https://doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2024.94.saarlo

SHE SANG IN A BEAUTIFUL LIGHT VOICE: MUSICAL QUALITIES OF RUNOSONG PERFORMANCES IN FIELDWORK REPORTS

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Abstract: Folklore has been systematically collected in Estonia over 150 years, resulting in more than 500 fieldwork reports, diaries, and travelogues, in addition to folklore texts. Since runosongs were in the preferred position when folklore was collected, most of the fieldwork reports contain descriptions of encounters with people who knew and performed runosongs. As a genre of oral tradition, runosongs have text and melody, as well as certain performance practices and contexts of use. These self-evident aspects, regrettably, do not manifest themselves equally either in the archived folklore materials or fieldwork reports.

The article starts with a discussion on the reasons why collectors wrote so little about the melodies and musical aspects of the performance of runosongs. Then the focus goes on descriptions and evaluations of the musical aspects of the runosong performances in the fieldwork accounts and analysis of how the preparation and musical background of the collector influences evaluations and perceptions. The most common aspects of evaluations come under consideration: the prominence and peculiarities of the runotunes, the characteristics and qualities of the performer's voice, and the musical skills of the performer.

Keywords: folklore collection history, fieldwork, runosong melodies, performance, variation, mistuning, voice, timbre

There were several motivations for writing this article. Firstly, observations of how different components of the representative genre of Estonian folklore – runosong – were treated differently during the history of Estonian folkloristics. Although the name of the genre – the *song* – presupposes the consistency of lyrics, melody, performance, and the context of use, attention has been paid primarily to the textual component of the songs. In the nineteenth century

and later, runosongs were seen as a testimony to the history and cultural value of the Estonian nation, a justification for the aspirations of national independence, which is why many glorifying approaches dedicated to the texts of runosongs were written. The value of runosingers was judged above all by the level of knowledge of the verse lines in the writings about singers and in fieldwork diaries that describe performance situations. Outside ethnomusicological research, collectors or academics did not tend to pay much attention to runotunes in the collection reports, while even less attention was paid to the musical aspects of the performance. In the fieldwork reports there were rather customary observations by the collectors that singers knew many verses, the textual material varied extensively, but there was little variety in melodies, and they were simple or monotonous.

Another motivation stems from a notion presented by Janika Oras, the compiler of the typology of runotunes of Kodavere parish in eastern Estonia (Oras & Tuvi 2014), referring to different singing styles of two Kodavere runosingers: Rosalie Tark sang in a low chest voice, typical of the older tradition, Anna Lindvere in a loud and high head voice (ibid.: 113–115). This notion drew my thoughts to the fact that collectors' descriptions and evaluations reflect the influence of music culture of their era – in addition to the singer's personality. Anna Lindvere was the best-known singer in Kodavere in her time, representing the east-Estonian singing tradition in the eyes of collectors, researchers and the local community as well as the media in the 1930s–1950s (Saarlo 2012). Rosalie Tark was an informant for several folklorists and linguists in the 1950s; nevertheless, her performances received particular attention neither from folklorists nor from the local community. Perhaps the collectors did not pay enough attention to her archaic singing because of her humble personality and modest singing manners, in addition to the unfamiliar music style.

The article is devoted to descriptions and assessments of the musical aspects of the runosong performances, which are reflected in the fieldwork diaries. The most common aspects taken into consideration are the characteristics and qualities of the performers' voice and their musical skills (first of all, mistuning vs carrying the tune). The key to interpreting assessments of performances could be the significance, meaning, and quality of the runo melodies from the point of view of both collectors and singers, which is most evidently expressed in the lack of descriptions of singing.

The aim of the article is not to evaluate the worldview of the folklore collectors and researchers of their time; I am conscious of the contextual association of the assessments with the knowledge and beliefs of the respective era. These estimates as well as complexity of the descriptions changed over time but varied also in relation to the preparation of the collectors. A volunteer contributor or

even a student without any (or special) training or education noticed different things than a folklorist with a philological education, not to mention that the musical details were noted differently by a musician with a training in classical music or an ethnomusicologist with a philological, musical, and ethnological education.

Several researchers of Estonian folkloristics history have pointed out that the study of the disciplinary history, concepts, and language use shows their multilayered links to different individuals, objectives, and cultural policies, while rhetoric, metaphors, and imagery used in both academic and public writings confirm the importance of the topics and have helped to validate, confirm, and reproduce participants' power relations and hierarchies (e.g., Kalkun 2012: 182; Särg 2022). As Estonian musicologist Taive Särg has emphasized in reference to Bourdieu, words create reality (Särg 2022: 82). I can but accept Särg's statement that also the words describing and analysing the runosong tradition, the performance, and the performers form an idea of what was (or is) the reality to which this singing tradition belonged (or belongs), and how this tradition should be treated – or accepted. I also draw on the view that writing about culture represents and reproduces culture, being never absolute but rather imperfect and biased, and writing about fieldwork reflects the background and position of the writer (Clifford & Marcus 1986). It is therefore relevant to examine how fieldworkers in their notes wrote about runosinging, reflecting their views on archaic music, and influencing their contemporary as well as future readers, researchers, composers, and others, and indirectly affecting their interviewees' relationship with runotunes and the runosinging tradition at large.

The article is based on the fieldwork diaries, reports and notes accompanying the folklore texts documented during fieldwork from the beginning of the twentieth century until the end of the 1960s. The source material is archived and available for research in the Estonian Folklore Archives' (EFA) manuscript collections. I have used approximately 200 reports focused on collecting runosongs or other musical traditions, which have not been statistically analysed during the research, since there are relatively few descriptions of interest. Instead, the fieldwork notes have been analysed using close-reading methods, making observations regarding general tendencies with the aim of finding reasons for these tendencies and placing the assessments in the context of the era.

It should also be noted here that Estonian runosongs were collected in the situation of the late tradition, that is, other forms of musical expression had already occurred in addition to or displacing runosinging, influencing the practices, possibilities and spectrums of the performers' musical expression. It has also shaped the attitude of the singers to runosinging.

THE COLLECTION OF RUNOTUNES

> *Many singers did not understand what 'the melody' meant at all; yet they thought there was no peculiar melody for the old songs, everyone kept recounting with their speech-sound. Indeed, it could be seen, in particular, in the 'kaske-kanke' songs that their simple melody was largely similar to the intonation of speaking*.
> Armas Otto Väisänen, 1911 (EÜS IX 1262)

The older form of Estonian oral poetry, runosong (Est. *regilaul*), is a tradition common to most Finnic peoples and dates back to the first millennium BC. The common formal characteristics of runosongs are octosyllabic trochaic tetrameter, alliteration, and parallelism; similar formulae, motifs and song types can be found in the traditions of different related languages. The method of runosong text composition is characterized as stichic, and the system of musical thinking is monophonic or linear (Lippus 1995). Runosong melodies have relatively narrow ambitus and melodic contours close to speech intonation. Unlike Western tempered music, the performance of runotunes is characterized by the non-tempered tuning and shifting intonation (Rüütel 1998; Sarv 2009).

Runosinging is characterized by the use of group-melodies. This means that several texts can be sung with the same melody, and vice versa, one text can be sung with multiple melodies. The use of melodies is generally functional – according to emic classification, different melodies are used for wedding songs, working songs, ritual songs, swinging songs, lyrical songs, and narrative songs (Särg 2009). There are, of course, examples of polyfunctional tunes that are used in different song genres (e.g., Pärtlas 2021). Over time, during the decline of the older tradition, the diversity of melodies also diminished.

