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Teona Lomsadze: So I feel Voices of the Ancestors are definitely, somehow, I don't know, kept in Georgian traditional music for me, because it's it brings me so much energetic like emotional information and energy er encoded in this music over the centuries, which is just because of our ancestors and their voices.

Intro music: Makharia, chonguri. From the laloni album, 'I fell in love with that sweet voice'

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

Susan Thompson: and me **Susan Thompson**

Holly Taylor-Zuntz: And our guest Teona Lomsadze. Dr. Teona Lomsadze is ... well she's many things! She's an ethnomusicologist, a music researcher, an educator.

Susan Thompson Yeah - She's lectured at the Tbilisi State Conservatoire and taught the community choir Naduri.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz She's a singer of folk AND jazz music; She's a music and events manager. And most recently she finds herself in the UK as a fellow of Oxford University studying the Internationalisation of Georgian Music in the UK.

Susan Thompson And I'm so glad Teona found a moment to record with you Holly - cause her diary is always so full. I mean I was sad I couldn't make it but do you what it was such a great chat - and I was blown away at the end how Teo answered the question we always ask - What does 'Voices of the Ancestors' mean to you - and she came up with another way of thinking about it that just blew my mind. Now Holly knows Teona socially, while I know her more in her role as an academic at the Conservatoire.

And I went to her graduation from Leeds where she received her MA in Music Management.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Yeah to me, she is 'Dr. Teona Lomsadze' but she's also just Teo, one of my best friends. And I have got a lot of fond memories of us um out late at night in Tbilisi, in bars or just sort of singing folk songs on the street. But that's not why we invited her on to the podcast! Just because she is our friend - er no. The reason we wanted to interview her is because, well firstly she is one of the people who helped us launch this podcast in 2020 and has been such a huge supporter since then because she, like us, sees this big need to platform and amplify Georgian women's voices.

Susan Thompson Yeah I was really surprised once, that even as an academic, in her role, she'd had people saying that Georgian women don't sing. And that's why I felt so proud at the Symposium in 2022, there was that Gala concert that was an all women performance.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Yeah that was epic it was to mark the publication of Teo's book called 'Women's role in unesco recognised european traditional singing practices', and that's available online so do check out the link in the show notes.

<https://polyphony.ge/en/womens-role-in-unesco-recognized-european-traditional-singing-practices/>

Susan Thompson Yeah and for those who aren't in the know, the Symposium it's this international event held every two years in Tbilisi, and researchers and singers from all over the world come together to discuss and perform traditional polyphony - not just Georgian polyphony. Oh And Teo has been one of the key organisers of that event for the last few years.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Teo grew up in a town called Gori, about an hour's west of Tbilisi. As a teenager, she was the youngest member of Gori Women's Choir. Erm Who you might have heard of from their collaboration with Katie Melua. And then after those rehearsals she'd go and find her siblings at the Folk Youth club called 'Folk Underground'.

Susan Thompson Yeah that reminded me of Ninutsa in the first episode of Series 2 you know the one with Tamar Buadze. And Ninutsa was a student in Rustavi and she just seemed to have grown up in this big gang of young people with music just all around, all day.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Yeah definitely it was a very similar vibe of um the backdrop of the 'dark' 90s, and for young people, singing together music being a sort of balm to that darkness and just trying to spend all day every day singing, if they could.

Susan Thompson

Susan here. Just a quick update before you start the episode to let you know that when you get to the end of the chat with Holly there's a bonus bit where I go and visit Teo to chat about the protests happening in Georgia in Winter 2025. Enjoy.

Music:

Holly Taylor-Zuntz So Teo welcome to the podcast.

Teona Lomsadze Thank you, Holly, thanks for inviting and because er, especially that I know about the podcast from the very beginning, and I'm a very big supporter of you and Susan um and podcast itself, and I'm very glad that I can be er guest today.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Yeah, I feel like it's about time that we had you on the podcast. (*Teo laughs*) It's Been a long time coming. Um But I feel like going back to your like maybe we can start by talking about your roots and your your family in Gori who I know, you know, you come from a family of professors and doctors and er contemporary people that live a normal life, but I know that the tradition of Supra is really still important and integral to your family. Um So I wondered if we could hear about that, and maybe you can even paint a picture of your, your family's Supra, um for example, I know that your mum, she works really long hours as a doctor, but it brings her so much joy to, to host people. And I can even remember one Supra, which, sadly, I couldn't go to because I had COVID, but you were hosting British singers in your family home. And so, yeah, I wonder what that, what that meant to your family, yeah, and if you can just paint that picture for us?

