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TRADITIONAL MUSICAL CULTURES  
IN CENTRAL-EASTERN EUROPE.  
ECCLESIASTICAL AND FOLK TRANSMISSION

Edited by PIOTR DAHLIG

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Translated and co-edited by  
John Comber

Summaries in Polish by  
Piotr Dahlig

Graphic design, layout and typesetting  
Ewa Stawińska-Dahlig

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Jerzy Piechnat

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TRIINU OJAMAA, ANDREAS KALKUN

ORTHODOX CHANTING AND TRADITIONAL SINGING:  
CONFLICTS AND COMPROMISES

Background

The article concludes the results of the pilot study carried out in Setomaa in 2006. Seto traditional culture has been very attractive for the researchers more than a hundred years: many books and articles have been published on their folklore, traditional music, religious customs, etc. Mostly the authors writing about Setos use the Estonian term *Setu*. As historically this term has some pejorative undertone we prefer the ethnonym *Seto*.<sup>1</sup>

Setos live in the area between the Lutheran Estonia inhabited by people speaking the Finno-Ugric language like Setos, and the Orthodox Russia the inhabitants of which belong to the Indo-European language family. It means that linguistically Setos are closer to their western and by religion to their eastern neighbours.

Nowadays the ancient Seto territory named Setomaa ('Seto land') is divided into two parts by the Estonian-Russian border. The part we are

<sup>1</sup> See also eg. Kristin Kuutma, 'Collaborative Representations: Interpreting the Creation of a Sami Ethnography and a Seto Epic', *FF Communications*, 137 (289). (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica 2006), 56–62.

concerned with has been incorporated into the Republic of Estonia and, using the name Setomaa in the current article we refer only to the Estonian part of the whole.

Setomaa is a small area with the territory of about 420 sq km (the area of the Republic of Estonia is 45,215 sq km). Setomaa consists of four rural municipalities (Mikitamäe, Värskä, Meremäe, and Misso). We have no access to the official numerical data of the people living in Setomaa and identifying themselves as Setos. In 1974–75 the population was 6,780<sup>2</sup> but in the meantime it has diminished because many of Setos have migrated to the other places of Estonia or assimilated with the Estonians. By unofficial data the number of inhabitants on the territory of Setomaa at present is approximately 4,500 people.

Seto Orthodox congregations belong to the Constantinople Patriarchy. Setomaa is the oldest and most solid Orthodox region in Estonia. Currently there are five active congregations in Setomaa which join about 80% of the inhabitants.

For different reasons there are very few special studies on the Orthodox singing in Setomaa: we can name only the article by Jelena Gandšu (2002)<sup>3</sup> and doctoral thesis by Jeffers Engelhardt (2005)<sup>4</sup>. In her article “Vaimuliku laulu folkloriseerumisest Värskä Püha Jüri kirikus” Gandšu describes the folklorization process of Orthodox songs. In the doctoral thesis “Singing in “Transition”: Musical Practices and Ideologies of Renewal in the Orthodox Church of Estonia” Engelhardt examines liturgical singing in the Orthodox Church of Estonia (incl. Setomaa) observing it in the broader socio-political context (disintegration of the Soviet Union and post-socialist transition period).

As far as Seto traditional vocal music is concerned, the situation is much better. Seto culture is unique: preparation for including it in the list of UNESCO cultural heritage started in 2005. Setomaa is the only region in Estonia where we can meet the carriers of the oral heritage, including the people who can still sing traditional songs in (almost)

<sup>2</sup> Elizaveta Rihter [Елизавета Рихтер], ‘Интеграция сету с эстонской нацией’ [Integration of Setu into Estonian nation], in *Eesti talurahva majanduse ja olme arenguajoni XIX ja XX sajandil*. (Tallinn 1979), 97.