As several reviews about the collection of runo melodies have been published by folklorists, ethnomusicologists and musicologists (e.g., Särg 2002, 2009, 2012; Sarv 2002; Sarv & Oras 2020), I am limited here only to a brief summary to illustrate the difference in the musical background and education of collectors during different periods.

Very few runotunes were documented during the collection peak of Estonian folkloristics, the all-Estonian collection campaign initiated by Jakob Hurt in 1888.[1] Collection focused on the texts of runosongs, because it was in the texts that the historical value of the runosongs was seen (Särg 2012; Saarlo 2008) and despite Hurt's contributors having a diverse education, quite a few of them were able to note down music. Also, back then, runosongs had gradually gone

out of fashion, since their archaic simplicity did not meet people's musical needs anymore. The newer singing tradition – end-rhymed songs that replaced runosongs – was musically more complicated and the lyrics corresponded to people's changed expression of feelings and thoughts. This newer tradition was rejected by the ideologists of collection because it was seen as foreign and verbally undemanding (e.g., Oras 2017).

However, at the same time, linguist and musical figure Karl August Hermann (1851–1908) organized his smaller collection campaign, which called for the collection of "folk's melodies", with special emphasis on the importance of the old tradition, runotunes, and aimed at providing original material to Estonian professional composers. Hermann's call was aimed at rural intellectuals with modest musical education; his collections include very diverse material, including individual compositions (see, e.g., Sarv 2002; Särg 2002).

Hurt's first folklore collection stipendiary in 1888, Oskar Kallas,[2] noticed the difference between song texts during singing and reciting performances and pointed out the need to collect runotunes (Särg 2012: 90). There were a few notations, but in most cases the ambitions of the late-nineteenth-century collectors clashed with practical obstacles: there were no educated musicians among Estonian enthusiasts; the preparation of specialists with more modest musical education was based on a classical harmonic system that made it difficult to note monophonic, freely intoned and both melodically and rhythmically varying folk melodies (Sarv 2002: 280).

Kallas commenced the collection of melodies in 1904, using the methodological assistance of Ilmari Krohn (1867–1960), an expert in collecting Finnish folk melodies. Under the auspices of the Estonian Students' Association (EÜS), students were sent on collection trips in pairs, one of whom had musical education – mainly from the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. During this activity, several later recognized Estonian composers – Mart Saar, Cyrillius Kreek, and others – acquired the basics for their musical compositions. In addition to runotunes, the melodies of newer songs and instrumental music were documented. It should be noted that it was during this action that travelogues and fieldwork diaries were systematically requested by Kallas (Tamm 2002).

In the period of Estonia's independence (1918–1940), the professionalization and institutionalization[3] of folkloristics took place, the most important of which was the establishment of the Estonian Folklore Archives in 1927. Young folklorists who started working in the early years of the archives became leaders of the study and designers of collection policies until the second half of the twentieth century. Professional musicians were involved in collecting runotunes; some of them had already taken part in EÜS's fieldworks. In addition to documenting the melodies, the first means of recording the sound were used – from 1912

onwards Estonian folk music was phonographed on wax rolls; the pioneer of the recording method in Estonia was a Finnish student, the later ethnomusicologist Armas Otto Väisänen (1890–1969).

It was in the folklore archives that the Estonian ethnomusicological research started, initiated by the young research fellows of the archives, Karl Leichter[4] and Herbert Tampere.[5] They were also the first ones to see the value of folk music not only as a source of national professional music, but also its own value (Kalkun 2005; Hiiemäe 2009; Särg 2022).

Figure 1. *Singers from Setomaa in the National Broadcasting studio. August Pulst and Herbert Tampere on the right. Photograph by Peeter Parikas 1937 (ERA, Foto 765).*

One of the most important folk music figures of that period was August Pulst,[6] who, in order to popularize and document folk music, organized great staged performances and tours with traditional instrumentalists and runosingers. It brought live performances of traditional music to urbanized people – though no longer in a "natural" everyday setting but staged as a part of the show, evoking feelings of nostalgia and perhaps some exoticism.

Pulst's singularity was that he was not merely a manager of folk singers; he figuratively and literally-speaking lived with the musicians during the tours, sharing all the joys and concerns. He became close with the musicians, as he saw them as people with their personalities and peculiarities and not just ethnographic objects. Pulst wrote excellent memories about his tours, which are part of the source material of this article (Sildoja 2014).

Pulst was also involved in the sound recording of folk musicians and singers in the National Broadcasting studio organized by the EFA, Herbert Tampere, and Oskar Loorits, the head of the archive. Tampere, unlike Pulst, wrote quite a few collection reports and personal impressions. He preferred to stay academically detached and restrained in his writings, avoiding giving any personal or subjective assessments.

The first decades after World War II, during the Sovietization of Estonia, the collection of archaic folklore continued, albeit in a somewhat renewed form. Musicians were once again involved in the collection of folk music – this time the students and lecturers of the Tallinn Conservatoire[7] participated in folkloristic field trips and wrote down melodies (e.g., Saarlo 2017). Here the fact that Herbert Tampere worked as a lecturer at the conservatoire in 1946–1951 played an important role. Since the officially favoured or even demanded composing, especially during Stalin's period, was to be based on folk melodies, the traditions of the national music of the pre-war period continued mutated in a grotesque way (see, e.g., Lippus 2011). The practice of collecting folk melodies also gave musicians creative inspiration and source material. Of the participants in the folk music collection at the time, the best-known composers were Anatoli Garšnek[8] and Ester Mägi.[9]

As it was a long way to go before the wider adoption of tape recorders, the phonograph and wax rolls were still used for rerecording after the transcription of the melody until the 1950s (Oras 2009: 705). From the 1950s onwards, recording on tape was increasingly used; the method became overwhelming starting from the 1960s, diminishing the need for the transcription of the melodies, and the inclusion of the music students in the fieldwork faded (ibid: 712).

During the post-war decades, several large series of fieldworks took place under the direction of Tampere, dedicated to the collection of musical folklore in rich singing areas. In addition, several young researchers took up work as

folklorists, formatting the collection, publication, and research of runosongs. Among them were Olli Kõiva,[10] who was devoted to documenting the runosinging tradition on Kihnu Island, Udo Kolk,[11] who made a great contribution to the study of melodies, and Ingrid Rüütel,[12] who largely continued Tampere's ethnomusicological school.

In the 1960s the attitude towards folk songs changed internationally – i.e., non-Western singing, once exotic and alien, became acceptable and understandable, and the "authentic" tradition became preferable contrary to arranged adaptations (Oras 2009: 716; Kuutma 1998, 2008; Särg 2023). Veljo Tormis (1930–2017) was one of the Estonian composers who took the runosong as the basis for his compositions, trying to transmit it as tradition-sensitively as possible, not just by arranging it according to the rules of Western music. In the philosophy underlying his work the technique of singing, the method of generating voices, and the sound itself were also important. At the same time, several folklore groups were founded, drawing on archival transcripts or even encounters with traditional performers during their presentations, rather than stylized arrangements. This topic remains out of the focus of the article, but it is important to mention how the changing attitude towards runosongs by academics, manifested in the changing vocabulary, terms and concepts, as well as the transformation of research focus towards performance – in Estonian case the fieldwork and research done by Tampere, Kõiva, Kolk, Rüütel, and others – changed both the (re)use and performance of runosongs as well as the aesthetic preferences of composers and musicians (see, e.g., Oras 2008: 101–108).

