

THE NORTH KHANTY BEAR-FEAST SONGS

Katalin Lazar. Budapest, Hungary

The best known Ob-Ugric tradition, which actually resembles a folk drama, is the bear feast that usually takes place every 5-7 years. Although the bear cult is present in different regions of the world, nowhere is it so perfectly elaborated as among the Ob-Ugrians. The tradition includes various components: songs of different genres, dramatic dances, acted drama scenes, improvisations, common feasting.

At the bear feast people sing songs about the creation of the world, the arrival of the bear from heaven on the earth, the bear hunt (killing of the bear); there are songs to wake the bear in the morning, songs of invocation of the spirits, etc.

The most comprehensive publication of the Ob-Ugric folk tunes, A. O. Väisänen's *Vogulische und ostjakische Melodien* (Helsinki 1937), contains besides the 150 Mansi tunes (phonographed by A. Kannisto) 56 Khanty melodies that were collected by F. K. Karjalainen at the beginning of this century. (Among Kannisto's melodies there is a Khanty bear feast song performed by a Mansi singer at the Sosva, and a Samoyedic song performed by a Khanty singer.) The majority of the songs are Eastern Khanty, but the Beryozovo or North Khanty are represented with 5 bear feast songs (Nos. 159, 171, 177, 188). Here belongs also the above-mentioned song performed by the Mansi singer (No. 155). So, the publication contains 6 North Khanty bear feast songs all in all, unfortunately without words, as Väisänen took down and published only their melodies.

Relying on Väisänen's notation, we can draw conclusions about the structure, range and scale of the melodies. One of the six is a one-line tune (Example 1), one is two-line (Example 2), and the remaining four are three-line tunes

Example 1. Sosva. Väisänen 155. lines 1 – 2.



Example 2. Beresov. Väisänen 159. lines 1 – 2.



(Examples 3-6). In their case we cannot speak about the so-called stanza tunes as known in the European music, but about tunes of irregular form. If we mark different melodic lines with A, B, and C, the melodic structure could be, for example, ABCB ABC ABCBCB. Therefore we have to make a distinction between two kinds of 3-line tunes – those that combine two different tune lines (e.g. ABB ABB) and those that contain three different tune lines where the length of the melody may vary, and the lines A, B and C are always interchanged. The latter structure applies also to the above-mentioned four tunes in the Väisänen's work.

Example 3. Beresov. Väisänen 188. lines 13 – 16.

Four staves of musical notation in treble clef, 3/4 time signature. The first staff, labeled 'a', contains: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. A bracket labeled '3' is placed under the last three notes (E4, D4, C4). The second staff, labeled 'b', contains: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The third staff, labeled 'c', contains: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4. A bracket labeled '3' is placed under the last three notes (E4, D4, C4). The fourth staff contains: G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.

As for the tonal system, Väisänen's notations in question include four cases of pentachord or hexachord (Examples 1-4), one case of a full major scale

Example 4. Beresov. Väisanen 174. lines 1 – 3.

Example 4 consists of three staves of musical notation in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#).
Staff 1: Labeled 'a : 6'. It begins with a 6/8 time signature. The melody starts on a quarter note, followed by eighth notes, and includes a fermata over a quarter note.
Staff 2: Labeled 'b : 6'. It begins with a 6/8 time signature. The melody consists of eighth notes and quarter notes.
Staff 3: Labeled 'c : 6'. It begins with a 6/8 time signature. The melody consists of eighth notes and quarter notes.

(Example 5), and one minor scale (Example 6) without the sixth tone. From Éva Schmidt's Khanty folklore collection, recorded in 1980 and 1982, about

Example 5. Beresov. Väisanen. 177. lines 3 – 5.

Example 5 consists of three staves of musical notation in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#).
Staff 1: Labeled 'a : 3'. It begins with a 3/4 time signature. The melody starts with a quarter note, followed by eighth notes, and includes a fermata over a quarter note.
Staff 2: Labeled 'b : 3'. It begins with a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes and eighth notes, ending with a triplet of eighth notes.
Staff 3: It begins with a 3/4 time signature. The melody consists of quarter notes and eighth notes, ending with a quintuplet of eighth notes.

80 songs have been notated. They include 15 bear feast songs (two of them recorded in 1980 and 13 in 1982). All of the latter mentioned 13 songs have been sung by the excellent 75-year old singer Grigori Smolin. His songs be-

Example 6. Beresov. Väisanen. 171. lines 3 – 5.



long to the oldest layer of folk songs of this region. The melodies of nine songs of his are built up on the so-called half-lines (i.e. one line of the text is divided between two musical motifs or half-lines), which are combined according to certain rules. All the mentioned nine melodies are formed of four of such half-lines according to the same rules. One of them, however, contains an added fifth half-line (Example 7). In case of five melodies the initial part of the song

Example 7.



has been elaborated into a half-line at some time in its history (Example 8). All these half-lines are pentachords with an irregular third tone.

