

Covers and Folklore. Contra's Songs

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<i>kui on trumm</i>	<i>if there is a drum</i>
<i>tulevad pulgad</i>	<i>the sticks appear</i>
<i>iseenesest</i>	<i>by themselves</i>

Contra (1998: 50)

THE RELATIONS OF TEXTS AND MELODIES IN ESTONIAN FOLK SONGS

It has been a characteristic of Estonian folksongs since ancient times that one melody can be used with several lyrics. The oldest layer of Estonian folk music, the runosong, originates from the common runosong heritage of the Balto-Finns. Estonian runosongs have usually “group melodies”: one melody is used with several texts belonging to a certain (regional, functional, etc.) group of songs (Rüütel 1995: 128). A singer has some freedom to improvise or change the text according to her/his creativity and the particular occasion. New lyrics were (re)created by the most gifted singers and as a result more texts than melodies were common in oral tradition. A good singer was considered a person who was eloquent in words, had a good voice and great influence on the audience.

In the more recent layer of Estonian folksong that is characterized by end-rhymes, creating new texts for well-known melodies as also used. This layer has been influenced by European music, its influence continuing up to the present. Songs were also borrowed from neighbouring cultures, especially from the East during the Soviet period.

The multiple use of melodies is also known elsewhere, both at the times of the trobadors (Trobadors 1985: 20) as well as in contemporary Europe. Melodies that new words are written to have been called *kontrafazierende Melodien*, the same phenom-



*Contra at the Kaika summer university in Põlgaste.
Courtesy of Ülle Harju, 1998.*

enon in English is termed *the practice of contrafactur* (Klusen 1986: 195).

When end-rhymed songs emerged in Estonia in the 18th century, the songs spread from one person to another, but today the most important mediator of music – that of local origin, from the neighbours and from the West – is the music industry.

From the viewpoint of folklore the massmedia mediates a song to the human mind and acts as the teacher of a tradition. The Norwegian folklorist Torunn Selberg has claimed that media and folklore are opposite poles that can nevertheless have influence on one another. “Folklore is in ideal direct communication where the roles of the sender and receiver change and where everybody is a creator of common culture characterised

by historical depth” (Selberg 1993: 201). Ethnomusicologist John Blacking has said that although our contemporaries wish to see folk music as an intact and unchanged heritage from a distant past, one must admit that music heard over radio or other massmedia also has the essential features of any orally transmitted music tradition (Blacking 1977: 8). To learn a tradition, the repeating of audible and visible information is important. Quips from advertising clips and serials turn into folklore especially fast, because they recur most frequently (Peebo 1995: 7), and so do popular songs. Walter Anderson, the classic of folklore, emphasised the role of recurrent story-telling in learning the fairy tales by heart (Anderson 1923). Not only is a song learned from the massmedia, but also its style and situation of performing. For example, a singing child holds a toy in hand like a microphone and thus the singer performs as opposed to the audience.

There exist a large number of more or less well known songs in people’s active memory. Some of them are from the older and some from the newer layers of folklore, some are learnt at school, some from the massmedia. Two aspects in their performing in oral tradition can be distinguished:

1. Song are repeated from memory, making a choice from among known songs to be performed in a certain situation, creating **folk songs, popular songs and ways of performing**.

2. A song is chosen from among those known to one, but in performing they are arranged, **recreated in some popular way**. The aim may be to simply refresh an old song, to suit it to the current situation, or to create an entirely new one.

The main ways of (re)creating a song are:

1. adding new words to or changing the words of an existing song;
2. writing new lyrics, maintaining the melody;
3. creating a new melody, maintaining the lyrics;
4. translating into Estonian;
5. a foreign language text is adapted on the basis of sounds only, the contents of the song often turns into absurd nonsense;
6. combining different lyrics and melodies. (See Example 1.)

All these simple ways are used both in runosong and in the more recent layers of folk singing. A large part of contemporary student songs are based on well-known recorded pieces of music.

