

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### IGOR TÕNURIST 60: THE CAT THAT WALKS ALONE

*Aivar Jürgenson*

If anyone were to go and carry out a street survey to find out people's awareness of folklore and, for a start, would ask passers-by to name some folklorist – I am convinced that many would just rush ahead, some would slow down and smile apologetically, some would say that, yes, they definitely know but cannot quite say the name. And some would come up with the name of Igor Tõnurist.

For an awe-inspiring number of years, Igor Tõnurist has been active in building a bridge between folklorists and people, and embodies for people more aware about ethnology everything associated with “the legacy of our forefathers”.

Igor has been the leading figure in folklore movement for a long time – this fact and the determination of an expert and personal charm have turned him into the living symbol of folk culture. Igor Tõnurist's personality is a fortunate symbiosis of a scholar/ethnologist on the one hand and the promoter and fosterer of folk culture on the other. While he might not be the most popular folklorist in the international academic circles, Tõnurist's name and voice, heard in the radio programmes twenty or so years ago, are very well known among the Estonians. His active and somewhat defiant performance left the impression of him being a courageous and energetic herald who understands that he is not just talking but is passing on a message. A message that has to be conveyed even when the audience is not responding or when the talk is not exactly mainstream and might not be very popular. In one programme he talked about Izhorians and their folk music, touching upon, among other things, the situation of Izhorians in the Republic of Estonia before WWII. The then Estonian national policy, which was highly idealised at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, was harshly criticised by the Izhorians and by Igor's mediation.

The clear voicing of his opinion and a very straightforward vision of how things are supposed to be is still characteristic of Igor Tõnurist, as it was, reportedly, during the Soviet period. He is the shifter of boundaries – always present when something was not quite right.



For instance, he uncompromisingly fights for the authenticity of folk music and its performance. He did so, in a way, also with the authenticity of folk music during the Soviet period. At this time, fostering folk culture was allowed, but only when the form was ethnic but the contents were socialist.

In these uncompromising fights his phenomenon as a bridge-builder proved very useful: though a practicing folk musician, he was also a scholar, skilful in providing arguments to support his convictions. Perhaps his “grandest” project at the time was the establishing of folk music group *Leegajus* in 1970. This was the first folk group to play traditional folk music in urban setting, experimenting with Kalevala-metric folk song, instrumental music as well as dancing. The folk group performed in national costumes, the authenticity of which was strictly checked by Igor himself. In folklore studies it is called folklorism (performing of folklore in an altered context, the display and application of elements of folklore outside the historical use). Igor, however, wished to create something even more authentic. Perhaps this is the reason why he decided to find the Setu singers living in Tallinn and form the Setu choir *Sõsarõ* in 1973. The choir is still active today, with an additional group of Setu singers, *Siidisõsarõ* formed alongside of them. Neither of these groups are amateur, and can rather be viewed as a form of lore culture fostered under the scrutiny of a scholar. Vaike Sarv, a reputed Estonian ethnomusicologist has very aptly called Igor’s activities as experimental folkloristics and *Leegajus* as a folk music laboratory.

Even in his ethnomusicological activities, Igor Tõnurist transgressed boundaries, since the group’s repertoire was not limited to mainly Estonian folk music but performed also Votian, Izhorian, Russian, Latvian and Lithuanian songs, and Estonian folk hymns.

With Maia Muldma, he has published the textbook about Estonian folk instruments in Russian language (2002, second edition in 2004). His interest in bringing closer the Estonian and Russian culture may be the result in his family background: having grown up in a mixed Estonian-Russian family he is proficient in both languages. Igor has recalled how he used to “lecture” his Russian co-students in the 7th grade about the Estonians fight for freedom in the 13th century – a topic that was not included in the curriculum of Russian schools in Estonia.

Interethnicity is the key word in several musical activities that Igor has been involved in. As a person who greatly values his Estonian identity and who has consciously grown into it, he notices people speaking other languages. A good example is the Ukrainian folk music group *Zhurba*, which Igor has supervised and consulted, and also the Russian folklore ensemble *Suprjadki* established in Narva.

Igor is the member of the art committee of the International Folklore Festival BALTICA, has also staged the main concerts of the festival, and is thus very influential in the folklore movement. In-between the festivals he is active in supervising, counselling and instructing folklore groups and their leaders.

In addition, he has been the head of the Estonian Folklore Society for many years, one of the organisers of the international folklore festival *Viru Säru* and supervisor of several folk music groups.

While Igor’s name is mostly associated with folk music, its popularisation and research, it is not the only field that he has studied. He is also expert in Estonian national costumes.