<sup>3</sup> Jelena Gandšu, ‘Vaimuliku laulu folkloriseerumisest Värskä Püha Jüri kirikus’, in *Lemmeleht. Pro Folkloristika*. (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum 2002), 17–24.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffers Engelhardt, *Singing in “Transition”: Musical Practices and Ideologies of Renewal in the Orthodox Church of Estonia*. Volume 1. Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Division of the Humanities in candidacy for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. (University of Chicago, Illinois 2005).

ancient manner. K. Kuutma has characterized Setomaa as a 'folkloric reservoir' that precisely expresses the cultural essence of that region<sup>5</sup>. We have to mention that nowadays the Setos does not mostly make music in traditional situations but in 'folklore groups' belonging to the local cultural institutions. These groups are mostly oriented to performances in folk music festivals and concerts for tourists who visit Setomaa. Seven choirs<sup>6</sup> of this kind are active in Setomaa currently and about seventy people in all take part in the folklore groups. Seto choirs as folklore groups differ from most of the other Estonian folklore groups: (1) they sing only Seto songs while the repertoire of other groups often consists of the songs from different regions, incl. Seto; (2) at least some of Seto choirs contain singers who really had acquired their musical skills in the traditional way so that we can talk about some kind of cultural continuity. Due to the named reasons we are concerned rather with the choirs as Seto traditional choirs (in some publications also named as 'leelo choirs') than folklore groups.

Seto polyphonic traditional singing has an important role in their culture – this is one of their identity markers. The Estonian ethnomusicologists have studied different musical aspects of Seto traditional songs, eg. metrics<sup>7</sup>, the musical structure of the laments<sup>8</sup>, the vocal polyphony and specific Seto one-three-semitone mode<sup>9</sup>, the historical layers of traditional songs as well as the broader cultural context of the Seto music<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> K. Kuutma, Collaborative Representations...op. cit., 61.

<sup>6</sup> The choirs are Leiko, Kuldats'auk, Tsibihärbläseq, Laanõtsirk, Hõpõhelmeq, Helmine and Helbi village choir. Seto traditional songs have also been practised outside the Seto area: in Tartu (Liinats'uraq), Tallinn (Sõsarõq, Siidisõsarõq etc), Põltsamaa (Kull'akõsõq), and Võru (Helmekaalaq).

<sup>7</sup> Vaike Sarv, 'Setu itkuvärsi meetrikast', in *Keel ja Kirjandus*, 1993/5, 282–292.

<sup>8</sup> Vaike Sarv, 'Setu mõrsjaitku muusikaline struktuur eeslaulja partii põhjal', in *Tagasipöördumatus. Sõnad ja hääl* (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi folkloristika osakond 2000), 119–194.

<sup>9</sup> Žanna Pärtlas, 'Tähelepanekuid setu laulu laadiehitusest ja mitmehäälsusest', in *Teater. Muusika. Kino*, 1997/1, 23–28. Žanna Pärtlas, 'Viisi rütmilisest vormist ja laadirütmist setu mitmehäälses rahvalaulus', in Jaago, T.; Sarv, M. (eds), *Regilaul – keel, muusika, poetika* (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum 2001), 117–152.

<sup>10</sup> Ingrid Rüütel, 'Setu rahvalaulu kihistused ja etnokultuuriline taust', in *Keel ja Kirjandus* 1999/1, 33–52.

All the ethnomusicologists who have had some interest in Seto traditional singing have also mentioned their specific timbre but rather in informal discussions with colleagues than in their writings. We have no studies about the timbre: in earlier times the researchers had no technical equipment and skills for acoustical analysis, which is necessary for timbre studies in deeper level. Nowadays all is possible in technical sense but we have to ask, what about the timbre? Žanna Pärtlas said in the conference paper summarizing the fieldworks in Setomaa June 2006 that the traditional singing manner has substantially been changed in comparison with the earlier times: the timbre has become softer and the singing in general is more similar to cantilena<sup>11</sup>. It means that the specific traditional singing manner became closer to the 'ordinary singing' or the manner Setos also tend to use in church singing. In spite of that cognition the Seto timbre as something unique (at least in Estonian context) is still alive in the Seto traditional cultural environment and in the scholarly circles, too. This ambivalent situation was one of the reasons that motivated us to start the current project.

Some members of the traditional choirs have also been members of the church choirs for many years. Involving in two choirs had given rise to the conflicts of different kind in Seto community as well as in the singers' mind. It had emerged through the singers' recollections published by Andreas Kalkun in a book „Leiko. 40 aastat Värška leelokoori”<sup>12</sup> dedicated to the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the most famous Seto choir named Leiko. These recollections have been the other important reason for further parallel research of Orthodox chanting and traditional singing.