WAS RUNOSINGING CONSIDERED TO BE MUSIC AT ALL? OR MUSICAL ENOUGH?

Omnes eodem cantantur tono et melodia.
(Dionysius Fabricius, 1610)

Wie lieblich sind die Töne ihrer Gesänge und Tänze! Die größte Einfachheit derMelodie paart sich mit der schmeichelndsten Gefälligkeit der Worte; ich bin jederzeit ganz hin gewesen, wenn ich dem vorher nur Wirrwarr und schwerfällige Sonate gefiel, unter dieser Zone so viel Liebkosende aus dem Innern des Herzens heraus gequollene Melodie hörte.
(Christian Hieronymus Justus Schlegel, 1819)[13]

The attitude towards runosinging, the awareness and understanding of the tradition has been changing over time, depending not only on the cultural background of witnesses – Baltic-German literati, leaders of Estonian national movement and first generations of Estonian intellectuals, linguists, folklorists, musicians and ethnomusicicologist, etc. – but even more on the proximity or distance to the runosinging tradition, and the performers. The central problem seems to be the definition or perception of music.

Ethnomusicologists have pointed out that although music is a universal phenomenon, the understanding of music is culture-specific, the aesthetics and perception of music are not universal but are formed in the course of experiencing (Särg 2022: 88). Estonian ethnomusicologist Žanna Pärtlas has argued that in every traditional community some kind of "sound ideal" exists – a comprehension of how the songs and voices should sound to represent the specific singing tradition – singing "the right way". This ideal can include several factors like the manner of singing, mode of voice production as well as specific tuning and musical scales. Pärtlas has noted that the "sound ideal" functions as an ethnic or social marker of the community or is perceived by outsiders as the group's ethnic marker (Pärtlas 2017).

Taive Särg has indicated in her research that the study and appreciation of non-Western music, inter alia, the song styles close to speech, began in European literary circles in the nineteenth century. Estonian runotunes did not gain proper vocal music status among Baltic-German literati or Estonian educated elites until the 1930s. Although being a part of folklore, runotunes did not resemble the sound ideal of European folk songs – e.g., folk ballads –, which is why this music was not enjoyed outside the peasant culture; also, it was not considered a testimony to the history of the Estonian people or a justification for cultural sovereignty like lyrics was (Särg 2022: 86–87; see also Sarv 2002; Särg 2005, 2012; Saarlo 2008).

The first descriptions of the runosong performance confirm that foreign listeners did not get much of an aesthetic musical experience, although the specificity of the lyrics and the prowess of improvisation were recognized (see Laugaste 1963). At the collection peak of runosongs, already at the end of the nineteenth century, the runosinging tradition had been gradually replaced by the end-rhymed stanzaic song almost everywhere in Estonia. The collection of runosongs was a kind of memory work; they were recalled – or not wanted to be remembered – as memories of the practices and rituals of the past, so the documentation of the "living tradition" was, in fact, possible only in certain regions. It can be assumed that Estonian runotunes became more and more foreign to most performers and collectors – outdated and embarrassing or nostalgic and exotic.

In the historiographies on Estonian folklore collection, it has been pointed out that the *other* in the context here is not the same as in the Western European ethnological/anthropological fieldwork tradition (e.g., Meizel & Daughtry 2019 [2008]: 192–193). As a rule, Estonians collected from Estonians, sharing language and living experiences – it could be considered an autoethnographic school of research (e.g., Adams & Ellis & Holman Jones 2017: 1). However, during the modernization of Estonian society, there emerged a cultural and educational difference, a distinction between urban and rural people, as well as between social classes and age groups, which caused the relationship between the folklore collector/folklorist and the "tradition carrier" to become alienating and sometimes objectifying, as evidenced in the fieldwork reports. Despite the relative proximity, the runosingers were *others* who represented a different, lost or soon-to-be-lost archaic world for the collectors.

There were various reasons why runotunes – apart from the texts – were not worth any special attention for the singers, thus being those *others* within the runosong tradition. First, because the runosinging tradition was text-oriented with an extremely sophisticated poetic system and relatively simple musical features; second, there are testimonies that the performers themselves sometimes disrespected these tunes, often did not consider them as music – or musical enough –, already being possessed by modern melodies in the era of the fading tradition. As to collectors – with the exception of collectors with a special purpose – the melodies were also of secondary importance for a number of reasons: runotunes were often treated detachedly or even ignored in the fieldwork notes, and the deafening silence that replaced the descriptions of musical sides of the runosong performances refers to the collectors' distant attitude towards melodies.

Runotunes were collected as they were seen as the necessary bedrock for the creation of national professional music. The simplicity and unaesthetic nature of the folk melodies had to be compensated by artistic workmanship. No sufficient information was documented on the presentation of the tunes, since it was not considered necessary or investigational – the raw material was important (Särg 2012, 2022).

Do the general preparation and musical literacy of the folklore collector (folklorist, musician or ethnomusicologist) somehow influence the attitude towards folk music or character, content or existence of the description of the musical side of a performance? Särg has noted that, paradoxically, the lack of music education may have encouraged becoming a researcher in folk music, because European music teaching diverted one's aesthetic perception and interests away from traditional music (Särg 2022). Kati Kallio has suggested that the collectors of Finnish runosongs were not always in a positive relationship with the musical side of the singing tradition (e.g., Kallio 2013). This is also the

case elsewhere in the history of European ethnomusicology. Särg has pointed out that several of the first researchers of non-Western music came from other disciplines (Nettl 1964: 15 as cited in Särg 2022).

The following sections are based on the fieldwork diaries which focus on the collection of runosongs and other musical traditions analysed within this study. Unfortunately, notes and reports are written mainly by the collectors who documented lyrics – philologists and folklorists –, musicians often wrote nothing more than melody transcripts. Therefore, those few melody-collection analyses found among fieldwork materials are particularly interesting.

REDUCING THE IMPORTANCE OF RUNOTUNES: *ALL SONGS WITH ONE MELODY…*

> *The main importance, however, is in the words of the song, since he mostly sings everything with one melody*.
> Johann Aavik, 1904 (EÜS I 750)

The importance of the runotunes was reduced by the remarks of many collectors that singers sang all the song texts with the same melody. One of the reasons for that kind of degrading observation can be the aspects of modern reality: there were few tunes used in the fading singing tradition but also the collector accustomed to Western music was not able to register dissimilarities of different melodies. Deeper behind these obvious reasons lays the nature of the runosong: focus of the singers mainly on the complicated textual side and use of archaic group melodies.

The runosong tradition is text-oriented, which means that the text has the primary role, and the music mainly follows the build-up of the text. While song texts are complex, runo melodies are relatively 'simple', as Särg (2009) resumés. The runotunes are short, with a narrow ambitus and stepwise melodic movements; often the pitches are realized during the performance in a "loose" and approximate way. Särg justifies the simplicity of the tunes by the fact that, next to the complex textual side, the melody cannot be complex (ibid.).

Runosongs were dominated by group melodies which were linked to the song's function (e.g., Rüütel 1998). Särg (2009) argues that singing several texts with one melody is not a scarcity of tradition, but a hallmark of the oral transmission of songs, the functional association of songs, and human creativity. Of course, when the tradition was gradually forgotten, only one of these

group melodies could be remembered. Still, in the active tradition, the number of group melodies of a singer could be quite remarkable (e.g., Laanemets 2008).