Teona Lomsadze First of all, I feel absolutely lucky to be growing up in such family, which, on the one hand, values education very much, and er my parents did their best to give all four of us the best education possible, especially in Gori environment, and on the other hand, they have traditional values er Georgian. They value Georgian culture and traditions, which resonates very well with me as a grown, grown human being. Er And maybe because of that foundation, I chose the path I did, and Supra was part of it, for sure, we had er, er. My mom was telling that we were one of those families where a door was never locked, so their friends would come and go whenever they, they wished, and they were always welcome. And because my parents were from one big friends group, they kind of became couple later on. Um, their friends er, as a big group were gathering in our home, mostly, and they are well educated, very interesting people who

used to sit in this - we call 'dark 90's' because we literally didn't have electricity in most of it. They used to gather around this big table er with a very modest feast and er talk for many hours and have toasts in between, and me as the oldest, er from these four siblings, I was pretty much allowed to stay longer with them, and I was quietly just sitting around this feast and listening, because it was extraordinary, interesting stories and jokes I was listening to, but er toasts in between was so natural, that until the point when was I was when I was grown up, I thought that this is normal. This is like a universally normal thing - that you have this big feast full of friends and everybody gives a toast and wishes themselves er all the best and peace and freedom in the world, and in between of it, they're just all interesting stories and some songs,

Music underscore: Teo and friends singing 'Jer Ar Ikneba Gvian'

because my my parents, friend, one of friends, but one of them, particularly was playing on a guitar. And when I was even young, very young, apparently, she used to sing with me during these gatherings, and they were making fun, how - they still make this joke, how I was trying to sing, but I couldn't speak back then I was so, I was a baby, and tebs, Tovliantebs, right? So I couldn't say words, and I would say, like, ebs na, na, na ebs. *(Teo sings - Holly and Teo laugh)*

So from, this, early childhood, basically, Supra was very important part of my life. And growing in that environment somehow, even nowadays, even though I accept myself or perceive myself as a contemporary human being from Georgia, valuing not only traditions but, modern tendencies and loving going to clubs, and um this vibe, enjoying vibrant musical life. I still um like, I still love that with all my heart, the Supra tradition, because in my case, it was always very interesting and healthiest and emotionally very important.

Susan Thompson Now Maspindzelsa mkhjarulsa is a song which celebrates the host at a supra. And thanks to Geoff Burton's live recording we can share this moment when Teo, her partner Sandro Shar and Nana Mzhavanadze sing it at a Conference at Oxford University, Teo will tell you more about this Oxford University Conference later in the episode.

Music: Maspindzelsa mkhjarulsa - Teona Lomsadze, Sandro Shar and [Nana Mzhavanadze](#). Live recording by Geoff Burton.

Teona Lomsadze And you asked me about Maspindzeli right?

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Yeah - I guess I'm interested because - well, your research at the moment is about the internationalisation (Teo yes) of Georgian music in the UK. And so, yeah how have these interactions been for you with, for example, with Mas - singers from London, from Maspindzeli, or other places in the UK. You've hosted them in Georgia, you've been hosted here in the UK. Um so maybe you can talk about that Supra as an example.

Teona Lomsadze Yeah, that's actually a er very shiny memory of mine, because I'm glad that I had this opportunity as employee of International Research Centre of Traditional Polyphony Tbilisi Conservatory, where, basically I, as a professional, was formed there, and I had this possibility of hosting as one of the employees of the centre, all these amazing singers of Georgian music, and not only Georgian music and researchers from all over the world. And um if I was lucky, to have some time left out of, er, enormous amount of the tasks during the International Symposium we organised. I was always glad to spend time with this lovely people, because over the years, we became very good friends, right? And singing, and especially singing in three voices, makes this friendship even stronger and deeper. Er so I was lucky that in previous symposium in 2022, if I'm not mistaken, yes. I could host this lovely group from the UK.

Music underscore: Maspindzeli singing 'Tsaiqvanes Tamar Kali'

Mostly Maspindzeli members and [Caroline Bithell](#) was also there at my home in Gori. Mmm er because my parents still live there, and they have a lovely garden, and my father is very er proud of his garden and peace he's looking er looking at, and I wanted them to experience um life, my life, or become part of my usual life outside of Tbilisi, and um it was very generous of my parents to host all this group of people er being in love with Georgian music and performed like singing on that Supra, even more songs than me and my siblings were, and they were so impressed by - my parents were so impressed by the repertory, wide repertoire of Maspindzeli and skills they have as performers. Um it was actually interesting that there is a stereotype in Georgia that Supra is a male dominated er sphere or the area and the tradition, because in some villages, remote villages, people still see that mostly women are cooking in the kitchen, and then men are having feast, and women don't have enough time to join them. So, contemporary, more liberated version of supra is that everybody is - drinks toast, and can celebrate together. Everybody drink toast (*laughs*). And in our case, even though my father and my mother are very good er, er, Toastmasters, Tamada's my father's initiative in that Supra was that he wanted me to be er Toastmaster for my friends gathered around, and he was sitting there, saying and drinking these toasts with us. And um it was kind of, very interesting experience for me, because he's such an experienced Tamada, and I'm giving a voice to lead the Supra as I will wish, and to say

toast what I wish and the way I wish for. So that, that was quite important for me as well, kind of initiation as a skilled Tamada in my father's eyes. And

Holly Taylor-Zuntz So how close did you stay to the traditional toast, and how much did you ..

Teona Lomsadze I don't remember very well what I said, especially after a few glasses of wine (*laughs*).