#### Aims and methods

The project is divided into two stages: pilot study and main study. The aims of the whole project are following:

- To define the real essence of the conflicts caused by belonging in different choirs (to describe the conflicting situations; to examine if something has changed in comparison with the earlier times because the people's look at the life has changed more tolerant in general).

<sup>11</sup> Žanna Pärtlas; Andrea Kalkun, 'Leiko, Helmise ja Kuldats'auga mitmekanalilisest salvestamisest', in *Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiivi kogumiskonverents* (Tartu 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Andreas Kalkun (ed.), *Leiko. 40 aastat Värška leelokoori* (Tartu 2004).

- To find out the ways the singers behave in conflicting situations or, in other words – what kind of compromises they have to make.

In the pilot study our primary goal was to find out the concrete topics which would be prospective for the further research. For that purpose we interviewed four female singers. Two of them participated both in the church choir and Seto choir; the other two belonged only to church or traditional Seto choir (see table 1).

<b>A-singer</b>	Church choir alto	Seto choir <i>torrõ</i>
<b>B-singer</b>	Church choir soprano	Seto choir <i>torrõ &amp; killõ</i>
<b>C-singer</b>	Church choir alto	
<b>D-singer</b>		Seto choir <i>torrõ</i>

Table 1. The singers' participation in different choirs. *Torrõ* is the Seto term for the lower part in the traditional heterophonic chorus; *killõ* denotes the high voice.

The singers A and B both sing in the church and traditional Seto choirs; the C-singer sings only in the church choir, and the D-singer sings only in the Seto choir. The singers A and D belong to the Leiko choir but the B-singer participates in the Kuldats'auk choir. Both traditional choirs are from one and the same small town named Värskä. The singers A, B, and C are members of the choir of Church of St. George which is situated in the same town. The D-singer never participated in a church choir but belongs to the congregation.

During the interviews the singers behaved differently. The A-singer was timorous: she almost spoke in whispers. She did not like to talk about involving in two choirs and her answers were vague. She asked us not to make the recorded interview public.

The B-singer was very open-minded. She tried to answer the questions as well as she could but she also confessed that she is unable to answer the questions concerning Seto-specific singing manner. She was not interested in what we would do with the recorded interview.

The C-singer was also open-minded but she asked us to keep the things she told about the other singers and of different conflicting situations

between us. Her opinions were the most critical in comparison with the other singers we interviewed.

The D-singer was totally different from the previous individuals. She was a former teacher and she had been the leader of a traditional Seto choir for many years. She was familiar with the discourse and gave concrete answers.

We made free interviews on four topics:

1. Singing secular songs in the period of Lent;
2. Wearing Seto national costumes and adornments in Orthodox church;
3. Singing the Setu traditional songs in church;
4. Differences in timbre of Orthodox chanting and Seto traditional singing.

### Singing secular songs in the period of Lent

Women singing was tightly regulated in the traditional Seto culture. Orthodox women for example had to give up all the secular entertainment, singing included, during the Lent. A lot of stories from Setomaa have been documented in the Estonian Folklore Archives, which express the fear about the violation of Lent and punishment, which follow the violation. For example Jevdokia Palo said in 1940:

My niece was about to go to the army. It was the Lent period, the middle week of the Great Lent, so-called 'Cross week'. They were making beer and prepared for the party. I was so sad! I was thinking if they start to party and sing then I don't know where I would escape. I don't want to hear party sounds during the Lent.

My sister-in-law went to feed a horse, the horse kicked her. The God saved her so that the bone was not broken. No one had a party or a party mood any longer. Thank God the leg also healed. (The Estonian Folklore Archives (EFA) II 286, 159/60 (131a) < Setu, Palo village – Ello Kirss < Ode Palo born 1869 (1940).

In the Soviet period when the spontaneously created Seto choirs were institutionalised and they started to operate in cultural centres of sovkhoses and kolkhozes, the singing traditions also changed. Singing, which was initially related to feasts and festivities, became secondary and beside that performances on the concerts were becoming more and more important. Private genres (e.g. laments) were also brought to the stage (Sarv 1999). The situation developed where the singers were forced to perform songs outside their natural context. Irreligious cultural officials

did not accept religious customs and also arranged performances in the period of Lent.