THE THREE TENORS OF VÕRU COUNTY

New texts are written to songs not only by translators or musicians in a band. Anyone can do it. In this article I would like to introduce Contra (Margus Konnula), who is quite a phenomenon with his creative attitude towards song texts. In addition I would also like to discuss Indrek Rüttele's and Olavi Ruitlane's lyrics (see Särg 1999). Both young men are foremost known as poets.

The young poet Contra lives in Suure-Horma farm, Urvaste village, Võru county, and also sometimes identifies himself as the king of Urvaste (Contra 1997: 1). He is 26 years old (born in 1974) and used to work as postman and head of the Urvaste post-office. In February 1999 he quit the job and has been freelanced since then.¹ Contra has published a cassette and CD as well as eight collections of poems, one of them available on the Internet (Contra 1997). More information about Contra as a person can be found in article by Veiko Märka (1998) and Peeter Sauter (1999).

I consider him more as a folk singer than a professional poet or singer. It is because he sings his songs with pleasure anywhere to any audiences: at different parties, while travelling by bus, etc.; he sings "a capella" and out of tune. Veiko Märka writes how after the interview was ended, "Contra rides a bike to a shop in Antsla and among other things buys sausages named after his dog (Spot). And sings the salesgirls and customers a couple of songs." (Märka 1998: 4). Arne Merilai, a reader of literature at Tartu University, was the first literary person to notice Contra, when he was selling copies of his poems on a local bus to Urvaste.²

I have repeatedly heard him singing to closed and open circles, at public events and birthdays. I have also taped or filmed his performances (with Einar Sinijärv or Indrek Särg).

Contra has published his songs in various books of poetry, two of them subtitled "singing book": *Üüratu üürlane* [Huge shriller] and *Naine on mees* [Woman is man] (Contra 1996, 1999), containing with few exceptions only lyrics of songs. The mentioned exceptions are also relative – while recording texts from

¹) Personal communication with Contra in *Peegli Pubi*, Tartu, 19.04.1999.

²) Personal communication with Arne Merilai at Järveküla Summer School, 12.07.1998.

Üüratu üürlane, Contra improvised on the spot melodies also for poems that originally had had none³ (e.g. Contra 1996: 26A, 27, 28A). He said on a recording session, that since he had already started to sing he may as well sing the song to the end.

The second young poet, Indrek Rüttele (born in 1971) lives in Puhja village, Tartu county. He has used popular songs as a source of material for his poems. He does not perform his songs as widely as Contra, but he can just as quickly as Contra improvise the poems to an original speech-like melody in a blues or rap style.⁴ The third poet, Olavi Ruitlane (born in 1969) comes from Võru, lives in Laeva village, Tartu county and can also play guitar. His source of material is Estonian-centered, singing mainly covers of Estonian children and pop songs. His covers include inserting small jokes as well as political satire, e.g. the song "Mine minema Savisaar Ets" (Go away Savisaar Ets) (Ruitlane 1999: 42). Neither Contra, Rüttele nor Ruitlane has tertiary education and they are mainly occupied with writing. In singing, they are often joined by Jan Rahman or Veiko Märka, creating different versions of a group called "Three tenors of Võru county".

COVER

Contra himself calls his texts *covers*. On the title page in the songbook *Üüratu üürlane* is written: "The book [...] consists of covers of famous songs as well as just so songs!" (Contra 1996: 2). According to the Finnish lexicon *Otavan musiikkitieto* 'a cover' is quite the same as plagiarism (OM 1987). The German handbook of popmusic *Rock. Pop. Jazz. Folk.* explains the term: "*Cover version* is the new performance of a song, which has already been put out on a record, by another musician at the time the original is still popular; cover is only aimed at commercial success, it is not an independent new interpretation of a composition, even if the press may call it so." (RPJF 1987). Hence, cover has two meanings: strictly speaking it is like a plagiarism, but in colloquial speech it can mean a new interpretation of a song by some other musician. Cover can more or less resemble its original. Based on the examples from the lexicon we can draw a con-

³⁻⁴) EKLA reg. 1999/49. Recorded in the Tartu office of Fenno-Ugristics in 1997 by Taive Särg.

clusion that cover can have a different title and probably a different text. It is a debatable point, whether there is any difference between a cover and a translation of a song.

