once you do that, I remember some members of [Dunava](#) met up with Irina who is in [Dakha Brakha](#)

jen morris

oh yeah.

Ukrainian what would you call them? Ukrainian

Briget

folk super group?

jen morris

Folk fusion. Super group. Yeah. But Irina lives here locally. And so we were at a party together and we, some of the people in the group really wanted to sing Vdova, which is a song I know, you know and that song, the woman who's singing, it is like she's in pain. When you hear those grandmothers sing that song, there's no, there's no question what emotion is happening. And I think we had gotten to a place with that song where we were just kind of like, oh yeah, let's sing. It that's was Ukrainian song, you know, la la la and so we sang it for her and she just said, stop. You were like, you were like, kitten, you were like, in that, it's just like, you know, like, meow, mewo, meow you need to be, you know, big, like tiger roar. This re, this really big. Voice. And to

have her say that like, no, this is not, I think sometimes we forget, we, sometimes we forget what the language is about. Like what words are we singing and what emotions are we conveying and not just, this is number seven in our set list. Like let's just sing it. Like we always do. You know? So I always appreciate it when there are teachers like Svetlana, like Tamar who say. That's nice and now really give it to me

Music: 'Vdova' by Ukrainian ensemble Drevo,

Briget

Well, and that's why they're so appealing, you know, and that's why they are, the forefront of these folk traditions, you know, and sharing them and teaching them to sing from such an honest place. You know, you can't, like, I never doubt what Tamar is saying in her singing.. Yeah. And, and I think as I think one of the things that's, there's two things that feel like maybe stand in the way, one is like this sort of language fluency, right. To like, have this removed, like, you have to memorize, like if you're an English speaker and you're maybe, you know, you have to just sort of memorize the meaning of a thing and translate. So there's a translation that's going on. If you're really trying to integrate, what the words mean into your singing, they're singing these words out here that are in this, you know, in whatever language you're singing in and then in your head. This is my experience anyways, and this is something I'm really trying to fix or like, you know, get better at, like, in my head, I'm thinking in English, right? And so how did, how did kind of get that gap closer where it's like the language that's coming out of my mouth has the meaning of the original language.

jen morris

Mmm-hmm.

Briget

And that's like, I mean, it's such a subtle thing to think about, but it's also really powerful. Like there's a song that's, Svetlana, taught Kitka, which is called Zegar Polye. One of my favorite songs in the whole wide world. And I teach it a lot and I sing it a lot. I like, and it's one of the songs where, I feel like I am inside of that song. I've never been to Zegar, but it is the most beautiful place on the planet. And I know exactly how it looks. I know exactly how it feels. It's really bizarre and, you know, and, if I could do that, or if all of us sort of once removed people can, like, integrate in that way. I think our music would be so much more interesting and it would be less pretty, pretty is not something. I mean, I know. You know, a group of women's voices together, we make pretty sounds, like that's part of, but I think what's interesting is when we make less pretty sounds, sound know, sound like real

jen morris

A woman after my own heart.

I mean, I love the village stuff. I love the really clashy songs. I kind of seek that out, you know, if it's so clashy it's, like, minor second, less than a minor second, but you can feel your molecules rearranging. I mean, you can feel, you can feel the vibration through your whole body and you know, if you're open to receiving that, it's, it's very powerful.

And I think some people, it just makes them uncomfortable. Like when we've performed when [Dunava](#) has performed particularly Serbian duet songs where their harmony is just so tight, so close. Sometimes people will laugh at the end. (Briget Oh yeah. Yeah.) Well, yeah, but it's just,

it's just, it's uncomfortable to hear this thing. That's so different than what we're used to hearing. And then also, maybe they feel it in their bodies, but they don't know what to do with that feeling.
Briget Absolutely Mmm-hmm.