Igor Tõnurist has also been awarded the letter of recognition by CIOFF Estonia (2001), the Prize of Cultural Heritage (2002), the CIOFF Estonia medal (2002), and the fourth class Order of the White Star (2003).

As to Igor's academic activities, he has given and still gives lectures on Estonian folklore in various higher education schools in Estonia – the Viljandi Culture Academy, Music Academy, Tallinn University, as well as on courses and seminars organised by the Estonian Folk Culture Development and Training Centre. Igor Tõnurist is a reputed scholar, who has been the first to thoroughly introduce and study Estonian folk instruments and instrumental music and has focused less on the repertoire. He began his scholarly activities already in the 9th grade and became the correspondent to the Estonian Ethnographical Museum (now Estonian National Museum). In 1962 he joined the ethnographers of the Institute of History, where he has worked until now, and received the third prize at the campaign of collecting ethnographic material in the Estonian settlements in Moloskovitsa, Leningrad Oblast. He has been on several expeditions in Siberia and beyond Lake Pskov, studied Estonians in the Minussinsk area, and has been socially involved in these issues even later.

As a scholar, Igor has been both critical and self-critical, which has probably hindered him in being too prolific in research. At the same time, his printed articles and publications are outstanding in their thoroughness and good structure, and are remarkably well written.

In 1996, Igor gathered several of his articles on folk music instruments in a book *Pillid ja pillimäng Eesti külaelus* ('Instruments and instrumental music in Estonian villages'). This was an extensive and thematically solid collection, after which many colleagues tried to convince Igor to defend it as an MA thesis. But Igor's virtually allergic reaction to academic red tape and demands postponed it until 2001. "A cat that walks alone," has Igor commented on himself whenever he feels the pressure of academic bureaucratic burden. But when would this cat that walks alone appear in front of the doctoral committee with a PhD thesis?

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Igor is an acknowledged scholar, which is attested by the large number of co-authored works. This overview of Igor hopefully conveys that he is more than a versatile person. While preparing this text, the word that was most often used to characterise Igor Tõnurist, the leading figure in Estonian folklore movement, is – a cultural phenomenon.

## POST-SOCIALIST JOKELORE

*Liisi Laineste*

On January 15–16, 2007 the international symposium *Post-Socialist Jokelore* (*Пост-социалистический анекдот*) was held in the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu. The international cooperation project brought together leading scholars from Bulgaria, Russia, Rumania, Poland and Estonia.

In two symposium days, nine presentations were held. The topics ranging from literary approaches to sociological brought together a considerably large audience and inspired lively discussion.

The papers given at the symposium could be largely divided in two thematic units: the more general presentations discussing the joke creation of a specific country or period and more folkloristic treatments of the past, present and future of the genre. The humour of post-socialist countries was analysed by Stanoy Stanoev, Dorota Brzozowska, Liisi Laineste and Arvo Krikmann; the issues of genre evolution were handled by Elena Shmeleva and Aleksei Shmelev, Aleksandra Arkhipova, Aleksander Belousov and Mikhail Lurye, and Sergei Nekliudov.

The presentation of E. Shmeleva and A. Shmelov, 'Contemporary Russian Jokes: the Evolution of Speech Genre', discussed the specific speech and behavioural markers of typical joke characters in Russia. A discussion was prompted also by an observation that instead of a joke text, the focus is on quoting the jokes, insinuations, and slang expressions. Jokes enter contemporary language use in an abbreviated and colloquial form, not as complete texts. This discussion was, in a sense, furthered by Mikhail Lurye with a treatment of contemporary youth jokelore in post-socialist Russia, espe-



*Sergei Nekliudov. Photo by Alar Madisson 2007.*

cially St Petersburg, in which the speaker drew attention to the fact that humour has transformed into a text of subcultural significance, varying in content and form among different youth subgroups. While creating a unique style, an important role is played by inside humour, which employs jokes, symbols, quotes, slang expressions borrowed from these, but also other important texts in the subculture that are shared only by this particular group. The presentation of S. Nekliudov was indirectly related to the topic and discussed the transformation process of a joke prototype and characters, thereby changing the semantic field of the joke. A regular replacement of characters may result in significant changes in the contents of a joke, and, in addition to the original ridicule, mock other (in this case those understandable for people familiar with Russian literary history) absurd facts, which, in turn, indicates the level at which another meaning is added to the original meaning of the joke and the joke is no longer a text per se but a quotation, a reference, the tip of the iceberg.