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Fair enough, fair enough and it was two years ago,

Teona Lomsadze But I do remember the way er we usually kind of lead toast, sorry, the supras in my home, and probably I'm affected by that as well, that there are a few toasts which I also feel important to be mentioned, and they are from this traditional list of toasts. For instance, there is a toast for peace, er for friendship, for family, these values which are very important for all of us. But the way we say these toasts is always very different. So this is what I love in Georgian Supra, that you don't repeat yourself. You might say, you may remember some joke and build your toast around that one time, and another time it can be just so philosophical (*laughs*) that you're like lost yourself in those adventures. And I think that this Supra with Maspindzeli members would be more or less that way, from my side, but it was full of singing. Was such a big joy, especially that it gave us opportunity - I mean me and my siblings, to kind of revive and restore our family quartet, which was, which once we had, and to remember um the songs we used to sing together, because it's quite a big luxury these days to gather together. We all have our own jobs, and that's difficult. So it gave us opportunity to, go back in years and sing together again and kind of recover the repertoire that once we had, and it was kind of two choirs, in that sense. There was Maspindzeli with their own repertoire, on the other hand, at the part of Supra. So um yes, and er this Supra tradition, I guess, probably is the best place for me, at least, to um kind of exchange this cultural background I have with other people's cultural backgrounds, um and in this case, with British people's cultural backgrounds. Um and I do remember that they also performed few English songs, just very nice to hear. And I guess this is probably the biggest value of Supra. It doesn't restrict you in terms of narrative, in terms of stories, in terms of repertoire you might sing, and it kind of embraces people from all over the world with this essence. So it's just a space to share, share songs, share stories, share your emotions. And it doesn't matter where it all comes from - so.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz So sounds like what we need the world right now, even if it's this very traditional thing, it sounds like actually contemporary, not just Georgian society, but contemporary society. You know, Supra has a place there.

Teona Lomsadze Supra has a place for everybody, like any kind of person. Um And that's another thing that you don't have to be long in toasts or short in toast there is, like, literally no rule how you want to express yourself. So in that sense, it's a free space for anybody, any kind of person.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Are there any rules at the Supra table?

Teona Lomsadze Yeah, there are, actually, *(laughs)* I'm now contradicting myself, no, it's um, I would say it's not a rule. It's more respect towards Tamada as a Toastmaster. Tamada is the one who initiates toast. But there is this freedom, er that even though Tamada gave a theme of the toast and now members of the feast are kind of following that theme. They are free to express that theme however they want and expand it. Er Another kind of freedom element, but still in respect, with the respect of Tamada, is they can ask toast to Tamada. Um And usually none of the Tamadas are against to give this toast to somebody else, which means just the person, ordinary member of the Supra, is given a roll of Tamada for a minute. Another important thing is that it's quite rude when you're kind of hidden way disappearing and leaving Supra. So it's important for Georgians that we acknowledge participation of all members of Supra. So when you're tired or busy and you have to leave Supra, you just inform Tamada about that, kind of um it's really not, not like asking, right? But can, more informing that. Okay, now I'm leaving. I need to leave and Tamada, as a gratitude that you share the feast is drinking your toast and letting you go.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz It kind of sounds like a ritual, because if you're taking part in a ritual or a ceremony, you wouldn't just leave before the end, or if you had to, you would make your own small ending, of the ritual. You wouldn't want to leave that door open.

Teona Lomsadze I guess that's a very nice metaphor. Because, I guess the Supra in its even though these days it's quite contemporary, modern, um but in its very deep essence. It's kind of, ritual, right? Ritual which is all about sharing our wishes, like best wishes to each other, and because of a power of the wine, Georgians believed it has, and we still believe - wine, the sacred drink, kind of makes those wishes to come true - stronger or the best, better way than if we would just wish each other without holding that jar with sacred drink. So in that sense, it's still a ritual related, but quite let's say, like, open and not that sacred anymore.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz And so what kind of moments would your family mark with a Supra. And like, how often would they have a Supra?

Teona Lomsadze Oh, my goodness, my family is obsessed, (*laughter*) especially my mother, who is super busy person, working in several places, she always finds time to initiate Supras, invite people. If you happen to pass my home and you knock door and to say hello, you're always invited. And like spontaneous surprise happening, and it's very difficult to leave soon, because they just want to give you the best food they have, the best wishes, the best, and I don't know like er experience, and then they let you go. And I don't think that our families, anyhow, different from other families with more or less traditional values in Georgia, um even though it doesn't mean that my family or other families are not celebrating some liberal values. It's just somehow very interestingly intertwined.

Susan Thompson One of Teo's favourite songs is 'Me var da chemi nabadi' It's from her region, Imereti and here it's being sung by Aidio.

Music: 'Me var da chemi nabadi' by Aidio

Holly Taylor-Zuntz So did you learn to sing around the Supra table?

Teona Lomsadze Yeah, that's actually very interesting that even though my first meeting with Georgian traditional music, at least, what I remember was and very transformative meeting for me was through my singing lessons, we have very dear and important place in for our family, it's our village in Imereti region of Georgia, where my father's cousins and uncles with their descendants were gathering during the summer, and I was spending quite a big time of my summer holidays there. So we, growing up as a child, Supra was always connected with singing in Imereti Imereti, and Supra was always full of singing for me once we grew up in Gori because my parents somehow don't sing, even though my grandparents had very like a good musical talent, my parents don't.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz And it just skipped a generation.