During an interview with Contra, Indrek Rüttele and Sven Kivisildnik it became evident, that in their colloquial speech 'cover' indicates simply a new interpretation of a well-known piece of music.⁵ Consequently, a shift of meaning has taken place in colloquial speech.

Song lyrics translated into Estonian (Estonian covers), are usually more humorous and trenchant than the original ones; this is also the case with the songs by Contra and Rüttele. Quite a large portion of Contra's texts have been made to the music of *Nirvana* (see, e.g. Example 2; Contra 1996, 2000: 5, 7), while Rüttele has preferred *Pixies*. The original texts – usually in English – can lead the song-writer, but it depends on how much he understands the original. Contra said that he often proceeds from only one association or from the sound of the words in the original.⁶ A good example is *Tüütu kärbes* (Boring fly, Example 3), made to Suzanne Vega's "Tom's Dinner"; another example could be the Beatles' song "Lucy in the sky with diamonds", sung by Contra: *Bussijaamas on Valgre Raimond* (Raimond Valgre is at the bus-station, Example 4).

Thus, Contra's definition of 'cover' combines parody and self-irony, since his performance has no connections with plagiarism. True, he usually tries to use songs which are sufficiently well-known. But his style of singing differs greatly from the original and is very individual in its character. He always creates a new text and there is never the monotonous beat drum the covers usually have – he sings "a capella". Any way you look at it, it is difficult to imagine, that he could be a commercial success with his particular way of singing.

CONTRA'S SYNCRETISM

An important part of Contra's performance are his gestures, movements, mimicry and interaction with the audience. The manner of singing described above touches on several areas,

⁵⁻⁶) EKLA reg. 1999/49. Recorded in the Tartu office of Fenno-Ugristics in 1997 by Taive Särg.

there are connections with folklore, literature, music and play-acting. For this reason I consider his creations to be syncretic. Syncretism is considered to be especially characteristic to folklore, it is “a lack of dismemberment characteristic to the earlier stages of cultural development: the unity of action, world perception and artistic creation. Syncretism is an essential feature of folklore, e.g. in a folksong art of words and music (with dance and drama elements sometimes added) are inseparably united. When culture differentiates (e.g. the distinction of art genres), syncretism retreats.” (ENE 1975: 372).

Although Contra has been accepted as a member of the Estonian Writers' Union, his activities are not limited to literature. The definitions of literature point in two directions: on the one hand, it is perceived as the art of words (folkloric and other literature genres belong here independently of their form of appearance), and on the other hand, any written text (independently of its contents or quality). Newer definitions are even more ambiguous as notion is a difficult one and hard to define exactly (Fowler & Kegan 1987: 134).

The Estonian term *kirjandus* 'literature' includes the notion of *kirjalik* 'in written form' – but is literature restricted in written and mute form, or does it also include an oral component based on oral tradition? A poet of the older generation Hando Runnel recites his poems on an LP released in 1972, on the cover he has written a commentary:

A poem takes its origin from music. [...] Poetry is a voiceless song. Poetry is written for intimate reading, from books, with the eyes. Poetry written for the eyes can sound embarrassing and painful to the ears. Perhaps the author's voice can diminish the embarrassment. (Runnel 1972)

Contra does not experience any embarrassment while performing his poems. Quite the contrary: although Contra's poems have been published in book form, they were meant for singing in a loud voice, like folksongs in olden times.