The intrinsic text-centricity of the tradition – along with what has already been discussed above – is certainly one of the reasons behind the fact that from the very beginning of the collection of runosongs, there has been no balance between valuing and documenting lyrics and melodies by the collectors and researchers. The singer's gold standard was the volume of verses they knew, and the level of their knowledge was compared to the number of verses of classic epics (Laugaste 1963: 238). However, in the middle of the twentieth century, when the discipline of ethnomusicology began to develop in Estonia, the representatives of the ethnological school stressed the equal importance of lyrics, melodies, and performance context; performativity became the focus of the studies for mainstream folklorists, improvisation in the performance situation became the quality mark of the song, and the reference was the wedding singer (Saarlo 2023). But still, most of the variability research was done on the improvisation of *lyrics*, not on the virtuosic style of singing or varying melodies.[14]

RELUCTANCE TO SING: *DON'T DARE TO SING, DON'T WANT TO...*

Her voice, which is very good for such an old person,
she herself finds to be ugly and is sure
everyone will laugh when they hear it.
Kristi Salve, 1973 (RKM II 308, 413)

Fieldwork reports, especially those from the first decades of the twentieth century, contain descriptions of persuading informants to agree to recall and sing old songs. For several reasons, even those skilled in singing did not dare to sing. What caused the resistance and refusal and what were the solutions for documenting the valuable runosongs?

Runosong collection consisted in a constant overcoming of value conflicts. On the one hand, it was a completely conventional disinclination to the obsolete (or fading) tradition. The singers were afraid to perform to a stranger, an upper-class person or a representative of officials; or they were afraid that other community members, younger people or family members in a stronger position would resent and ridicule archaic knowledge. On the other hand, this

outdated tradition had become an invaluable resource for scientists and builders of national cultural identity – a national treasure.

Conflicts were manifested in both nineteenth- and twentieth-century collection reports describing situations, when, as usual during summer fieldwork, rural people's most urgent working period, singers were persuaded to "waste time" to recall old times and outdated songs. Only some fieldwork diaries uncover what force of persuasion was needed. It is noteworthy that the singer's preferences are often revealed neither in manuscripts nor in audio-collections since the material was pre-selected and edited before archiving. We should not forget that the singers also complied with the collectors' wishes, and one might but wonder what self-denial it required for the singers to perform utterly unpleasant and outdated melodies (see, e.g., Oras 2008). On such occasions there was a combination of manipulation, persuasion, use of power, acceptance and selflessness – on both sides (Saarlo 2023).

Here, for the sake of truth, it must be emphasized that until the last decades of runosong collection, there were remarkably bright exceptions – both on geographical and personal level – where runosinging was self-evident because of the uninterrupted tradition, or by some performers who felt an individual affinity with the old style linked to precious memories. Also, over time, the knowledge of the importance of folklore collection increased, runosongs became a special part of Estonian literature in school curricula, so singers felt a certain sense of duty to fulfil the needs of science and national institutions, sometimes volunteering to contribute to the archives. Furthermore, with the changing collection methods in the mid-twentieth century – repeated long interviews – the relationship between singers and collectors became closer, more intimate, and they sometimes became close friends or even interested parties (Oras 2008).

In 1969, Erna Tampere wrote in her fieldwork diary about a singer who performed both runosongs and end-rhymed songs singing, not reciting, like the collector had experienced in the area. She recalls previous fieldwork experiences where informants did not sing although they knew the lyrics.

> *Velli Elhi (76) from the village of Vaiatu knows more newer songs. We also wrote down a couple of snippets of the runosongs. She sings runosongs with a melody, she can also sing newer songs. It seems strange somehow that many women here do not know the melodies and do not know how to sing. Men can sing better, but they don't know the lyrics very well. It's strange, because it is usually women who sing more than men. Last summer some villages in Lääne County left the same impression – that it was the women who do not keep the tune while singing, but they know the lyrics*. (RKM II 261, 347/8)

Figure 2. *Singer Velli Elhi, Vaiatu village, Kadrina parish. Photograph by Hindrik Hiiemäe 1973 (ERA, Foto 18955).*

The question arises why Tampere got these impressions: did the women not really know the melodies, or did they not want to sing to the collector or audio-record their voice?

In her article about fieldwork to Ingria by Armas Launis at the beginning of the twentieth century, Kati Kallio has argued that it is absurd to think that people did not remember the tunes but remembered the lyrics of the songs (2014: 8). There are examples in the fieldwork reports where collectors have admitted that singers have been struggling, recalling lyrics while reciting, or – as the initiator of the EÜS's collection campaign Oskar Kallas noted – that text can be significantly altered during reciting as opposed to singing (Särg 2022: 102). Still, during the fading of the runosong tradition, it may have been quite possible that people knew (some) lyrics by heart or recalled them, yet they had never learned songs from their parents, but rather from written sources. People might even have respected runosongs, accepting the cultural and historical importance of

the tradition, or sometimes feeling emotional ties to certain themes and being enraptured by the complex figurative language, although they did not like to sing them – or really did not know the tunes.

Nevertheless, one reason why people refused to sing to collectors may have been that they shied away from singing. In 1969, when Tampere wrote her fieldwork diary, participatory and individual singing was still a perfectly common musical practice.[15] In the context of fieldwork, however, one must bear in mind the derogatory attitude towards runotunes. Most likely, more pleasant songs are sung more often, and unpleasant ones are avoided. But, in addition, one must take into account that it can be insurmountably difficult to sing in front of a stranger – especially with an audio recorder present – if you do not consider yourself a good singer and singing does not give you a sense of accomplishment.

As a result, the question arises: how was the huge number of runosongs collected if singers did not want to sing? The answer to it lies in the simple fact that many songs were not documented from singing, but from reciting. Reading the fieldwork diaries, it takes some time to realize that this was exactly the documenting process in fieldwork situations – as singing situations were described very seldom. Folklore collectors might have heard singing quite rarely. August Sildnik wrote in 1908:

> *As a rule, in the poorhouses, among the farmhands, manor labourers, and cottagers they still know the words pretty often (wealthier people consider this writing down a bigoted joke, so they don't say, even if they know), but those who know the melodies are seldom found, and those who know, rather recite words, so I hardly ever heard the melodies.* (EÜS V 1009)

The songs may have been documented based on recitation not singing not only because of performers' preferences, but also because of collectors' consent – for technical reasons. Next to the song texts there are quite often remarks such as 'words written from dictation'. At first glance, it even works as a proof of authenticity – meaning that the words are written down as they were said, from the actual performance, not afterwards from memory. Still, it actually means reciting as opposed to singing. In technical terms, it is understandable that it is easier to write a dictated text rather than a sung one.

All in all, it brings us back to the main problem of the article – the lack of descriptions of singing in the fieldwork reports – and the assumption that there may be a simple fact behind it: that collectors did not hear enough singing at the performances of runosongs because singers did not dare to sing, or collectors themselves preferred reciting to singing.