*Music: Serbian Medley, from [Dunava](#)'s album *Behind the Veil**

Briget

That brings to mind something kind of off topic, but there's this book called "[The Comfort Crisis](#)" that a friend of mine is reading. And it's sort of talking about the fact that we spend so much time in comfort, right. Especially in, like, sort of modern American culture. And this is of course not for, it doesn't speak to everybody's experience. And I want to say that right out, but his, his whole thing is, is like, where are the pieces of discomfort that will make us connect to our humanity? You know, used to be that, like, when you woke up in the morning, you had to go out for four hours and hunt your food for the day, and you had to, like, sleep really close to everybody in your family so that you didn't die from freezing. And now it's like we get in our warm beds with our fresh water coming out of the sink. And we listened to highly produced music that is edited and mastered and mixed so that it sits exactly where you need it so that you can continue to like it, right? And so I can understand how, you know, hearing a really dissonant song. It is uncomfortable and people don't know what to do, but I think we've got to keep singing it because more people can hear it, the better. In my humble opinion.

jen morris

Yeah. Oh, definitely. Yeah. Well, and I wonder if that somehow ties into, where we are, you know, 16 months into the pandemic, or if you want to say on the other side of the pandemic, some of us are still very much still in it. But I wonder if that speaks, if there's a connection there of like, how are we being intentional about how we find community, how do we seek out what the essential elements are for our survival? I know for me, it's been, like, you know, I need, I have like one friend that I really like to see. I really need to laugh with that one friend. I need to spend time with children because that's also, like, it's a warm, I, you know, I, I love helping them learn, but also like there's a warmth that you get there from that as well. And then. What, what, well we all need to eat, what food can I grow? What food can I share? What can we trade? You know? Ha have you experienced that a little bit during this really bizarre time?

Briget

Absolutely. I mean, my life has been a little bit of a wacky thing. I've moved a lot over the last year, so I really feel like I've just been sort of holding on to, I mean, the thing I've been actually holding onto the most is like, breathing and meditation and music.

And I do live stream vocal warmups twice a week and getting to sing, like singing, so I want to say this, I rejoined Kitka in March 2020, right. (**jen** what a time?) Right before the pandemic. Right before it, I was like, came to me and they were like, my, my father passed away in the end of 2019. And about six weeks after that Kitka, 'cause I had just done [winter songs](#) and they were like hoping to find a high singer and they were excited to collaborate with me again.

And I was like, okay, this is, this is a time where like, my dad would really be proud of me if I rejoined Kitka and I get to sing. And like they're about to work with. Who's an amazing singer for this project. Great. I'm going to do that. Boom 'shelter in place' and a zoom group. And it was like, it was such a weird thing. You know, it just felt so strange. So I knew that I needed to find a

way to sing. I needed to find a way to connect to my voice and the best way I could do that was through teaching and through sharing what I know about singing with other people. And so I started doing the live stream vocal warmups, and it feels essential to my life now. One Hundred percent... like, I have to sing. I just, I can't not. When I don't sing, I feel awful. And when I do sing, I feel a lot better. And I don't think I really realized that before. I think I took it for granted. And I think, during the pandemic, singers were one of the most impacted groups. Like our activity, the thing that we do, the thing that we love. Could kill everyone around us, (jen right) you know, like, oh my God, it was such an, and what's so bizarre is singing is such a like life giving activity. Anyway. So that's one of the things that I found super essential and really helpful, especially when my life was not grounded. You know, it was a really good way for me to center in. But yeah, I mean, I rethought so many things this last year. Yeah.

jen morris

I feel, I feel similarly as far as like needing to sing- needing to sing with people -and that's my, like, if I were to , make my list, my hierarchy of needs for, you know mental and emotional wellbeing, like singing with other people. And I would now say, add in person. I would add that as a caveat. Apparently. I didn't tell the gods that it was exactly that, but that that's pretty high on the list. That's like in the top five with food and water and shelter. Yeah, so it, I feel similarly it has really made me prioritize. And. You know, just how can I, how can I make that happen? And maybe that even just means, you know, if there is, there is a group that is in a place where they can sing together and I'm watching it on Zoom, that I'm actually singing along and feeling it in my body versus just like, "oh, this is a nice concert - I'm going to sit passively and quietly in the audience." I mean, maybe that's actually one good thing that the pandemic and the Zoom thing has brought to us is that you can sing along to the entire concert and nobody cares! .