Teona Lomsadze Yeah, they make that joke, er yes, somehow and but then, when we got familiar with Georgian traditional singing through 'folk underground', it was a studio singing, folk singing studio in Gori for children, for children, yes, and very influential. Then we started singing everywhere. So literally everywhere, of course, Supra was the best and first place to start singing, but in the streets, while playing in the backyard. So er these children were so motivated and enthusiastic to sing traditional singing that Supra wasn't only place Supra couldn't fit our will to sing all the time, and I guess our Supras at home became like, um enriched with traditional singing from that period of 'folk underground', and it just became tradition. Because now, when we're gathering, um

in most of the cases, we sing, it's like so it's natural. It's so natural that we don't even think about it. So if we remember a song related to a toast, we just start singing right away, or we might just sing even beyond the Supra, and then Supra starts and you just move with singing on the Supra. It really depends whom you're sharing a Supra with. I guess that's a very natural thing for Georgian Supra, because self expression was not only through toasts and stories, but through songs. And it's very interesting that um when social function of Georgian traditional music was changed due to um people moving from villages to the cities. Then all these working songs kind of lost their function, initial function. All this repertoire was moved to Supra setting. So now I guess the most natural environment for performing Georgian music, traditional music, is Supra.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Because the other kind of ways of life are being lost. But I guess those were also still some of the, the moments of life that are marked by songs still happen, like the birth of a baby or the death of a family member. Are they still marked by songs in Georgia?

Teona Lomsadze it really depends on the family. In villages, it's a big tradition and still alive, thankfully. But me, as somebody growing up in the city had a bit different experience in that sense. Er So for me, Supra was definitely the central place, combining all sorts of Georgian songs, and another important um setting was the church, because me and my siblings were chanters, we performed traditional Georgian chants in church since early childhood, and in this Alilo rituals. Alilo is this Christmas ritual, very important and famous in Georgia, when we go to different basically, visit different doors or families and sing for them, ask them some sweets, or they just willing give us, some sweets as a gesture, but we sing them, for them, we bless them by this chant, Alilo chant, and this tradition was restored a few decades ago in Georgia. It's a very old tradition, like ancient tradition, but during the Soviet period, as most of the Christian religions, sorry, rituals were either banned or just forgotten, and Alilo was one of them, so it was revived by Edisher Garakanidze, hugely er through his Mtiebi activities going in different villages for Christmas and singing for local people. And then after a while, Georgian church officially revived that tradition of Ali law. So I was lucky that I was the generation who was part of Alilos yearly Alilos as well. So that was the two different settings where traditional music was solid.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz It was with your with your church, that you went to Alilo

Teona Lomsadze Church, choir, yeah - after a service, basically we would go for Alilo (Holly Wow), all over the Gori.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Would you ask people for wine and food at their door? Is that their ritual?

Teona Lomsadze No, We were not going necessarily like door to door, but we were covering streets, and people by their own will would come out holding baskets for with sweets or with fruits and churchelas and other Christmas related sweets, and they were just giving us this gesture to chanters.

Susan Thompson To give you a flavour of Christmas and her uncles singing in the village Teo chose this Chona Alilo from Imereti sung by Odila.

Music: 'Chona Alilo' from Imereti sung by Odila

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Fr the context from where your love of singing comes from, because er as your friend, whenever we've sung together, I've seen like er a big joy emerge in you, especially if it's been a time when you've been really busy with your academic life and your research and you haven't had time to sing with other people in harmony, and if we come together, whether that's, you know, around the supra table or on a Tbilisi Street at 2am, (laughter) some bar, it's like something very - you are whole again, almost - Would you agree?

Teona Lomsadze Absolutely. Singing is such an essential part of activity, if you can call it for me in general, because I started singing when I was in kindergarten. Then this experience with Gori women choir, which basically formed my desire to become a musician and devote myself to music, because I have heard what music is in that choir,

Holly Taylor-Zuntz and you started singing with them when you were a teenager.

Teona Lomsadze I was thirteen. I was the youngest in the choir, and I sang for many years, until the point when I had to move to Tbilisi, and it was not feasible to continue. But and then this 'Folk Underground' was always there. So after lessons, at rehearsals at Gori women choir, which lasted for five hours. I would go to 'Folk Underground' to attend lessons of my siblings there, and basically whole day was filled with singing, and I was also chanting, learning chanting in the 'Folk Underground'. And that was my life, when I was teenager, my usual life, daily life. And then I started studying at the Conservatory. I was er mostly oriented or focused on research and um kind of developing my skills as a researcher. And that was a moment when I feel, felt that, Oh,

my God, I have such a big gap. I feel so dry inside. I feel - I don't know, I don't feel complete, and I definitely needed something, and I was luckily offered becoming part of a jazz band, [Kanudos](#), even though I haven't sung jazz before, but I loved improvising. And my brother, who already played saxophone in the jazz band - based in Gori. He offered, they needed a vocalist, and he offered the tryouts. And once I started singing and improvising by intuition back then, I just realised that, okay, now I'm complete, and now I'm fulfilled. So singing is such an important part, and singing in voices, it's kind of a triple effect (Holly - Yeah the harmony), absolutely. And Georgian traditional singing has this effect, like, I guess traditional thinking in general, especially when it's in harmonies and in three voices or several voices, has this effect of not only kind of individually, um, how is that enjoying the experience, but enjoying this experience of sharing music and building music with two more people or several people, so especially if you're singing Georgian traditional music and trying to improvise, which we used to do a bit during um some of my friends. And you know, some of them, like Giorgi Khukhunaishvili, he is fond of improvising while singing, like other [Adilei](#) choir members. And when we use when we start singing with Giorgi, because he had gives you such a big freedom, I also started improvising. And now these days, when me and Sandro, my partner, sing, we improvise all the time.