A more thorough overview of modern jokelore in post-socialist countries was provided by D. Brzozowska ('Jokes in Poland in the Period of Transition'); S. Stanoev discussed political jokes in Bulgaria ('Power and Society in Bulgarian Post-Totalitarian Period Joke-Telling'); L. Laineste spoke about post-socialism and political jokes on the Estonian Internet, A. Arkhipova about jokes about Putin and Stalin, and A. Krikmann about ethnic jokes ('Estonians in Contemporary Russian Jokes').

The contacts with East-European colleagues established on the symposium and their enthusiasm for a future cooperation project suggest that we are on the right track. The cooperation entails a plan to publish cross-cultural studies on post-socialist jokelore, in order to offer a long anticipated addition and competition for the articles so far based on the analysis of mainly western joke material. Hopefully it will invite more countries in the project, since it is high time to analyse the changes that the politically, economically and in other ways tumultuous times have introduced in the joke tradition of post-socialist countries.

## **MEDICA IV: FOLK MEDICINE AND ETHNOBOTANY IN CULTURAL CONTEXT AND EVERYDAY LIFE**

### ***Piret Paal***

*The International Colloquium: Ethnomedicine and Ethnobotany within Cultural Context and Everyday Life* was held on March 23–24, 2007 at Koke guesthouse in South Estonia. The colloquium was organised by the Department of Folklore at the Estonian Literary Museum, the Estonian Folklore Institute and the Centre of Cultural History and Folkloristics in Estonia. The financial support was provided by the Estonian Cultural Endowment.

The interdisciplinary seminar has acquired an international dimension: though now called international colloquium, the objective and goal of the event remained the



*Conference participants in session. Photo by Andres Kuperjanov 2007.*

same. The organisers' aim was to build up a network between different disciplines and regions in order to develop the research of ethnomedical aspects of culture. Colloquium participants came from Estonia, Bulgaria, Russia, and Finland. Two days of intensive work entailed outstanding papers on various aspects of ethnomedicine and ethnobotany.

Mare Kõiva held the opening presentation on symbolic rituals and magical practices, discussing the role and significance of symbolic dialogues in magical healing rituals. Anu Korb introduced the use of folk medicine and related beliefs held in the village of Ryzhkovo in Siberia. Pharmacist Ulve Pihklik (Department of Pharmaceutics, University of Tartu) spoke about Estonian herbs in the files of ethnobotany at the Estonian Literary Museum. Julia Šilina (doctoral student at the Department of Botany, University of Tartu) discussed the changes in the quality of plants depending on their natural habitat; Renata Sõukand (doctoral student at the Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu) continued with an analysis of phytonyms on the basis of Jakob Hurt's archive files, and Raivo Kalle (MA student at the Estonian University of Life Studies) concluded the topic by introducing the oldest cultural herbs. The latter two are also involved in the *Herba* project at the Estonian Literary Museum.

After dinner, Ülo Siimets and Aado Lintrop spoke about their personal experience of Shamanic rituals, the former about Aleksander Heintalu's involvement into a healer, the latter about his travel to Mongolia and a visit to a local shaman. Herb cultivator Katrin Luke from Karepa concluded the evening with an introduction of various herbal mixtures, concoctions and ointments, and her herbal garden.

Day Two of the colloquium opened with Vanya Mateeva's (Institute of Folklore Studies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences) paper on the database of herbal medicine

constructed in Bulgaria and a presentation of video clips about authentic and reconstructed healing rituals performed, for example, at folklore festivals. Ludmila S. Lobanova from the Komi Republic introduced her study based on archival and field-work materials on the healing of animals. Alternative treatment methods used in addition to the treatment of official medicine among Finnish cancer patients was discussed by Piret Paal, author of this overview.

Ave Tupits spoke about the history of research into folk medicine in Estonia, mostly on the basis of various questionnaires on folk medicine. Irina Ilyina, who introduced the folk medicine of the northernmost Izhma-Komi, held a very condensed lecture on the cult of Marya Tandze, a legendary Komi chiropractic. Marju Torp (Tallinn University) concluded the presentation session with an overview of the sacred springs in Estonian culture landscape and rituals and beliefs connected with water at different times. Before the official conclusion of the colloquium, A. Lintrop introduced Elena Popova's poster presentation on the Besermyan, and R. Sõukand gave an overview of the poster presentations by Tõnu Lehtsaar and Heino Noor, which discussed the role of religion in surviving political traumas.

During the final discussion, the colloquium participants agreed that ethnomedicine is a universal part of culture that exists in every society, independently of time and socio-cultural dimensions. The key obstacle in studies into ethnomedicine is the inadequate capacity of scholars to study these aspects of culture in which ethnomedicine persists. Such interdisciplinary collaboration is therefore highly important and deserving of future.