Hasso Krull has stated that we should not oppose written poetry to songs sung. Poetry is not simply “reduced song”, quite the opposite may occur:

It would be easier to imagine that the primary “mode” of modulation of the human voice is humming without words, something starting off like an infant’s babbling which develops as a separate entity, and which later may be connected with the art of casting a spell with words or reciting a magic spell [---]. Consequently, the writing down of poetry may in itself not be a bigger transformation than the recital of a charm changing into a song. Thus a written letter is not alien to poetry in essence, but only an addition of a kind, a supplement, as Derrida once called it. (Krull 1998: 1).

Like a folk singer, Contra does not stress his being an author and does not try to hold on to his copyright: on the cover of his book he has written that the use of these texts without license is not liable to prosecution (Contra 1996: 2). Thus his endeavour is not to be individualistic, but rather he is outwardly orientated.

Trying to place Contra in Estonian poetry, we must consider the features in it that according to Hennoste, appeared in Estonian poetry in the 1970s: increase of daily life, quotations and songlikeness. The 1970s were also characterised by features of several *post*-periods (Hennoste 1997a: 117). Hennoste considers



Contra and Kauksi Ülle in Komi. Courtesy of Eva Toulouze, 1998.

the 1990s a jump towards both modernism and postmodernism (Hennoste 1997c); postmodernism is hereby understood as the negation of modernism or taking modernism to its extremes, losing in the process the opposition of high and low arts, including pop-culture among high cultures (Hennoste 1997b; Kangilaski 1995: 226). Postmodernism is also connected with the development of postindustrial information society, the spread of mass media, and suitable for Contra to paradise. However, this is also like breaking through a door he himself opened, as on the title page of his collection *Ei ole mina sinu raadio* (“I am not your radio”) is written:

<i>sisult – sotsialistlik</i>	content – socialist
<i>vormilt – eestipostmodernistlik</i>	form – Estonian
	postmodernism
(Contra 1998: 2)	

Contra’s sources and the style of singing originate from contemporary music disseminated through the massmedia. Unlike in literature, oral tradition is strong in music, and the listening experience and impressions thus received are important; usually one musician interprets a song composed by someone else, and changes it. And yet, a person well-versed in music will not accept the fact that Contra sings out of tune, he cannot be accepted as a singer proper. But actually Contra’s singing sounds particularly original and comical, because he sings out of tune. In the context of a general performance where the several features of the original have been shifted, Contra’s singing out of tune turns into a means of expression in itself, concurring with his characteristic abasement or even blasphemy. He parodies both the style of singing and performing, used by stars in front of an audience, as well as the way Estonian artists have tried to mimic foreign stars (e.g. the song *Maarja-Liis*⁷ in Contra 1999: 23).

Contra’s performance is quite fascinating in itself, he uses distinct dramatic elements. His clothing is quite original, one could state that he moves about in costume. Thus, due to his

⁷) Video filmed on November 7, 1997 in the room of Tartu Young Authors’ Assembly in Tartu Literary House. Collectors T. Särg ja E. Sinijärv.

lack of musical talent, his performance is closer to dramatic act. As a genre, Contra's songs can be considered parodies or travesties, often he turns things into the absurd.

What about Contra and folklore? The concept of folklore has become wider as it evolved (Honko 1998). The definition of folklore established in Bergen 1986 includes "even written and mass media forms of folklore to the extent that variations occur". (NIF 1986: 21). Contemporary folklore is often hard to distinguish from other forms of folk and mass culture.

One characteristic unique to mass culture has been considered standardisation as opposed to variation characteristic to folklore (Selberg 1993: 205). The American media researcher John Fiske has defined popular culture as emerging when people themselves use cultural products mediated via mass media (Fiske 1989: 2). The Norwegian folklorist Torunn Selberg sees this as a folkloristic view on mass media studies; use of products of mass culture is a social act and event that carries its own meaning in the social context (Selberg 1993: 206).

On the side of folklore fall Contra as a person (someone from the folk from the countryside, not too educated), his manner of creation (poems composed by himself to a well-known melody, based on repeated listening experience), performance situation (wherever the opportunity arises), and the manner of performance (according to his capacities and meeting the audience's request), and syncretism.