Music: 'Dideba chvens shekreba' sung by Teo Lomsadze, Sandro Shar and Nana Mzhavanadze, recording by Geoff Burton

So when you improvise, you kind of make a song in that spot, yeah, and when it's a traditional song with the traditional harmonies, which has its own, how to say, like energy embodied, and it also refreshes your soul itself. It's kind of a double effect, so I can't even imagine myself, to be honest, without singing. It doesn't matter if it's singing for the audience, singing at home, singing in the bar, which we've shared as well.

[Holly Taylor-Zuntz](#) singing with Naduri.

Teona Lomsadze With Naduri. Yes, Naduri was another saviour for me I would say.

[Holly Taylor-Zuntz](#) I remember

Teona Lomsadze Because that was the moment living in Tbilisi, when I was occupied, preoccupied by many research projects, and I couldn't really spend that much time with [Kanudos](#), either. So I was without daily singing. And then I was lucky to be offered to lead Naduri. It's amazing, international choir, Community Choir, based in Tbilisi, and I absolutely loved it. First of all, I was missing singing myself. Then I had, I loved teaching somehow, and I had opportunity to be back to teaching, but through singing practice

and then meeting all these people with different cultural backgrounds, and having this privilege to be the one who introduces them, not only Georgian traditional singing, but Georgia itself. Because these days there are so many different Georgias you can see when you visit the country, and especially Tbilisi. It can be extremely positive experience, but it can be also negative experience, or the impression you get - so it really depends what experience you go through and how Georgian culture and the country itself is introduced to you. And I felt that I had that privilege as well to just show people what I love in this country, not because I am from there, but because I love singing. And they also, do love singing. And there is this space of Georgian traditional music, welcoming me as well as them. And we can just, yeah, dive in.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz I can totally relate to what you're saying. It's - I mean, because I also teach Georgian singing, I feel that privilege of being the first person to bring this amazing history and stories and culture into their life, but I'm not even Georgian, so I imagine for you, it's like really such a pleasure, because it's, it's also your your culture, and we've been lucky to teach together, and you've led my choir, Kalta choir, and we've, we've led workshops together, so that's been an absolute joy to share that privilege together.

Teona Lomsadze It was very, very enjoyable for me as well, especially that we are feeling different. We are teaching differently, right? (Holly Yeah, yeah) so we are kind of feeling different spaces and kind of completing together. So it was absolutely joy enjoyable for me as well.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz So now's a good moment to hear, for the first time on the podcast, a little bit of Kalta Choir, which is the Georgian choir of women and non binary singers that I lead in Oxford. And it's been together for nearly two years now. As I said, it's been such a privilege to lead them, and to see their passion for Georgian music grow into a passion for Georgian culture and food and people.

And so here's the new year song Kirialesa from our recent Christmas concert and supra, where we fundraised £700 some of which we donated to the [OCMedia fund](#) for independent journalism in Georgia.

Music: 'Kirialesa' sung by Kalta Choir

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Now I'd just like to pause to acknowledge the reason we're able to bring you these songs and stories from Georgia. Because it wouldn't be possible without our patrons and kofi supporters. So thank you so much if you are one of the people that supports us. Um you know that this is a completely independent podcast we don't have any advertisers or external fundings. So if this podcast enriches your life in

any way, and you appreciate the thought, and time and energy Susan and I pour into it, please consider supporting us at patreon.com/voicesoftheancestors or ko-fi.com/voicesoftheancestors. So that we can keep telling these stories that really do want to be heard! Alright back to the episode.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz So as [Naduri](#) is an international choir, and you've also taught Kalta Choir and people from around the world, you're already internationalising Georgian music, and so is that what prompted your research, in, into the internationalisation of Georgian music in the UK?

Teona Lomsadze That was definitely one of the influential factors choosing this topic to be researched. But also I see a huge potential in that direction for Georgian traditional music, and I see that this sphere is already very interestingly developing for a few decades. And I had an opportunity to lead research in the UK, and I thought that, that's amazing, because I have all these contacts, I have friends they're in love with Georgian culture and performing Georgian music for a long time. There is a local community of Georgians in London, mostly, but in, all over the UK. And of course, this diaspora values Georgian traditional music and traditions still, especially that when you're in my, immigration, this kind of feeling of sentiments towards your country, your culture, it's just become stronger. It's a natural thing. And I thought that it's amazing if I use this opportunity to use, to research internationalisation of Georgian music in the UK, and um there is this amazing, absolutely fantastic process going, er performing and learning Georgian music um through Georgians, through foreigners, maybe like you and [Frank Kane](#), um, going to Georgia and studying from Georgians, there in folk tours. And as a result, as you know, in the UK, there are many choirs which, er kind of devote themselves to performing Georgian traditional music. And us Georgians value this a lot, um and we always are excited to realise that people, who don't, who have absolute different cultural backgrounds, they found some universal value in this music and which, and they found the value of, which they resonate to, as well as Georgians do, right? And they kind of devote themselves to this music, (Holly yeah.) And there are some, some people who, like Georgian community members, who reconnect, especially second generation of them who reconnect with their parents, erm country and country of their own origins as well, right, through Georgian music. Yeah, and there is a church choir in London performing Georgian traditional music. There's few Studios teaching Georgian music. So there is a lot happening. And I'm absolutely privileged to be researching all this process um in the UK, and I really hope that internationally um spreading Georgian music will go as successfully as it does in the UK.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz I'm sure it will. And thank you so much for doing this research, because, It feels it feels ripe, but it feels like the right moment to be doing it. And I'm