If the concert took place in the period of Lent, the Orthodox members of the Seto traditional choir had to make a choice: whether to miss the concert or to come into collision with religious customs, which do not allow singing at that time. By our sources in 1960–70s the violation of the religious norms connected with the Lent became quite a crucial issue. The singers said that some of them went to the concerts through the forest hiding their national costumes because they knew that the village people could disapprove of them. An excerpt from the interview with Maria Ryžikova (12/09/2004):

At the beginning it was a great shame to sing in the choir during the Lent, you just wouldn't dare to. Jekaterina said how she went through the forest during the Lent and put the national costume on in the forest so that people wouldn't see. Indeed, it was awful. The feeling was following: "Oh, my God! How shall we go singing at the time like that?" But now I am kind of used to it, the Lent doesn't matter anymore. It is a sin but you can do nothing about it. At the beginning it was told in the village: "how do you go singing during the Lent, aren't you ashamed?"<sup>13</sup>.

Later on the singers used to look at the singing in the concerts like at a work that just had to be done in spite of time.

Our interviews made in the frame of the pilot study gave no new information about the problem under discussion, probably first of all because the socio-cultural situation had changed. Leiko choir for instance, which consists of older and more religious singers does not take part in the concerts very often nowadays. Thus, they can follow the ancient Lent customs and keep silence. The singers of the other Seto choir in Väraska named Kuldats'auk are younger. They are not as religious as the Leiko singers. For that reason they don't perceive singing profane songs in the period of Lent as a problematic act. In addition to that, the Seto culture as a whole has become more secular. Many of modern Setos don't have respect to the religious taboos. The use and meaning of traditional songs have been changed, too; the songs live their 'secondary life' in public concerts performed by folklore groups.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 44.

## Wearing Seto national costumes and adornments in Orthodox Church

Based on the data by some ethnologists, the wearing of certain Seto adornments was prohibited in church. It is assumed that adornments were related to pre-Christian healing and fertility rites in Seto culture, therefore adornments wearing was regulated with certain customs<sup>14</sup>.

The prohibition is primarily concerned with a great brooch. Previously the wearing of the brooch was restricted: still at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century very young ladies and married women at the fertile age wore a brooch on very festive occasions. As far as church is concerned, only simple adornments were worn there. A white linsey-woolsey frock *räbik*, which covered most of the adornments, belonged to the outfit of Seto women. Today mainly the women wear national costumes who sing in the Seto choirs, irrespective of their age and place of performance. The frocks are not worn anymore and the adornments of all the singers are conspicuously big and always visible.

We had information that today's elderly Seto women had worn national costumes in church. We were interested whether the women were still aware that wearing certain adornments implies to sexuality and fertility, and if yes, whether this awareness regulates their behaviour to some extent. It became evident from the interviews that elderly women remembered that earlier only everyday outfit of national costume was worn (without a brooch, and other adornments were worn less). At the same time the connotations with adornments are not important to women anymore. Taboos are withdrawn to the decorative value of adornments.

### Interview 1.

**Interviewer:** How about wearing adornments in church in the past?

**C-singer:** If it was a usual Sunday, everyday Seto clothes were worn to church. It was not so that you were too adorned.

**Interviewer:** Did anybody tell you that the brooch must not be worn to church?

**C-singer:** No, there was nothing like that. If you don't do any foolishness with the brooch, then the brooch itself doesn't do anything. But if you jump and hop in church, it is a great sin.

<sup>14</sup> Mare Piho, 'Weiblicher Metallschmuck der Setukesen des 19.–Mitte des 20. Jh.', in *Yearbook of Estonian National Museum XXXIX*, (Tartu 1992), 78.

It became evident from the interviews that today Seto national costumes are worn in church related to the occasions, which among other things also include singing secular songs. Singing secular songs in turn involves more free behaviour. The interviewees were more critical about free behaviour than wearing national costumes. The last sentence of aforementioned interview refers to that: “jumping and hopping” apparently describes spontaneous movements, which accompany singing of Seto songs. “Clothing and adornments don't do anything, but singing Seto songs is inappropriate in church”, said C-singer repeatedly.