PORTRAYAL OF SINGING: *IN A BEAUTIFUL HIGH VOICE…*

The singer said she remembered these songs being sung
by her grandmother. Her voice was beautiful
and clear, which is why we were able to note down [the notes] *well.*
Silvia Porosson, 1957 (RKM II 65, 244)

In the collection reports where folklorists describe the singing of runosongs, one of the strikingly prominent features considered is the voice of the singer, its quality: strength or weakness, clarity/harshness, brightness/dullness, and above all its height/lowness. Does the description of the voice of the runosinger reflect the sound ideals of the collector's musical background or of the imagined runosinging soundscape? How did the singers themselves imagine a beautiful voice?

In the quotation at the beginning of the previous section, there was mention of being ashamed of the quality of one's voice. This is obvious, as runosongs were collected mainly from elderly people whose voice quality had often deteriorated – their voice had tired out during their lifetime and perhaps had no training. Here we could again recall the phenomenon of "sound ideal" – an idea of how singing should sound. Probably the singers thought that their voice did not correspond to the modern sound ideal.

But did the performers have any idea of the ideal sound of a runosong performance? This may have been the case for informants born in the first half of the nineteenth century, from whom the songs were collected in the first decades of the twentieth century, at the end of their lives. They had heard the performance of runosongs in a traditional performance situation – young maidens singing on a swing, an active singing of wedding singers or the like, in which case a strong and resounding voice timbre was used. In such a case, disappointment in their tired voice may also have been understandable. For the recordings of the runosong of the second half of the twentieth century, it is known that it was often done by recalling the singing of one's grandmother at home (Saarlo 2023: 583–584; Särg 1995; Oras 2004: 99). In this case, there was no likely significant difference in the voice quality between the performer and their recollections, and the contradiction arose presumably about the "sound ideal" caused by the singers' modern musical environment – the simplicity of runotunes and the timbre close to speech seemed inappropriate.

According to fieldwork diaries, it can be argued in general that both performers and collectors preferred a high and strong singing voice. In general, this may also be related to the difference between the aesthetics of singing of

young and old people. People, universally, prefer the singing of a younger person (Kallio 2012). As folk songs were usually collected from elderly people, the collectors of folk songs certainly heard rather tired and weak voices. Therefore, it was astonishing to listen to singers who had maintained their good voice at their old age.

Studies on the relationship between the development of the human larynx, age, and voice pitch have indicated, in the case of women, that the high pitch points to sexual activity and young age, or reproduction. Empirical studies have shown that men prefer higher-pitched women as they consider them more feminine, youthful, and sexually attractive. It has been observed that women tend to raise their voices when interacting with an attractive man (Re et al. 2012). Such studies are consistent with the content of the runosongs and the context of performance: young singers had to sing loudly and in a high voice in the public performance situation – for example, at village parties and on the swing – so that it would resonate further. And it carries, in addition to its communicative importance, the performer's message of the fertility and readiness for marriage.

Returning to the observations of folklorists who – as said above – heard mainly elderly people singing, and mainly in a relatively weak and tired voice, it is understandable that the strong and clear voice was noted as an extraordinary positive surprise.

> *The voice he* [Aleksander Rüütel] *has is very clear and resounding for his age. … August Trei is indeed a great singer and jokester. When he started singing, it was so strong that the microphone almost failed to record*.
> Ottilie Kõiva, 1961 (RKM II 103, 38, 42)

> *A woman starts singing runosongs. She has an extremely clear and high voice. It's surprising to me, since I'd only heard leelo-singing in a low harsh voice before and imagined it would always be so.*[16]
> A. Hallik, 1937 (ERA II 166, 434)

A remarkable fact, however, is that in the last quotation the voice is described as high – this, of course, in the case of female singers who, after all, are the majority of the performers of runosongs. But indeed, singing in a bright and high voice is noted positively more often in the collection reports than singing in a low and strong voice. As a matter of fact, the latter is essential to the descriptions of performers corresponding to the "ideal singer" representing the historical performance tradition (e.g., Kolk 1984; Saarlo 2023). The intriguing question is whether the accentuating and admiring of a high voice could reflect

a more modern – and institutional – language of music, in which, for example, positive characters with a high (sounding) voice sang in the operas (Siitan 1998). Oras has suggested by analysing the audio-recordings of prisoners of war from 1915 that the high voice of the (male) performers may have resulted, in addition to technical reasons, from aesthetic preferences of the time (Oras 2012: 169).

The positive example of institutional high culture music can also be seen more generally in the descriptions of the singers' voice and performance style. August Pulst described the singing of Hendrik Jantson, a 75-year-old wedding singer, using an opera-epithet: "His voice is deep, which is rare, with a good colourful timbre, a baritone. Sings like an opera soloist. Bold on stage" (Sildoja 2014: 224). It is clear that the quality of the voice of the opera singer was the sound ideal for people involved in the music of the first half of the twentieth century, which is why folk musicians were also recognized using this category.

In the case of a high and strong voice, there is an interesting technical – as well as aesthetical – question of whether a so-called head or chest voice is used. At this point, we should come back to the controversial contrast presented in the introduction of the article: the different singing styles of Kodavere singers and their reception. Anna Lindvere participated in the sound recording and the tours of folk musicians in the 1930s, being chosen to represent the eastern-Estonian runosinging tradition. The tour organizer August Pulst highlighted her strong and resounding voice. As Oras noted, Lindvere represents, from an ethnomusicological point of view, both technically and aesthetically more modern singing and musical style, using high head voice. Rosalie Tark, whose recording is relatively unremarkable from the point of view of today's listener, represents the traditional singing style, using a relatively low chest voice (Oras & Tuvi 2014: 113–115).

Lindvere's prominence among folklorists, in the media and the local community certainly relied on her eminently artistic performing manners and her expertise in heritage, but was also influenced by a very modern phenomenon: she was a celebrity because she was famous.[17] Lindvere was an acclaimed storyteller, but she was not a well-known wedding singer or the like. Her fame as a singer seems to be caused, or at least intensified, by outside attention. This raises the intriguing question of whether her prominence was due to her excellent mastery of the singing tradition, or rather due to the acceptability and familiarity of her singing for contemporary listeners? Oras's observation on the singing styles of Anna Lindvere and Rosalie Tark contextualizes Pulst's remarks on both Jantson's and Lindvere's voice and highlights the contractionary assessments of the time: despite the appreciation and prioritization of the archaic music culture, the features inherent in modern culture are appreciated

in its representatives. Singing in a high bright head voice and opera-like timbre is one of these features.

In archaic European singing traditions, it was common to sing in a chest voice, no matter what the pitch level was. Under the influence of the aesthetics of Western art music, singing in a head voice became prevailing also in Estonia. It can be assumed that in the twentieth century most singers preferred and used head voice for singing. Unfortunately, collectors have not specified whether they praise the singer's high pitch levels of the chest voice or the head voice.

Thus, certainly, the assessments of song collectors are influenced by the prevailing cultural norm, the idea of proper singing, the "sound ideal", and, in addition, by a certain evolutionary norm by which a high, strong, and clear voice is preferred as a sign of good health and fertility.

Figure 3. *Eeva Valner. Urvaste parish, Vana-Antsla commune. Photograph by Armas Otto Väisänen 1912 (ERA, Foto 906).*

ASSESSING THE MUSICALITY OF RUNOSINGERS: COULD EVERY SINGER SING?