glad that someone is researching this kind of phenomenon, er that's going on, not just in the UK, but I hope it, you know, it can be widened to Europe and the world as well.

Teona Lomsadze Hopefully there are few other researchers also interested in this subject, of course. But, er like, UK's case, deeply in all these levels and different layers um, was kind of given to me as a privilege. Er But in UK's case, I want to mention that Edisher Garaqanidze's role was tremendous, especially that we have 30 years anniversary after Edisher Garaqanidze and Joseph Jordania's first visit in the UK, and I was absolutely lucky to be given a chance by University of Oxford and Georgian program - I do my research fellowship in - to devote er event to this kind of commemoration of this first visit, and er you were a part of it Holly.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Yes It was an amazing event. It was a unique and beautiful thing. And it felt very, very poignant that people came from all over the UK to mark that moment of the first seed being planted here in, well, in Wales, and that spreading out to lots of different community choirs in the UK. And here we are, 30 years later, and people are still being energised and enthused by that music. And I wonder, if you think that if Edisher had never come to the UK, would - what would the landscape be like? Would - the diaspora be finding, you know, be reconnecting with their homeland, with, by the music? Um Would it be feeding in that way, or how would it look?

Teona Lomsadze That's a wonder how Georgian music would, would be spread in the UK. In other scenario, if Edisher and Joseph would

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Of course we know there are other teachers that come like Malkhaz and but Edisher was one of the first, and I think it was um, remarkable because of this event at Giving Voice that the Centre for Performance Research held, because, because um, because there were so many community - Natural Voice leaders,

Teona Lomsadze Absolutely, absolutely and Edisher's persona was very important (Holly: Yes) in that sense as well, because, er from my perspective, he was the ideal candidate, ideal ambassador of Georgian music in the UK, with his openness to all sort of activities and experiences, openness to people with different cultural backgrounds, different kind of musical abilities, er very liberating to, for everybody, basically, as I've heard, because unfortunately I'm, too young, I've heard too young I've never met him.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz I mean, everybody says it, everybody Yes, Yes.

Teona Lomsadze So I think that his persona was also very influential. (Holly Yes,yes) As well as CPR, it was the event organised (Holly - it all came together), absolutely.

Susan Thompson You can hear more about the visit of Edisher and Soso from Joan Mills in [Series 1 episode 7](#) where she talks about the Continuum of Theatre and Song. Joan gave a presentation at the Conference Teo organised in Oxford and it really brought home to me just how influential Giving Voice had been. The Centre for Performance Research over a period of 25 years brought together many exceptional voice workers and Edisher and Joseph were part of that mix. Here's Edisher's daughter in law - Magda, singing Nai-nina with Teo and Sandro.

Music: 'Nainina' sung by Teona Lomsadze, Sandro Shar and Magda Kevlishvili. Live recording by Geoff Burton.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz So Teo, we come to the last question, which, you know what it is, because you've listened to this podcast. But er. What Does Voices of the Ancestors mean to you?

Teona Lomsadze That can mean so many things. So um every time I'm listening to your podcasts, I have different opinions about that, but I guess um (**Holly** - what does it mean to you today?) Yes today - it definitely means - it's related to not my own ancestors, um but kind of my very, very - my ancestors in the deep past, like from centuries ago, um those ancestors who put - kind of universal values into Georgian traditional singing and through their voices over the centuries, kind of transmitted those values to us. So I feel Voices of the Ancestors are definitely, somehow, I don't know, kept in Georgian traditional music for me, because it's it brings me so much energetic, like emotional information, and energy encoded in this music over the centuries, which is just because of our ancestors and their voices, kept and brought to us, right? So in that sense, when I think about Voices of Ancestors, it's like, like, whole process of many centuries bringing that universal values and essence of the universe, basically through Georgian music to us.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Wow.

Teona Lomsadze That's too philosophical?

Holly Taylor-Zuntz No, And I think it's, it's, true for many folk-lores, absolutely, there are truths enshrined in folklore because there was no written language. So in order to pass things down to generations, they had to be either put into stories or songs. So I'm just absolutely loving that you're receiving this information through the songs.

Teona Lomsadze Absolutely yeah, through the Voices of the Ancestors, basically.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Wow. Thank you. (**Teo** Thank you so much.) Thank you so much Teo, what a way to, to end our chat. Yeah, that was absolutely magical.