Among the 15 bear feast songs collected by É. Schmidt there are also one-line tunes, i.e. each line of the text is of equal length with that of the melody.

Example 8.

...tə - wə n(ə) pəj tek tuj - maŋ wəš,

lōš - tan tuj - tə ka - šəŋ wəš,

ot - ŋem na

⁽²⁾oms - tem kūt - na

hōχ - sen⁽³⁾ pū - nə šū - həŋ jō - χa - nem

kar - ten nur - pə nu - rəŋ jām jəš

lāp ke⁽⁷⁾ es - ti - χi - jət - tem,

tar - nen u - nə tar - nəŋ kī - mət

šit[ə] šī ker - ti - χi - jət - tem...

One of the tunes is founded on two tones only, with the third one having merely ornamental functions (Example 9). One of the melodies is built up on one tune-line and its variations at different pitches (Example 10). This tune contains both tune-line A and its variations A5 and A4. The variations of line A at different pitches (A5 or A4) mark the beginning of a new melodic unit and are

Example 9. Polnovat. É. Schmidt's collection, 82. PO. 18/B. line 4.

...^(γ)un tem ωɔ - jə - (γə) n̥ʉɔtəjäm kũ - š(a)...

Example 10. Polnovat. É. Schmidt's collection, 82. PO. 23. lines 10 – 12.

...χăt-ti-jem kert-maŋ χăt - təŋ mǔj mǐy
 mǔpa^(γ) ut'-t'i - γij' - mat≈ i - je.
 tōr - n̥^γχōn-pə ^(γ)un mǐs ĭ - mə...

Example 11. Polnovat. É. Schmidt's collection, 82. PO. 23. lines 21 – 22.

...ĩγ ke't'ik-met(ə), ^(γ)γω œt - ta
 mǔŋ paχɔ-ši - γi - jət - teω,...

followed by two or three A lines. This melody offers us an opportunity to observe a transformation of an one-line tune into a two-line tune.

É. Schmidt's material includes four 2-line tunes. All of them have a regular structure – the form AB is repeated during the whole song. The only deviation is that three melodies do not end with line B as expected, but with line A. One of the tunes is based on the tritonic scale (Example 11, where the fourth tone is

Example 12. Tugjiani. É. Schmidt's collection, 80. TU. 18. lines 1 – 2.

aj pe-tu-š(ə) ^(ʔ)e - ωi - γi - jem,
aj pe - tu - š(ə) ^(ʔ)e - ωi - ji - jem...

replaced with the fifth, and the third tone with the second), one on the major pentatonic scale (Example 12), and the remaining two on the minor pentachord (Examples 13 and 14).

Example 13. Polnovat. É. Schmidt's collection, 82. PO. 14. lines 7 – 8.

...tan-tə-ŋ^(ə) nə-ras in pel - kat naj,
^(ʔ)in pel - kat naj ^(x)i - n(ə)^(ʔ)āŋ kem - na...

On the basis of the above analysed tunes we may state that they belong to the most archaic level of the Ob-Ugric vocal folk music, which is characterised by a narrow range (2-3 tones) and half-line melodies. A very interesting problem concerning both these and other songs is the relationship between the text

Example 14. Peregryobnoye. É. Schmidt's collection, 82.
PE. 4. lines 7–8.

...in ωŭ- r(a) mī - š^(a) χu - (ja)

se - ωatə^(ŋ) aj ur - t(a)

ma pŭ-ŋ^(a) te - m^(a) na -

(γu) tă - ta šĭ^(ŋ)öt - tat...

and the melody. The analysed North Khanty songs should certainly be compared with those of other Khanty regions as well as with Mansi bear feast songs; it is yet to be found out whether the melodies of this genre represent a specific layer of Ob-Ugrian folk melodies or not.

In summer 1990 there was an opportunity to invite a group of Khanty singers to perform in Hungary and to demonstrate their bear feast. The video recording of this event is extremely valuable. As at the time of writing of this article not much time has passed since the event, researchers have not yet come to a practical analysis of these recordings, but it is clear that the texts and melodies are very archaic. It is to be hoped that the scientists do not confine themselves to notating and studying the songs, but will also find ways to publish them.

Translated by Kai Vassiljeva