When we had finished the interview with A-singer (it was our first interview), A-singer decided to show us a photo album where were the photos about foreign travels of Leiko and church choirs. Our attention was attracted by the photo, which was taken about Värška church choir and where all the singers were wearing Seto clothes and adornments (photo 1).



Värška church choir singing in Espoo, Finland, during the inauguration ceremony for the foundation stone of a new Orthodox church. Private collection.

National costume is a usual clothing of traditional Seto choir, at the same time the church choir, the singers of which are wearing national costume is extremely unusual. It is remarkable that all the women in the photos

are wearing Seto clothes: those who sing in both choirs and also those who sing only in the church choir and have expressed their critical attitude towards secular culture in previous interviews. The interviewer, who was astonished by finding unexpected photo, asked whether the church choir wearing Seto clothes sang orthodox chants or traditional Seto songs. A-singer replied that the choir sang Seto songs.

Next day the C-singer showed us the same photo. She had also taken part in the inauguration ceremony. To our question, what songs they sang when the photo was taken, she answered that these were orthodox chants. We also asked why the church choir was wearing Seto clothing during the inauguration ceremony.

## Interview 2.

Interviewer: Why did you wear Seto clothing?

C-singer: I really don't know, the Finns liked it and they told us to.

Interviewer: But was it appropriate?

C-singer: Clothing doesn't cause harm but if you sing the [Seto] songs in church,<sup>15</sup> it is inappropriate.

Thus, we got contradictory answers to our question, what kind of song the church choir was singing, presented on the Photo 1. Later, while observing the photo more attentively, we noticed that the singer in the middle was moving like the singers traditionally do singing Seto songs.

Why did the singers answer differently?

The A-singer is deeply religious. She had sung in church choir for many years. After her husband's death some years ago she felt loneliness and also decided to join Seto choir. When we started to ask questions about involving in two choirs, she immediately said that one can not serve two Gods. But she also added that the priest once told her that singing in two choirs is not a sin. In spite of that it seemed to us that she couldn't solve this problem at the core till now. She talked very carefully on these topics that might contain some kind of contradictions between sacred and secular.

The interviewer's question about the songs they performed wearing Seto clothing, seemed to be unexpected for the A-singer: her look was very surprised. Nevertheless, she didn't take time for thinking

<sup>15</sup> The C-singer doesn't mean special concerts in church but first of all singing Seto songs in connection with some ecclesiastical event.

over the ambiguity (church choir wears national costumes that belong to secular culture) and gave an unexpected answer to us (church choir singing profane songs).

The C-singer sings only in church choir. The interviews 1 and 2 refer to her bad attitude towards singing the Seto songs. (It is known from earlier interviews that she doesn't do it, at least in public.) At the same time the interviews demonstrate clearly her tolerant attitude to wearing Seto national costumes.

Based on this information we supposed that the valid variant would be the third variant: the choir performed the Orthodox chants and also Seto songs but not all the singers took part in singing the Seto songs.

During the next visit to Väraska a week later, we got another photo which denied our assumption (see photo 2).



Väraska church choir in Espoo participating in the inauguration ceremony for the foundation stone of a new Orthodox church. Singer C is dancing with singer A. Private collection.

The singers of the church choir, we can see in the photo, are probably performing a Seto game song. Thus, there is no doubt that all the members of the church choir independently whether they belong to Seto choir or not, participated in performance of Seto traditional songs.

### Singing the Seto traditional songs in Orthodox Church

As traditional Seto music is not clerical but secular, it is natural that it was not performed in church. At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Seto culture was strongly influenced by secular Estonian culture with Lutheran background, the Setos were beginning to violate old taboos gradually. It is known that in 1920s, in relation to Seto song festivals, organised by Estonians, the Seto women were taken to sing in the territory of Pechora Monastery. For example Anne Vabarna, the greatest Seto bard participated in that event and this singing place seemed also rather unusual and unprecedented to her. The songs have been collected from her, the text of which shows that she was confused about violating this custom and considered it wrong. The following song excerpt (free translation) shows that the violation of taboo also caused the problems to the bard in her community.