Teona Lomsadze Thank you so much again for inviting - and I wish your podcast to be around for many years and to reach listeners in all countries of the world.

Holly Taylor-Zuntz Yeah, well, now we have the written language and the recording equipment. Let's pass it on.

Music: Shavlego sung by Mtiebi

Susan Thompson Susan here. That was a burst of Shavlego by Mtiebi - Now Holly and Teo met to record what you've been listening to in November 2024. Since then, Holly and I have felt the need to acknowledge the political situation in Georgia, so we created a mini episode in January 2025. If you're not aware of the situation in Georgia you might like to go and listen to that before going on. Teo also felt strongly that she wanted to speak on the matter, especially given that some of her research has thrown up relationships between folk music and protest. So I went to visit her myself later in January '25, and here's our conversation - a short bonus to end the episode.

Susan Thompson Teo I'm so glad to be here (laughter) I listened back to the time you spent with Holly recording for the episode and (I was very jealous - obviously) but then when I got to that last bit, when she asked you what she thought was going to be the last question for this episode - What Does Voices of the Ancestors Mean to You? - and you said something so philosophical and profound - it was like the energy that you got from the songs, that you felt it contained the wisdom of your ancestors - well all ancestors was like encoded in that vibration from the song, which just - blew my mind. (Teo laughs quietly) But then I got another message from Holly - I'd been sent the recording, lovely but then I got this voice message from her and she said - Oooh I've just had another chat with Teo she's telling me about some research that she did long ago before all these protests about the folksongs and their relationship with protest and it was like oh my goodness, oh we have to go back, we have to go back. So here I am - Holly couldn't make it today but I can.

Teona Lomsadze Thank you so much for being here. (Susan laughs) always so nice to see you, you know.

Susan Thompson It's lovely to be here Teo. And I do want to know, I want to know more about what people are singing, what they used to when they protest. Because it

seems to me that Georgians as well as having this, this amazing history of folk singing within the country. There's a less amazing history but there seems to be a history of protests as well and of protesting.

Teona Lomsadze Absolutely yes um and during the centuries Georgians had to er go through different kind of protest sometimes it has, had a form of just actual war, but er in recent years we had to protest sometimes against our own government as well (Susan mmm, mmm). Er Well let's start er from er when Georgia got independent right, from USSR it was 1989 (Susan uh uh) when the demonstration started and led to independence in 1991 and er demonstration back there were full of traditional music, traditional dance, traditional sound basically. Everything which represented Georgianess erm and um, was resonating to all the protest, participants, I would say. But some of them we're actual folk singers and playing quite a significant role in those protests and we still remember them and one of this figure's are er is Lela Vepkhvadze, a blind singer. who was memorable for everybody with her songs with playing on chong - panduri sorry, Georgian instruments, playing mostly either folk songs or songs with folkish sound, we would say, erm and one of these kind of songs was Salagoblo which was recorded, and this material is still available, er in the same day when Russian tanks arrived in Tbilisi to um, (Susan Wow) er, er to basically um, to er coming towards the protesters and Lela was just standing in this crowd and singing. Urm but some other traditional songs were also very famous and er performed several times during those demonstrations and 'Shavlego' was definitely like a hymn for um, in that time.

Susan Thompson How does that go? the Shavlego.

Teona Lomsadze sings - *Shavleg sheni shavi chokha shavelgo...*

Susan Thompson Yes OK

Teona Lomsadze But er of course there were some other songs performed during this demonstration but, important thing is that traditional music played a big role with them. Um if we come closer to nowadays in the following demonstrations and we had um a Rose Revolution in 2003, traditional music was shaped with contemporary elements more, so there was a message from people that even tho traditions are still valued by us we strive toward modern and contemporary world and towards western world and western music in this case is still important for us (**Susan** yeah) so that was this mixture of two represented in different songs mostly arrangements of traditional songs (**Susan** Aah - interesting) like contemporary arrangements or er (**Susan** yeah) yes er versions. And then er, if we talk about protests which take place at the moment in Tbilisi er absolutely extraordinary er movement I would say. Er because Georgians at the

moment fear er um that country striving towards Europe for many decades and centuries I would say, might be shifting er unwillingly and forcefully towards Russia by our government and government already declared that the past and so Georgians at the moment do their best to um prove that um European future which was declared in the constitution of Georgia and was supported by more than 80% of Georgian citizens, er just a few years ago. It's still something we need to strive for and towards. And you will hear that even tho there is a European Anthem played together with Georgian Anthem these days Georgian traditional music plays a huge role in the demonstrations. And it's a massive gathering of people for almost two months, a daily gathering, and it's been, it has been in Christmas period, right, so imagine all this thousands of people singing Georgian Christmas song 'Alilo' and they had very nicely organized different stages on Rustaveli Avenue and different spots where people would sing different kind of Alilo's. And then people come, coming from Georgian churches singing 'Alilo' and with this little, little processions and joining this big crowd on Rustaveli and singing together then, so massively singing together. So ah, whole day was er basically formed around 'Alilo'.