Single texts by Contra have been disseminated among the people and sometimes even become "anonymous". He recalled that he found one of his songs "Jimmy Troll" on a tape released by the band *Operatsioon Õ*. The lyrics had been assigned to "a guy from Tartu". The poem "Nekrofiil" ("Necrophile", Contra 1996b: 23) had been recited and copied even before it was published. At some public performances it turned out that the audience know his poems by heart. The most popular poem was recited in chorus:⁸

*Naised on nii imelised
harrastades odaviset.*

Women are marvellous
they practice throwing the javelin.

⁸) Personal communication with Contra in 1998 at Järveküla seminar "Lätete pääl".

Contra has listed his sources on the last page of *Üüratu üürlane*, where he admits that “I got hints etc. from the following collectives of artists and naturally from single individuals”. The list includes in addition to *Kukerpillid* and *Nirvana* also *people*, and *probably someone else* (Contra 1996a: 44).

Syncretism as a world view and the unity of activities is evident also from the publishing and the layout of Contra's books. The front cover of *Ei ole mina su raadio* (Contra 1998) is illustrated with postage stamps, indicating Contra's profession. The fact that he provides the finances for publishing his books reflects his farmer's pride. He jokes about all kinds of sponsors by writing on the title page of *Ei ole mina su raadio*:

Iuulekogu väljaandmist toetanud
this collection of poems was supported
AS Eesti Tugi
by Estonian Support Ltd.
sõnad luuletamiseks ette valmistanud
the words prepared for poetry by
AS Eesti Sõna
Estonian Word Ltd.
(Contra 1998: 2)

Self-financing forces one to economize. The thin booklets by Contra include more poems than one might expect, because the pages are covered with print and no decorative white patches have been left. The latter is considered essential for enjoying poetry in modern times.

THE SYMBOL-MELODY

Contra sings well-known melodies with his own texts, a popular way of creating songs everywhere. Many of these songs and melodies are well-known to the extent that they have become a kind of symbol-melodies in Estonia, signifying a certain content for us.

According to Evi Arujärv, a symbol-melody could be defined thus:

Music that tries carefully to illustrate and amplify ideological imaginations, does not maintain its pure nature. [...] The social context and the situation of its use have given a symbolic meaning to the music, and it is impossible to remove it from its temporal and cultural space. (Arujärv 1993: 38)

An example of the musical symbol can be the American folktune “Yankee Doodle”, that several authors have created words for. The tune with its simple harmony and clear melodies is reminiscent of newer Estonian folk songs, adding to why singers find it easy to use. The tune became well-known in Estonia since it was used as the signature by the radio *The Voice of America*. Listening to and co-working with *The Voice of America* was forbidden in the Soviet Union, rendering the broadcast political, a part of the forbidden West, and making this simple tune a symbol of the Western world, and implying that any message accompanied with this tune is political. Another reason is that the tune has been used by *Sex Pistols*.

I have found five Estonian texts written on this tune and I have heard of an additional two. Two of them were composed by students in EÜE (the Students’ Building Brigade) (EÜE 1998: 4, 15). Both of them refer to war. “Kuldre (või Kuldne) marsirood” (Kuldre (or Golden) Marching Company, Example 5) from 1981 deals more with internal policy, the lack of freedom and an organisation referred to with an euphemistic name *Ehhehhee*. Here the Estonian audience recognizes the KGB, an acronym that at the time was not said aloud in public. “Euromais” (Euro+maize, Example 6) from 1982 deals more with foreign policy, particularly with relations between Russia and the West, and colonization. A Conservative Britain, whose economy contrasts distinctly to the asiatic production of student brigades, is hailed by the refrain “I love Thatcher!”

Poet Jaan Malin has written the lyrics, titled “Jüriöö eelseisund” (Condition before Jüriöö, Example 7; Malin 1990: 29). The uprising of Jüriöö in 1343 is the most important armed resistance against Germans in Estonian history and has a symbolical meaning of rebellion and yearning for freedom. The poem refers to bloody injustice and mutiny, implying the Soviet order as the enemy.