> *The man's memory was weak too: he repeated one "tone"* [tune] *several times, still thought them to be new each time; the new tunes again came to light with great distress and pain – though the man spat, scratched behind his ear, went outside before anything came to mind. ... The writing down was hard; he sang in a pathetic weepy voice, sometimes high, sometimes low, simply as it happened; he could not keep the tune.*
> Frieda & Siegfried Talvik, 1904 (EÜS I 983/4)

The features of the performance of the runosongs examined above were highlighted by folklorists – mainly collectors with philological education – and others, non- or semi-professional collectors with various education and preparation for fieldwork. More diverse are the observations by those with musical education – above all, music students and active musicians who, from the very beginning of the collection history to the third quarter of the twentieth century, before audio-recording became prevalent, bore the fundamental weight of collecting runotunes. Thereafter and alongside, in relation to Herbert Tampere's work, ethnomusicologists with both musical and philological (folkloristic) preparation, who, in their activities, combined musical expertise with an understanding of the peculiarities of oral tradition, followed suit.

The questions of whether the performer of runosongs can sing correctly or sing at all, has musical talent, or carries the tune have been addressed – although often discretely as it is inappropriate – as long as the runotunes have been collected. If we use as a basis the "sound ideal" phenomenon, it is certainly plausible that singing had to meet certain criteria for it to be considered acceptable, according to vernacular understanding. Since the topic of this article is not ethnomusicology, I omit these criteria because they cannot be answered relying on fieldwork diaries. Instead, I ask a question that is more important from the point of view of historiography: was such an estimation of runosingers' musical talent even reasoned or appropriate? And if yes, what was the background to the estimations?

Already in 1912, Finnish music student Armas Otto Väisänen noted the speech-like intonation of runosinging and associated it, in a special way, with unmusicality, writing: "Their simple melody closely resembles the speaking intonation. It

could be seen most clearly in Eeva Vallner, who, of the singers I encountered, was the most primitive and – I dare say – the most unmusical one" (EÜS IX 1262).

To consider archaic, close-to-speech singing of a simple melody as non-musical singing is certainly related to the prevailing modern musical context; it did not correspond to the "sound ideal" imaginations of the collectors. Discussing the specifics of the documentation of the folk tunes, especially noting down differences between intervals smaller than half-tone, Jüri Välbe described singing in key in "correct" (tempered) pitch in 1910:

> *Very rarely there are such persons among the common folk who have some perception of the musical pitch. For the most part, all singers are pretty careless about the size of the intervals, because greater influence of the folk song lies in their words and rhythm. Of course, the singing of folk songs often contains intervals smaller than half-tone, but these can't be counted as advancement in the melody of the song, because they do not appear in the repeated melody during the song – maybe just sporadically. That's why they must be considered as mistuning.* (EÜS VII 2248/50)

Since Välbe claims, at the same time, that "the tone-scale of the modern time has already become well-known to our people" (EÜS VII 2251), it can be assumed that he considered the variating and singing typical of oral music to be an imperfect, flawed singing, because people should be able to sing in key and tempered pitch – it means their "sound ideal" should be modernized.

We can draw a parallel to the changing and modernizing "sound ideal" with the example of Kihnu, where the vernacular heterophonic way of group singing started to disappear in the second half of the twentieth century, when participatory singing was replaced by supervised institutionalized cultural activities. In addition to the tutors who received cultural education outside Kihnu Island, this process was certainly also influenced by a more general change in the musical background under the influence of Western music culture. "Pure" singing became the ideal; everyone had to sing exactly in tune and exactly the same tune, the spontaneous variation that caused vernacular heterophony inherent in oral traditions disappeared (Rüütel 2013: 89–97).

As Särg has pointed out, the professional musicians of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century did take the example of folk music as a source for individual creation and inspiration, but did not appreciate the artistic qualities and performative style of the original material (Särg 2012). The views of Soviet-era folk music collectors were more ambivalent. Professional musicians may still have been struggling with documenting tunes of singers whose singing did not match their own "sound ideal". Examples can

be found from the 1950s, when musicians of the Tallinn State Conservatoire – e.g., Anatoli Garšnek, Ester Mägi, and others – participated in the fieldwork in different regions of Estonia. Being Herbert Tampere's students, they had been prepared for documenting musical folklore. The diaries and working principles of the musicians were completely different from those of folklorists. Their observations, while rather laconic in scope, focused on specialized topics, describing the informants' musical experiences, qualities (e.g., range of voice), the peculiarities of the performance, repertoire, etc., also describing problems of documenting archaic speech-like music, identifying vague intervals, shifting intonation, and the like.

The musicians were no doubt also more foursquare in their assessments of musicality – or harsh for the contemporary reader. In her diary (1957, KKI 25, 418/32), Ester Mägi rated one singer as musically talented. About another singer Mägi said that she could not sing, i.e., she sang out of tune. Were Mägi's assessments based on her understanding of folk music or universal understanding of musicality? The documentation of the runosongs in the 1950s, during fieldwork in northeastern Estonia, was extremely scant, which points to the longstanding fading of the runosong tradition and allows for an assumption that local singers no longer had a runosong repertoire, nor did they follow the archaic singing style. Mägi's experience in documenting runosongs and other genres of folk music – she participated in several folklore field trips as a documenter of melodies in different regions of Estonia in the 1950s and 1960s – and the observations made in her reports allow us to suggest that she understood well the differences between Western/modern music and oral musical tradition. So, it can be said that she did not hesitate to give an assessment of the musical skills of a singer not out of disrespect or ignorance, but she knew experientially that there were performances of different quality in the oral tradition as well.

UNDERSTANDING VARIABILITY: SINGING OFF-KEY, FORGETTING, OR CREATIVE IMPROVISATION?

Attitudes to musical variation have also been volatile among collectors-researchers. When the characteristics of the oral tradition were not known, singing with variation was considered to come from the performer's incompetence. When the flexibility of oral culture became apparent, the possibility of musical variability was also recognized. There is a certain natural variation inherent in oral culture; just as the song texts are never memorized verbatim, so is the spontaneous variation and improvisation which causes heterophony in group singing typical of oral musical traditions (see, e.g., Pärtlas 2013).

In the 1950s and 1960s, one of the central research questions was the variability of runosongs, the formularity of the songs and the creativity of the performers, the improvisationality. Alongside the variability of the texts, the variation of runotunes was also considered. In fieldwork reports and in media reviews, folklorists highlight the artistic and creative value of "folk creations", emphasizing that the variability of the melodies in the performance situation was not a reduction in quality, but a conscious action inherent in the oral tradition. It was important to emphasize that improvisation was artistic modification, not random and unaware variation or flawed singing. It was also a political issue, since it was important in the Soviet folkloristic tradition to emphasize the artistic value of the creations of "working crowds", its equivalence to professional and high-class art.

However, collectors and researchers continued to be concerned whether the variability in documented runotunes was a musical variance, or mistakes caused by the singer's unmusicality or memory problems, or mastery of the runosinging tradition. The uncertainty of the collectors themselves about their own competency to evaluate the traditional musical qualities of the performance was also expressed.

Udo Kolk documented in detail the repertoire of a singer in Pärnu County, Leena Peterson, and observed that she improvised runotunes to an unusually large extent, raising doubt in him that maybe the singer did not hold the tune. However, when Kolk had also observed her performances of newer, rhymed stanzaic songs, he realized that she remained within the predetermined correctness (1952, EKRK I 7, 25/199). Thus, mastering the more recent melodies evidenced the musicality of the singer, and he was assured that her improvisation was "conscious" and traditional (ibid.: 193).

In her diary in 1960, Selma Lätt describes in plain words how a singer from Karksi, Ann Toompalu, was able to sing runosongs, but not complicated melodies of rhymed songs.