I heard that we would go to the monastery  
That the party shall be arranged in the monastery garden.  
I dropped a tear because of that,  
The second on my cheeks.  
I shall not enjoy myself in the monastery garden,  
I shall not sing near the monastery,  
The silver crosses shall ring there,  
Golden domes shall chime there,  
Angels shall hear our voice,  
Women's screed shall reach the God  
But if the angels are startled,  
Good Lord shall become sad  
Pious Mary becomes quiet?  
It's not a place for entertainment,  
It's not a place for joy,  
It's a place for worshipping,  
A place for bending

The following song excerpt shows that the violation of the taboo caused the bard problems in her community.

A hundred mouths told me that  
 Ten tongues twisted:  
 "Houses of God are golden there,  
 Mary's face is laid there,  
 We must not enjoy ourselves there,  
 To strike up a tune in the place of mourning."

In the interviews carried out in 2006, it is concluded that different singers have different attitude towards singing in church. C-singer was very critical, telling us about some cases. For example, during the visit of the Patriarch Bartholomeus to Setomaa the choir performed Seto songs in front of the altar. The C-singer told us:

First we performed the chants. But then – off it goes: they started with their Seto songs! My hair stood on end, you know. I felt so bad. To sing these songs in church – it had never happened before, all one's life ... I am quite old, I will be 83, but I have never seen before that Seto songs are sung in church. You can sing Seto songs in the wedding, at the parties, while visiting people; but in church, in front of the altar ...

She also told us that because of the singing Seto songs in church bad things happened to the singers: some of them became ill or even passed away. She emphasized that it had happened because God didn't like such things.

Actually the Setu songs in church were performed by permission of the priest. This information came out in the same interview made with the C-singer. But the fact had no influence to her attitude that was purely negative.

The singers A, B, and D were much more unemotional concerning this problem. Seto traditional singing like their clothing belongs to the 'Seto cultural trademarks'. It is used to perform Seto songs for the important guests during the secular ceremonies and sometimes they do the same in church in similar situations.

#### Differences in timbre of Orthodox chanting and Seto traditional singing

Our last problem is through musicological and the most complicated at the same time. Some musicologists who have studied music making in Setomaa had mentioned that Seto church choirs sound different from the other choirs of the Estonian Orthodox churches. By

musicologist's opinion the main reason is that some persons sing both in the church and traditional choirs and use traditional manner of singing in both cases. The main peculiarities of traditional manner are sharp timbre achieved by singing 'by throat' and very loud voice in comparison with the dynamic properties of the singing in other regions of Estonia. It is possible that the neutral third (*Seto tertis*) also plays its role.

Looking for the earlier studies that at least in some extent could touch on the singing manner (first of all the timbre or some aspects of it), three writings attracted our attention: the article by Jaan Sarv<sup>16</sup> (1980) "Расшифровка сетуского многоголосия при помощи многоканальной студийной аппаратуры" (About the Notation of Setu Folk Songs by Means of Multi-Track Studio-Apparatus), the article written by Leea Virtanen<sup>17</sup> (1994) "Singers on their songs: the act of singing as perceived by singers in Setu region of Estonia today", and previously referred Jeffers Engelhardt's doctoral thesis.

The article by J. Sarv is the only published source where we can find some references to the role of timbre in Seto polyphonic singing tradition. It bases on the recording made in 1976 in the studio of Estonian Broadcasting. The recordings were made by 8-track recorder and dynamic microphones directional properties of which enabled to separate different voices perfectly.<sup>18</sup> The singers came from Seto villages Väraska and Treski. J. Sarv, evaluating the skills of the choir, says that it is ethnographically authentic enough to concern it as traditional choir. J. Sarv's scientific aims were to describe the modal structure and heterophonic peculiarities of Seto songs but he also emphasized that it is necessary to study the timbre and characterize the style of performance of each singer in order to create a more exact idea about the components of the chords. Timbre problems were not J. Sarv's main interest but in spite of that we can find in his article a short verbal description of seven recorded voices. The timbre of three singers has been characterized as sharp and the timbre of four singers as soft. One of the recorded singers is still active in Seto choir and also in Väraska church choir. She was one of the singers with soft timbre. This is the fact we can interpret on several ways: (1)

<sup>16</sup> Jaan Sarv (1941–1988) was an Estonian musicologist and folklorist. Beginning from 1966 he also worked at the Estonian Broadcasting as a sound editor. The position enabled him to use innovative technique for making sound recordings in Setomaa.