The last text “Ei eesel pole elevant” (Example 8; Rüttele 1997: 29) was written in 1997 by Indrek Rüttele under changed political conditions when Estonia was already an established independent republic. He parodies the heroic history of America and stresses the contribution of Jewish capital and freemasonry in it. His version indicates an enlarged political horizon, because any criticism of America during the Soviet period would have been a collaboration with official politics.

Pop groups *J.M.K.E* and *Kulo* have written their own versions. The latter sings an advertisement for Saku beer in their chorus. Departing from *Sex Pistols* and *Kulo*, the students of Tartu University have composed a new version of the song (Rotten is former the singer of *Sex Pistols* Johnny Rotten):

<i>Nurgas istub Rotten</i>	In the corner sits Rotten
<i>kes näpib oma kotte</i>	who scratches his balls
<i>ja kallab enda sisse üha</i>	and swallows beer cans
<i>uusi õllepotte.</i>	one after another.
<i>Jooge Saku õlut (3x)</i>	Drink Saku beer (3 times)
<i>siis on elu sees.⁹</i>	then you'll stay alive

These texts have the same melody, all those new texts may be considered textual variants of the song.

Another example of a symbol-melody could be the *Kasatchok* “Tantsulaul”, composed by an Estonian composer Kustas Kikerpuu (Lauluraamat 1998: 202) on the motif of an Ukrainian folkdance. The song was well in keeping with Soviet national policy, which aimed at drawing different nationalities closer to each other, finally losing the borders and differences between them, which in real life actually meant Russification. Against this backdrop, the *kasatchok* featuring a Russian or Ukrainian accordionist Vanya was created. The song was quite popular in its time around the 1960s, and it was on a tape released by the group *Golden Ribbons* presenting the more popular songs of the 1960s and 1970s (KL: 6). The song has been rewritten into covers at least four times before Contra, by pop-groups *Kulo*, *Talong*, *Kuldne Trio* and singer Üllar Jörberg. Following the original

⁹) Mediated by Valdo Valper from the 1998 seminar “Lätete pääl” at Järveküla.



The three Võru tenors Contra, Jan Rahman and Olavi Ruitlane at the Kaika summer university in Põlgaste. Courtesy of Ülle Harju, 1998.

version, the song relates to the inner politics and the question of nationalities.

The song by Contra to the same tune called “Kassatshekk” (Cashier’s receipt, Example 9) was written in 1992, during the transition period to Estonian Republic and the hard economic crisis. It is about poverty, about waving a receipt received at a shop at night. Especially suggestive are the verses:

<i>toidupoest varastasin singi</i>	from foodstore I pinched a steak
<i>selle ümber joonistasin ringi</i> (Contra 1996a: 12)	around it I drew a circle

Vanya who blows up Tallinn before leaving it for good, does not leave much hope in solving the nationality problems peacefully.

The number of such musical symbols in people’s minds is large and they are often put to use in contemporary popular compositions. The symbol can involve several features of a song: melody, text and context (used for what, in what kind of situations it has been performed, etc.). Songs changed this way spread here and there and sometimes nobody knows the author. Usually such songs are treated as new musical folklore.

In spite of Contra's singing out of tune, we can still clearly distinguish the main outline of the melody movement, which is, according to Estonian researchers of folk music (such as I. Rüütel 1980: 3, U. Lippus 1995: 145), the most consistent part of melody. The simple recognition is sufficient for perceiving the symbolic meaning of the melody; the manner of performance, the shift in musical features and the new text provide it with an additional meaning.

In addition to symbol-melodies, Contra uses in his song texts many well-known symbols or symbolical objects and facts. For example, in the songs "Killukeski yesterdayst" (Example 10), the names of famous Estonian swimmers and politicians are side by side with obscenities and the patriotic song "Kaunistagem Eesti kojad" ("Let us decorate Estonian homes") as well as the Estonian tricolor flag.