Briget

Yeah. Yeah.

jen morris

Hi listeners, Jen here hope you are enjoying my chat with Briget. Check out some of the other episodes of Voices of the Ancestors there's a whole back catalogue of brilliant women, for example episode 3 'Healing Songs and Circle Dances' with Nino Naneishvili or Episode 11 Khatia Turmanidze finds her voice about a teenagers in a singing family. Susan and Holly are the regular hosts and they've built the podcast from the ground up, they are totally independent, they rely on listener donations to keep the podcast going. You can support them on patreon at patreon.com/voicesoftheancestors. You can enable more women's stories to be heard. You can buy Holly and Susan and mint tea and a coffee on Ko-fi on Ko-fi.com, that's [Ko-fi.com/voicesoftheancestors](https://ko-fi.com/voicesoftheancestors). When you buy them a coffee you're actually helping them purchase microphones, editing software and to pay for interpreters and translators to make the podcast episodes accessible to a wider audience. Now let's get back to the interview.

jen morris

Well, I know for sure that I need to ask you, "What does voices of the ancestors mean to you?" Mmmm, that's such a good question. And I read it, you sent it to me earlier and I was like, wow, that's a good one. So I thought of this, there's for me, I feel like there's two tracks, there's spiritual ancestry and there's like genetic ancestry. They feel really different to me. I feel a lot less connected to my genetic ancestry than I do to my spiritual ancestry. And I'll explain a little bit, so I'm Irish a hundred percent and I have never, like, I've listened to Irish music and every so

often I'm like, yeah, okay, I'm going to do it. I'm going to like dig in on Irish music, and I'll learn it because that's the music of my people. And especially this last year, I felt like it's so important to understand our cultural roots and like really, you know, find our identities through our history, right? And I just, like, I don't know, like my spirit isn't as drawn to it, as say like music from Eastern Europe. And for me specifically, like the Southern Balkans so much so, that when I landed in Greece for the first time I had an out-of-body experience, I was like, this is my home. This is where I like. I mean, I get chills every time I'm talking about it. This is like, there's something here. There's something deep. And I don't, I can't explain it, you know, and I don't need to, but it's there, you know, it's a real thing. So, I think and then actually, maybe there's like a third track of ancestry, which is sort of humanity, like connecting to being a human being and an understanding that there's been this evolution of human experience. That is part of who I am today. And part of why I make music, part of why I'm a creative person is because I want, like, I want to feel that deep root. And I'm not sure how that, how that all ties in. But for me, there's like saying the voices of the ancestors feels like it, it almost has like the genetic thing should be the place where it goes on like a scientific place makes a lot of sense, but then there's the other tracks that feel more alive to me.

jen morris

Mmm-hmm

What you were saying before about how, the two singers. Really need each other to know how the song goes. And, you know, I can't sing the part by myself because I need the other person there. That for me, that's what I love about polyphony. And that's what I love about. I mean, emotionally and spiritually, there's the, like, they need me as much as I need them. And we have this like mutual exchange, of working together and creating a thing together. But yes, I think there's something that's, visceral and ancient and that we, maybe we don't even have all of the words or all of the understanding for why it is that way. But we, you know, that's, that's why I thought it would be good to interview you because I know that we do both, feel that, we've both feel it and seek it out and we try to, you know, create it within our own communities. I don't know where I'm going with that point.