<sup>17</sup> Leea Virtanen (1935–2002) was a Professor of folkloristics at the University of Helsinki.

<sup>18</sup> The recordings made by J. Sarv have not preserved.

specific Seto timbre had already changed before 70s; (2) not all the Setos have had sharp timbre – it would be individual, etc.

L. Virtanen's 'Singers on their songs...' bases not on her own fieldwork experiences but on the information she has got from Estonian ethnomusicologists and folklorists. Her writing under discussion belongs to gender studies: it deals with the question how the Seto women interpret their female-centred music and culture in general. Nevertheless, she has paid attention also to the Seto timbre mentioning that it is distinctively laryngeal and very difficult to imitate. By L. Virtanen the specific timbre is no longer used by younger Setos and they adopt singing style from outside the tradition.<sup>19</sup>

J. Engelhardt has made fieldworks in Setomaa (mainly Värskä and Saatse) in 2003. His observations are very interesting from our point of view. J. Engelhardt describes how the traditional Seto manner of singing (*leelo*) and church singing can mix with each other in the mind of people on the basis of neutral third (*Seto tertis*) that is one of the peculiarities of Seto traditional singing.

In speaking with some of my friends from Tallinn who have made multiple journeys to Saatse, they talk about the "amazing Setu third" (*imeline Setu tertis*) that can be heard there. Their response to singing at the Church of St. Paraskeva is to align it with *leelo*, the familiar and iconic category of Seto musical distinction. Thus, they liken Anna's remarkable leadership to the lead singer (*sõnoline*) in *leelo* choirs and the "amazing Setu third" (the women who extemporize above Anna's melody) to the high, sharp-timbred *killõ* part that characterizes *leelo*. In truth, there is very little, if anything, common to *leelo* singing and singing at the Church of St. Paraskeva. Anna is not involved in any *leelo* choir [---]<sup>20</sup>.

By J. Engelhardt, the "amazing Setu third" as his friends define it, in Orthodox chanting actually means that the singer is out of tune. J. Engelhardt supplements that the singers from Värskä have emphasized

<sup>19</sup> Leea Virtanen, 'Singers on their songs: the act of singing as perceived by singers in Setu region of Estonia today', in Michael Branch and Celia Hawkesworth (eds), *The Uses of Tradition: A Comparative Enquiry into the Nature, Uses and Functions of Oral Poetry in the Balkans, the Baltic and Africa*. (Finland 1994), 231–250.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffers Engelhardt, *Singing in "Transition" ...*, op. cit., 336–337.

that church singing and Seto traditional singing are entirely different things.

The interviews we made in Värskä three years later also demonstrated that the singers were aware of the differences between these two singing manners. We did not deal with 'Seto third', our main goal was to find out whether the nowadays singers perceive difference between the timbres of church singing and traditional singing, and if yes then how they comment it.

### Interview 3.

**Interviewer:** What is the difference between the Seto voice and church chanting voice?

**B-singer:** Church chant is softer, the Seto song comes from the throat. With the throat voice. But this [church chanting] is not with laryngeal voice, it is... oh, I don't know where the vocal cords then ... this variation... I don't know... But the voice for church chanting is definitely softer and milder.

The C- and D-singer described the differences between timbres (laryngeal voice vs. soft voice) in similar way but they also told us about the problems which are caused by mixing different singing manners using 'wrong timbre'.

### Interview 4.

**Interviewer:** Actually some church choir singers sing in Seto choirs too. A-singer sings in Leiko and some others ...

**B-singer:** They sing, but like A-singer – her voice is in Seto song more like in the church, she is not with laryngeal voice.

**Interviewer:** Does she sing differently?

**B-singer:** Yes, especially when she leads the song, then you recognise immediately that she doesn't sing in Seto manner.

### Interview 5.

**Interviewer:** There is a wonderful alto in Saatse choir, this Anna ...<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Anna sings in the choir of Church of St. Paraskeva in Saatse (cf. also Engelhardt, op. cit.).

C-singer: Yes, but this alto shall boil all this soup as she sings at a Seto choir voice.