> *We heard old folk songs, it really caresses the ear. The runotunes come out pretty well, while the newer folk song with its extensive melody presents difficulties for Toompalu. Not accurate. Ann has not been a great singer. Dad didn't let her sing at all as a girl, as she could not carry a tune. Later, however, she gained courage and could sing together with others; besides, Ann has a very good memory and she remembers a lot of lyrics and tales*. (RKM II 94, 310)

Figure 4. *Sound-recording of Ann Toompalu in Polli village, Karksi parish. From the left: Olga Jõgever, Lilia Briedis, Ann Toompalu, Selma Lätt. Photograph by Viiu Jürken 1960 (ERA, Foto 4693).*

Lätt was a folklorist, and unfortunately Ann Toompalu's singing has not been described by musicians. According to the singer's biography, her parents did not think her singing was appropriate, either. Toompalu was young at the time when the song repertoire changed – the archaic runosong was replaced by modern music culture, dance evenings, circle-games, singing choirs, and printed songbooks. Probably her grandmother still sang runosongs, but the parents may already have been influenced by the aesthetics and musical requirements of Western modern music and evaluated Toompalu's singing according to modern criteria. Does that mean it does not require as many musical skills to sing runotunes as it does to sing Western music? But still, even if runosinging might have made simpler claims to the singer's musical competences, we must not conclude that there were none of them at all, that there were no vernacular musical rules and requirements in archaic oral musical traditions. Unquestionably, there were certain rules to respond to the sound ideal, as claimed by Pärtlas (2017). The problem was whether the folklorists who documented runosinging were competent enough to identify the sound ideal and these rules.

At the peak of the variability research, the capture of the variability of the performance was treated with real enthusiasm, which is why the repeated performance of one song by the singer was patiently documented in the fieldwork. Sometimes those efforts were, in the case of extreme variability, overshadowed by the concern of whether the variation was caused by memory problems – a topical problem, again, because of the advanced age of the singers. For example, in the case of the Kodavere singer and healer Sohvi Sepp, neither the collectors (Ottilie Kõiva and Udo Mägi) nor the later researchers (Ingrid Rüütel and Sirle Lorvi) came to terms with whether her unusually extensive variation stemmed from forgetting, the blurring of the traditional rules of variation, or creative improvisation (Saarlo 2014).

The complexity of documenting runotunes from a performer with weakened memory is vividly described by Ingrid Rüütel and Ottilie Kõiva in their Saaremaa fieldwork diary (1961), which also reflects the consistency of collectors in capturing the last relicts of archaic heritage.

> *The oldie kindly agreed to sing. Sadly, her memory had faded considerably. Melodies often came out vaguely, once this way, then the other, and mistuned. Sometimes, though, she sort of got the right sequence and was stable in staying in tune, especially if she remembered the song better. The uncertainty of her memory encouraged mistuning. However, we made an audio-recording of her singing and filmed her*. (RKM II 103, 35)

In the diary of Ottilie Niinemägi (Kõiva) from 1956, the agency of the singer as an active user of tradition, and not only a passive carrier, is most directly manifested:

> *From her we receive genuine runic folksongs. Runosongs have not only stayed in the mind of Anna Kivi, but she has also used them – she still sings old songs while playing with children and putting them to sleep. Anna Kivi has essentially one melody, but she uses it freely in variance. In every new performance, something new appears in the melody. It's not about forgetting the melody; Anna Kivi completely owns the melody, and that's exactly why she uses it as a mistress. Unfortunately, we have very little time to audio-record. The singer cannot concentrate calmly. The first time (on 6 July) she sang to us much more freely and variably than during the recording*. (RKM II 54, 72/3)

Figure 5. *Singer Marta Pull in the middle, Milvi Sakkis (left), Ingrid Ruus (Rüütel) (right). Kihnu, 1956 (EKRK, Foto 208).*

The actual diversity of those skilled in the song tradition comes out well from the next example – the diary kept by Aino Strutzkin on Kihnu Island in 1948. The two singers she describes were not musically talented, but they knew many lyrics. Most likely, their function in a singing group was to know the words and to sing along with others. The coexistence of the rich textual repertoire and singing in tune in one person may not have been a rule.

> *She had a good memory and answered and explained the asked questions well. She recited a bunch of songs, both wedding songs and others, newer ones. Singing with a melody didn't work out, she didn't stay in tune, which she confirmed herself.*[18]
>
> *Nothing came out of the performance of the songs, except for one three-verse-long lullaby. … She explained that she could sing together with others, but not alone.* (RKM II 27, 467, 468)

Ingrid Ruus (Rüütel) described the phenomenon in her impressions of the summer fieldwork in Kihnu in 1955:

> *To my great amazement, I heard that Paju Ann does not carry a tune well while singing newer songs, although she is such a fine wedding singer. Nevertheless, she helped others to sing, and* [she has] *no problems with singing together with others.* (EKRK I 9, 392)

Probably the same has been true for the melody and for the lyrics – it depended on the singer's personality whether they repeated exactly or varied. In the case of lyrics, it is known that the singers themselves also accepted variation alongside "singing as it has always been sung" (e.g., Timonen 2004: 274). Quick reaction and the willingness to improvise lyrics were highly appreciated in performances of wedding songs.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the main characteristics of the collection story of Estonian runosongs is that the tradition began to be documented during its crumbling phase. All over Estonia – with some regional exceptions – the runosong had receded or was receding from active life; it was remembered and to some extent used for the accompaniment of the family and calendar customs, but its importance was fading. As a result, informants' attitude towards it was often contemptuous, although over time the importance of tradition for national culture and science was recognized, and the attitude changed for the better. The decaying of the tradition also affected its richness, as memories were never complete and could be faulty.

The community involved in documenting runosongs was also evolving – their skills and professional training advanced over time. Voluntary collaborators, students, and professional folklorists, musicians and ethnomusicologists took part in fieldwork. The fieldwork diaries express a wide variety of views according to collectors' professional background and personal attitudes.

When describing the performances of runosongs, collectors use quite a few distinctive features. The monotony of runotunes and lack of different melodies have been observed most often. Collectors of runotunes, especially those without ethnomusicology training, were struggling transcribing tunes close to speech, tackling the recitative style of singing, non-tempered tuning, shifting intonation, and variability. In the reports, collectors mostly characterize the voice, positively emphasizing the presence of a high and/or strong voice in (mainly

elderly) singers. As a rule, the technical details of singing and generating a voice (timbre, sound, pitch, chest or head voice) are not reflected.

Archaic music was not inherent – or even familiar – anymore in all the collectors even at the beginning of the collection of the runosongs; it was evaluated through the prism of modern Western music education. That is why the high and/or strong voice of (elderly) singers was appreciated, but the runotunes themselves were evaluated as extraneous, insignificant, exotic, and even non-music.

The runosong tradition was text-oriented, which means that the text had the principal role, and the music mainly followed the build-up of the text. The primary reason why several songs were sung to collectors using the same melody was the musical nature of the tradition – different song texts were sung with group-melodies, divided rather by their functionality, and, vice versa, the same lyrics could also be used in different contexts with different melodies. At this point, again, the crumbling of the tradition played a role, and the singers may have remembered only one melody. This deepened the insignificance of the position of the melodies compared to the lyrics.