Briget

I think that the sort of ancientness and the spirituality and the rootedness of folk music, I'm curious about how to bring that. Forward into, like, modern consciousness, I think it's really important, you know? Even if it's not anything that is obvious or we are rooted in this da da dah, it's like I would rather people be aware of depth. And like, of history, and of culture and of lineage, and the fact that we're not the only people like we've come from this incredible complex, like bizarre history of humanity, you know? And, and, I actually think that like, the pandemic has pushed this, like evolutionary thinking a little bit, I feel like something needed to be split open so that we get our heads out of our tushies and, and start to, recognize that our spirits are deep and old and rich and resilient, you know, and that like creative expression is a perfect way to dig in on that and to like, experience.

jen morris

Yeah, definitely. Well, I think in, in the Old Way or the Before Times, you know, it was easy to just, you'd go to your nine to five job, you see your same work acquaintances who you, you know, say hello to, but you don't actually make eye contact. And like, you, you warm up your same frozen lunch in the, in the microwave at your workplace. And like you do your job and then

you're done, you go home. Like, I was guilty of that, I, I did that for, you know, a long time. And I think, yeah, I think there was something that needed to be cracked open where. And because it happened to everyone. You know, we are all in a position of being able to, to ask ourselves, if we have enough privilege to know that we have shelter and food, then we can be asking ourselves. What, how do I want my life to be, what do I want my life to be like, what are the things that I really value and what are the things that I could do without,

Briget

Right. And then like patriarchal capitalists are like AHHHHHHH

jen morris

Right, exactly.

Briget

Right. Well, and then you get to like, look at what's comfortable for you and what. I think we spend so much time not being tuned into what we want, and like what feels right and

jen morris

right.

Briget

Yeah. Yeah. ,

jen morris

so yeah, I guess there have been some good things that have made a lot of us tune in, tuning in to what feels right. I think is just a good way to summarize all of that. (**Briget** Yeah, yeah. Yeah.)

jen morris

I thought of one more thing just because we're still recording and I didn't ask you about it. another reason that I asked you to the podcast was that I feel like there's this, you know, we kept talking about culture bearers and people bringing songs, places you actually brought a song to me, which was very special. You came to Seattle and taught a workshop and I'm, want to say it was probably like 2009 or 10 called Bedinera, it's a wedding song, three parts song from [Polikarpe Khubulava](#)'s repertoire. And you taught that in a workshop, which looking back on it now, that was a bold move to say, cause that is not an easy song. I mean, talk about polyphony. That's some, that's the twisty stuff. but you taught it in the workshop. I then, I had all the recordings. I then brought it to my friends in Moscow, Idaho, and we studied it and sang it together as a trio. And that was like, when you can drive six hours and meet up with friends and they're like, yes, I want to sing this and I want to sing it with you right now.

That's a very special thing.

Briget Boyle

Yeah, you know you've got good friends..

jen morris

totally. Um, so we sing that together, but then the most magical thing was that later in 2011, I went to this very special village called Merisi which is in Ach'ara in in Western Georgia. And I met the Turmanidze family who they've been on the podcast before. But then I met Polikarpe and I got to spend a week with him learning his songs. And so the fact that I had some semblance of an idea of what a Megrelian song does, what the top does, what the middle does, what the bass does, how they're all like intertwined and interconnected together. Like that song, that you taught me, was basically like, it gave me a blueprint that I could work from.

And so then when Polikarpe was teaching us these songs that were even more complicated and, sometimes, and of course, every time that he would sing out the line, it would be totally different than the time before. (**Briget** Of course.) But I felt like I could hang on to that ride. I could ride that ride.

Briget Boyle

That's amazing.

Jen morris

So I wanted to say thank you for that.

Music: Bedinera, Polikarpe in a trio singing from the CD: Teach Yourself Megrelian Songs

jen morris

Did Carl Linich teach that to you? And then you brought it?

Briget Boyle

Yeah - It was in the context of Kitka. We learned it from Carl during the [Kitka / Trio Kavkasia](#) concert, series.

jen morris

Yeah. So it went, all the way from, it went from Poughkeepsie, New York then went to the San Francisco, Oakland bay area came up to Seattle and then it went right back to where it came. Oh yeah. Before Poughkeepsie New York came from Polikarpe in Samegrelo. Yeah. So then to be able to like complete that circle um, just felt really magical and really special. So thank you for that.