Interviewer: What is the Seto choir voice like?

C-singer: Seto choir voice is like we talk. This is not something the choir leader could conduct ... They in their Saatse choir lead their own screed.

Interviewer: This Anna there has a really loud voice.

C-singer: Yes. With this [speaking voice] the loud voice comes. You may even sing so that house walls would break. And then those who are singing the right song – alto part, cannot sing it properly beside that.

#### Interview 6.

C-singer: Here [in church choir] is this that B-singer – this soprano. She cannot sing.

Interviewer: But how does B-singer sing?

C-singer: Well, this B-Singer sings with Seto *killõ* (high voice), it should be said so.

Our informants criticized mainly A- and B-singer who sing both in church and traditional choirs. The A-singer first belonged to the church choir (at present she is the leader of the choir) and joined Seto traditional choir later. The co-singers in Seto choir say that her voice is too weak and thus they perceive her timbre as ‘church timbre’. The B-singer started in traditional choir and hereafter became a member of the church choir. The co-singers in church choir blame her for singing with too sharp voice which is not suitable for Orthodox chanting but belongs to the traditional singing manner.

The D-singer explained that the timbre can cause problems. For those who are used to sing with ‘Seto voice’ it is difficult or even impossible to sing with ‘soft voice’. The D- and B-singer also told us that the Father Andreas who came from another region of Estonia and worked in Värskas in 1990s regarded their timbre as a cultural peculiarity of Seto area and he did not criticize singing with the ‘Seto voice’ in church.

During our research trip to Setomaa we videotaped the liturgy of St. Anastasia’s Day in the Church of St. George. Regardless of singers’ sayings we have to conclude on the basis of this video that the choir

sounds different from the other Orthodox choirs of Estonia<sup>22</sup> but nevertheless, the problem of the 'wrong timbre' may be overestimated.

### Conclusion

In the article we give the review about the pilot project *Orthodox Chanting and Traditional Singing: Conflicts and Compromises*.<sup>23</sup>

In the course of the project we interviewed Seto female singers on four topics: Singing secular songs in the period of Lent; Wearing Seto national costumes and adornments in Orthodox Church; Singing the Setu traditional songs in Orthodox Church; Differences in timbre of Orthodox chanting and Seto traditional singing. Our main goal was to find out the topics which would be prospective for ongoing research.

On the basis of the results we decided not to continue with the topic *Singing secular songs in the period of Lent* as the questioning gave no new information. In conclusion we can say that the Seto culture has become more secular nowadays. Many of modern Setos do not have respect to the religious taboos and singing during the Lent that was a burning issue for instance in 1960–70s, has lost its importance.

The topics *Wearing Seto national costumes and adornments in Orthodox Church* and *Singing the Setu traditional songs in Orthodox Church* where inseparable for the singers. When we asked the questions about wearing the Seto national costumes, the singers by and by started to talk about the singing secular songs in church. The presumed reason is that the singers wear national costumes only in connection with the events where they also perform secular songs. The singer who belongs only to the church choir was very critical in that respect. The singers who sing both in church and traditional choirs or only in Seto traditional choirs were more tolerant in singing secular songs in Orthodox Church.

The topic *Differences in timbre of Orthodox chanting and Seto traditional singing* was proved to be more problematic. All the singers perceived difference in timber between two singing manner but it was very difficult for them to explain the essence of the differences verbally. The singers claimed consensually that Seto Orthodox chanting differs from chanting in the other Orthodox Churches of Estonia being Seto-specific. We suppose that the distinctiveness may have different reasons

<sup>22</sup> This assumption bases on the CD *Eesti Apostlik-Õigeusu Kiriku Laule. Hymns of the Orthodox Church of Estonia* compiled by J. Engelhardt in 2004.

<sup>23</sup> The project has been supported by the grant of the Estonian Science Foundation No 6730 *Research of traditional vocal polyphony in applying contemporary methods*.

and roots, e.g. singers' age (they are mostly elderly people while the singers of some other choirs are much younger), questionable musicality, too high tessitura etc. It is also possible that the researchers have somehow generated the idea of seto-specificity in the mind of the singers. We regard the topic under discussion to be more prospective for the further research.