Music underscore: 'Khorumi' from Merisi

Then another very memorable er was er 'Khorumi' performance it was very emotional because even though it was led by Sukhishvili dancers and some other dancers, whole crowd, thousands of people were dancing Khorumi - this is a war song. And 'Khorumi' is very significant piece for Georgians - of course conveys this meaning of er struggle, meaning of protest, meaning of fighting against some er power but er dance er as well er accompanying the actual music part was absolutely incredible. Erm as we see all the time, almost every day how my friends as well, and I'm super proud of them for that, for fighting erm for our and our children's future, and Georgia's future - Georgia's European future which is very important for all of us. And they..

Susan Thompson I can feel you getting so emotional - (**Teona** - I do, I do) I just want to hug you.

Teona Lomsadze Thankyou and it is very difficult for me honestly that I'm not in Georgia at the moment. And I can't fully participate in this moment (Susan yes, yes) er but er very emotional to see how er folk singers and my friends as well er sing traditional songs like 'Khasanbegura', of course er songs which have this protesting mood but together with some very fun songs because its a peaceful demonstration. (Susan: Yes, that's true) It has a very important message that we are here, we will struggle, we will fight until the end until we achieve erm new elections, until we achieve er freeing this basically this regime prisoners um but of course life goes on and we enjoy being here, we enjoy this peaceful crowd and all this is basically expressed

through singing as well, so that's why they also dance sing some famous like a joke song or just um fun songs.

Susan Thompson Ah that was because, I wondered about that, because there is the shierebi tradition and I wondered are they is that happening are people making up words as they go along to songs?

Teona Lomsadze There would be actually very nice, I haven't seen recordings of shairebi (Susan I haven't either - No I haven't) but I've seen some other, like a fun songs, some er songs from Georgian iconic movies which represent this light soul of Georgia (Susan Aah OK) and like loving each other and having great time I mean with each other and these kind of songs and shairebi you are right and correct usually reflects the ongoing process or what is happening at the moment right. It can be teasing er, it can be criticising, it can be making jokes but mostly two people are having that um, performance.

Susan Thompson It's really interesting to get an insight because I've been wondering well, how would people, what would be being sung and how would people choose it, and why. It makes perfect sense to have that mix of uplifting and keeping everybodies spirits up, as well as the sort of songs that are associated with being powerful, and then I'm sure there's a whole stream of patriot songs because I'm sure I've heard people sing things like 'Tsa Piruz'.

Teona Lomsadze Absolutely 'Tsa Piruz' as well and all sorts of different kind of Mravaljhamieri's song all the time. And er what is very important is that even though they are folk singers who mostly folk singers, but not exclusively though. Who initiate this songs er whole crowd sing along, whatever they can whatever they manage because it's not easy to sing 'Khasanbegura' right? But at least you can hold bani or parts of bani.

Susan Thompson We thought you'd like to hear what Teo means about 'Khasanbegura' not being an easy song to sing - this version is by [Kimilia](#) with Zoé Perret singing the top voice. And yes that's the same Zoé from [episode 4](#) in the first series.

Music: 'Khasanbegura' sung by [Kimilia](#)

And I've seen this - this is most emotional for me, people who might have not sung before but they might know just lyrics of this patriotic songs but they want to invest they want to join and they want to be part so um in that sense Georgian traditional music at the moment plays a huge role to unite all these people around one idea er one fight

basically they are all part of ...and I really really hope that this um fair movement, I would say fair, peaceful absolutely beautiful movement with very healthy young people and healthy dreams and wishes will be successful. And very proud that this young people, very contemporary, very modern values, with very modern values, value traditional music so much. And teenagers are seen to join these folk singers the first, so that's very emotional for me to see how tradition keeps existing and keeps er being very important, like holds this importance all over the centuries.

Susan Thompson Thank you so much - it's perfect - I think it's perfect. (laughter)

Susan Thompson Thank you for listening to Voices of the Ancestors with your hosts Holly Taylor-Zuntz and Susan Thompson. Special thanks to our guest, Dr Teona Lomsadze who made time for two interviews.

Our thanks go to Geoff Burton for sharing his live recordings of Teo singing at the conference she organised at Oxford University.

We've listened to your feedback and have included details of the music within the episode. You can also read these details in the transcript which you'll find on our website www.voicesoftheancestors.co.uk. While you're there please consider supporting us by visiting our donate page.

Bye for now.

Music in this episode:

Intro: 'Makharia', chonguri. From the Ialoni album, '[I fell in love with that sweet voice](#)'

Underscore: Teo and friends singing 'Jer Ar Ikneba Gvian'

'Maspindzelsa mkhiarulsa' sung by Teona Lomsadze, Sandro Shar and [Nana Mzchavanadze](#). Live recording by Geoff Burton

Underscore: 'Tsaiqvanes tamar kali' sung by [Maspindzeli](#)

'Me var da chemi nabadi', from Imereti sung by Aidio

'Chona Alilo' from Imereti sung by Odila

'Dideba chvens shekreba' sung by Teona Lomsadze, Sandro Shar and [Nana Mzhavanadze](#). Live recording by Geoff Burton

'Kirialesa' sung by [Kalta Choir](#)

'Nainina' sung by Teona Lomsadze, Sandro Shar and Magda Kevlishvili. Live recording by Geoff Burton.

'Shavlego' sung by [Mtiebi](#)

'Khasanbegura' sung by [Kimilia](#)

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