Briget Boyle

I'm really glad to hear that. I sometimes have questions as. like an American teaching music, that's not of my culture and my, know, I feel a responsibility and I sometimes have concerns about it and is it right thing to be doing? And should blah blah blah... But hearing something like that is profoundly, like it makes me feel okay about what I do, and that sharing songs is it's just such an important act. If like, you know, a song, share it and talk about where you learned it, and don't hold it to yourself or be afraid to share what, you know, but always be humble, always be open, always be crediting, always be acknowledging where it comes from, but continue to share, I remember talking to [Tzvetanka Varimezova](#) about that. What do you think when we teach Bulgarian music to other people and she's like, teach music, teach it go, you know, it I've given it to you go, , you know? Yeah. It's really reassuring to hear you tell that story. And it's what a cool story.

jen morris

Yeah and it does yeah, I think it gives us good faith or good feedback, that like we are doing the right thing that we're being intentional and careful about it. And we, we're doing our best to, learn the language, visit the places, meet with the people who have studied so much about it. I mean, that is, that's a really important, like, you were careful in how you presented it to me. And I knew that it was a special thing that, that, that needed to be treated in a special way. And so I, I also took that care with it. And then, I was able to, I dunno, reach the ultimate goal of singing with, back and it's back to the ancestors again, to bring it back to, to sing it with the, he was 90 at the time when I sang with him. Yeah, too. Yeah. So to bring it back to the roots and back to the earth from whence, it came, that's a really special thing. So

Briget Boyle

Yeah. what an amazing opportunity. Yeah. And the other thing I want to say is if people have, they're want to sing this stuff and they don't have the opportunity to travel to Georgia, I think you can still sing the music, and do your homework and talk to the people who have had the opportunity to go there and talk to, especially now with the pandemic, having of broken down all the walls because of the internet, we can have zoom meetings and zoom calls with people who carry these traditions. And it, a lot of people don't really want to do that, but, I think that there's ways that if you don't have the means to travel to the places and to pay the mentors for their time, you can still. Learn the music, acknowledge the sources. I think it's so important to recognize that continually learning and continually asking the important questions and paying attention to the language and paying attention really deep attention to the context in which the songs are song. like those, I don't know. I just, I feel like people should have the freedom to know that they can do it. if you're interested, follow your interest, something sparks your joy, put attention toward it.

jen morris

Yeah, definitely agreed. 100%.

Briget Boyle

Awesome.. This was like the best. Thank you for,

jen morris

Thank YOU! I was so glad you had so, so much interesting stuff to say and Yeah, thank for that.

Briget Boyle

You're welcome.

Music: *Žegar Polye (Žegar Field) album Feeds My Lamb, from Svetlana Spajić*

jen morris

In this episode, you heard snippets of 3 songs from Briget's [True Life Trio](#) album "Like Never, Like Always" — The songs were Mother, Moon,/ It Will Never Again Be What it Was, / and Love.

Next you heard Kitka singing [Shen Khar Venakhi, from their album "The Vine"](#), followed by Mokle Mravalzhamier from [Ensemble Zedashe's album "Our Earth and Water"](#)

[Tamar Buadze and Teona Kutsia](#) sing a mashup of a Spanish song and Laz song, simply titled Espanur-Laz, which is available on [YouTube](#). The percussion you hear is the two of them clapping and slapping the table — I encourage you to look that one up.

You heard the opening verse of the Ukrainian folk song Vdova, sung by Ukrainian ensemble [Drevo](#), followed by Dunava's Serbian Medley, from our [album Behind the Veil](#).

Finally, you heard Polikarpe in a trio singing Bedinera, from the CD: Teach Yourself Megrelian Songs, and then Žegar Polye, or [Žegar Field Feeds My Lamb](#), from Svetlana Spajić.

Thanks to all of you for listening and supporting VoicesofTheAncestors! You can visit VoicesoftheAncestors.co.uk for transcripts of all the episodes, as well as for a complete songlist of the songs in this episode. Hope to see you on Holly & Susan's Patreon, at patreon.com/voicesoftheancestors. Until next time...

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