Much perplexity was caused to collectors by variation which is inherent in runosinging as an oral tradition. The problem was exacerbated by the decaying of the tradition, which led to an improvisation diverging from the border of the tradition or a complete absence of variability. At the beginning of the collection history, variability was not appreciated and was considered faulty singing, not keeping the tune. Later on, collectors had no competence or did not dare evaluate the musical quality of variative singing. The end-rhymed songs representing the modern singing culture could be used to measure the musical competence of the singer. However, in the course of time, as the peculiarities of runosinging were studied and experienced during fieldwork, the specific competence of runo-singers also began to be evaluated.

Although not directly the subject of the article, we cannot overlook the fact that sympathy for the singers played a role in the assessments that folklorists gave to their performances. In the second half of the twentieth century, during the long interviews and recording sessions, a humanly close relationship emerged between folklorists and singers; they became collaborating partners and were no longer merely interviewers and informants. Collectors would not like to say anything critical about singing when the singer was a pleasant person, modest and accommodating to the wishes of the collector, and met their ideas of an archaic way of life. Therefore, silence was sometimes more eloquent than an expressed opinion.

The aim of this article was to highlight more general tendencies in the descriptions of runosong performances in the fieldwork diaries from the twentieth century and to discuss their details and the reasons for their assessments. The

article does not offer a detailed analysis of how the singers performed runosongs – because that is not what the source material allows. However, it can be taken as inspiration for more comprehensive future studies by comparison of report texts, melody notations, and audio recordings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research has been supported by the Ministry of Education and Research (research projects TK215 and EKKD-III2); Estonian Research Council (PRG1288); Estonian Literary Museum (EKM 8-2/22/3); Research Council of Finland (project no. 333138) and Kone Foundation (IKAKE project). I am very grateful to Janika Oras, Žanna Pärtlas and Taive Särg for inspiration, and observant and expert guidance, and Olga Ivaškevitš for language support. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to the obvious deficiencies.

NOTES

[1] Jakob Hurt (1839–1907), reverend and linguist of Estonian origin, one of the leaders of the Estonian National Movement. He was the ideologist of Estonian folkloristics and initiator of the all-Estonian folklore collection campaign in 1888–1907, which engaged appr. 1,400 people all over Estonia, including farmers, schoolteachers, and pupils, all kinds of (rural) professionals and intellectuals, as well as some students-stipendiaries (see Jaago 2005).

[2] Oskar Kallas (1868–1946), Estonian folklorist, later diplomat. As a student, Kallas was a member of the Estonian Students' Society and one of the first folklore collection stipendiaries of Jakob Hurt (Kuutma 2005).

[3] The Estonian national university (Tartu University) was established in 1919, and the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore was established in the same year. The Estonian National Museum was founded in 1909, its sub-institution, the Estonian Folklore Archives, in 1927. On Estonian history, see, e.g., Kasekamp 2010; on Estonian folkloristics see Valk 2005 and 2007 [2004].

[4] Karl Leichter (1902–1987) was an Estonian musicologist. He worked at the EFA in 1929–1931, and continued collecting musical folklore later, too. He worked as a musicologist, music critic, lecturer, cultural official and organizer of musical activities (see Särg 2022: 95–96).

[5] Herbert Tampere (1909–1975) was an Estonian folklorist and musicologist. He started work at the EFA in 1929 and was its head in 1952–1966. After World War II he also taught ethnomusicology at the Tallinn Conservatoire. Tampere's contribution to the collection, cataloguing, publication, and research of Estonian folklore, especially folk music, is unique and crucial (Kalkun 2005).

[6] August Pulst (1889–1977) was an Estonian painter, theatre decorator, collector of antiquities and traditional music, and popularizer of folk culture. He was involved in the establishment of several museums. As a passionate enthusiast of traditional music and instrumentalist himself, he had a close relationship with traditional musicians. The idea of the folk-music tours was, among other things, to raise money for the establishment of the Estonian Museum in Tallinn – analogous to the Estonian National Museum founded in Tartu in 1909 – which later became the Estonian Art Museum. The Society for Remembrance of Estonian Composers, founded by Pulst, later grew into the Music Museum, now the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum.

[7] Now the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

[8] Anatoli Garšnek (1918–1998) was an Estonian composer and pedagogue.

[9] Ester Mägi (1922–2021) was an Estonian composer and pedagogue. From 1946–1951 she studied composition at the Tallinn State Conservatoire, in the class of Mart Saar, who was an active collector of folk melodies and used them in his compositions. In 1951–1954 she was further trained at the Moscow Conservatoire and from 1954 was a lecturer at the Tallinn State Conservatoire. The source for her compositions is often folk melodies.

[10] Ottilie-Olga Kõiva (1932–2023) was an Estonian folklorist, researcher of runosongs and compiler of academic runosong volumes *Vana kannel*. She started work at the EFA in 1954 and was its head in 1966–1977. She participated in folkloric fieldwork and conducted it from 1954 until the 1990s.

[11] Udo Kolk (1927–1998) graduated from the University of Tartu (Tartu State University at the time) as Estonian philologist in 1951, but he also had an education in music. He worked as a lecturer in literature and folklore at the university. He organized fieldwork practice for students, documenting many folk tunes himself. The focus of his studies was on the variation of the lyrics and melodies of the runosongs.

[12] Ingrid Rüütel (b. 1935) graduated from the University of Tartu as Estonian philologist in 1959, but she also had an education in music. Later she complemented her studies in ethnomusicology. She worked as a research fellow at the Estonian Literary Museum, and from 1978 was head of the Department of Folk Music at the Institute of Language and Literature, later the Department of Ethnomusicology at the ELM. Her contribution to the recording, publication, and research of folk music, both vocal and instrumental, is outstanding – and fundamental.

[13] Quotes from the reader *History of Estonian Folkloristics* (Laugaste 1963: 35, 101).

[14] Udo Kolk's articles on variability were based on lexical formulae, his research on musical improvisations remained mostly in manuscripts and was printed only in the 1980s (see, e.g., Kolk 1984).

[15] About the reasons of the decline of participatory singing in European culture see Särg 2023: 128.

[16] Today *leelo*-singing denotes exclusively the runosong tradition of Setomaa, southeastern Estonia. The fieldwork notes, however, are written in Jõhvi parish, in northeastern Estonia. In the 1930s – as well as in the 1940s and 1950s – *leelo* stood for the runosong as a whole, including contemporary compositions in the runosong form.

[17] This is referred to, for example, by Udo Mägi in his collection diary in 1947 (KKI 1, 20/48).

[18] Kihnu Island on the southwestern coast of Estonia was one of the regions where the tradition of runosinging persisted for a relatively long time, it might even be said to the present day. Nevertheless, runosongs persisted, above all, in relation to customs and rituals. The most potent was the tradition of wedding songs; the wedding singers were professionals who, in addition to knowledge of the songs and specific performance skills, also had to have thorough knowledge of conducting wedding rituals. At the same time, of course, newer, end-rhymed songs were sung for entertainment (see, e.g., Rüütel 2002).

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum

EKRK – manuscripts of the Chair of Literature and Folklore, Tartu University, 1950–1992
EKRK, Foto – photographs of the Chair of Literature and Folklore, Tartu University
ERA, Foto – photographs of the Estonian Folklore Archives
EÜS – manuscripts of the Estonian Students' Society
KKI – manuscripts of the Folklore Sector of the Institute of Language and Literature
RKM – manuscripts of the Folklore Department of the Estonian State Literary Museum, 1945–1996

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