THE SINGER OF COUNTRY PEOPLE

What is Contra's relationship with the songs he uses as his source material? He says that he always finds something fascinating in them, he does not aim at ridiculing them in the worst sense, or parodying them; his sole purpose is to have fun. Several of the songs he uses are among his favourites and he never sings anything he dislikes.¹⁰ Thus, Contra's songs could also be called pastiches. Pastish, like parody, is imitation of some style, but without satire or the wish to ridicule (Jameson 1997:131).

However, it is clear that to some extent Contra places himself in opposition to the original songs. He forms a part of a sort of counter culture, which is already reflected in his name – Contra. The word *contra* actually has two meanings – 'against something', and 'an extreme'. While explaining his choice of name Contra once said that he preferred the second explanation. He does not fight against anything, but he is something especially extreme.¹¹ But another time he said: "I am against it all. Also against being against. Consequently, I am in favour of all." (Märka 1998: 4).

¹⁰) EKLA reg. 1999/49. Recorded in the Tartu office of Fenno-Ugristics in 1997. Recorded by Taive Särg.

¹¹) Communication from Contra's evening recital of his work at "Legend" gallery in 1997.

Information imbedded in melody (and also the original text and its meaning) are usually opposed to Contra's words, or is at least less mundane and robust. Contra has a general tendency to vulgarise things, to treat topics that are especially mundane, for example the physical aspects of love, or metabolism.

The creation of the kind of mundane counter culture is reminiscent of the European carnival and laughter culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, where everything official and serious had a humorous folk counterpart. (I have treated the subject in more depth in Särög 2000.) Laughter and vulgarisation helped reveal what was false and wrong, but also the high and too distant from everyday life. Vulgarising brought art closer to earth and the lower part of the body, signifying not only precipitation but also contact with the fertilising substance and rebirth (Bakhtin 1987; 194–195). This is well illustrated by Contra's famous statement about being the fertilising manure on the Estonian field of poetry (Sauter 1999; Contra 1998:3).

In conclusion, Contra's attitude is not destructive, but rather an affirmation of being himself. This being himself is emphasised by closeness to the country and earth, the clumsiness opposed to the world view obtained via the mass media that changes with the changing of time and fashion. Many of his songs have social content; more stable than the changing dominating ideologies (Russification, nationality, Europeanism) is Contra's point view that jokes about them (see Examples 10, 11; Contra 1999: 26). In his songs there are also many everyday phenomena that one is surprised to be sung about. With his manner of performing, Contra jokes about the differences which separate him as a country boy from the world we see on the TV screen. Referring to the film "Mr. Bean" we might compare Contra, singing a Suzanne Vega's song, to the face with a huge nose that Mr. Bean draws on a classical beautiful painting.

Contra's singing, his distancing from the originals, participating without participation, his musical inability that has reached the level of a new expression which is connected with eloquence and performance charm – all of that has been especially approved by the audience. Is this caused by the joy of recognition? Maybe Contra's original means of expression carry also messages about the audience itself: snappy country people who are inept in many ways, sceptical, used to the changing of holy men, and who ob-

serves the far-away dubious world from a distance. Contra's performance also shakes common beliefs – for instance, that a singer should sing in tune.

<i>kas viisi ma pean</i>	Do I sing to tune
<i>ei pea jah ma tean</i>	I don't, I know
<i>just seepärast laulma pean</i>	and this is why I must
sing	sing
(Contra 1999: 16)	

Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettle has observed the effects of the wide spread Western music all over the world and distinguished eight main types of reaction from the original cultures to this. One of these is the humorous parallel use of own and foreign musical elements (Nettl 1983: 352) that can also be observed in the songs of Contra and Röötle.

John Blacking has stated that new phenomena in music need not be the result of social change, the changes in music may be more radical, or precede them. "One of the challenges of studying artistic systems is the possibility that, because nonverbal communication and performative modes prevail in the performing arts, and because their ambiguity and polysemy allow people to assign to them a greater range of meanings, radical changes of thought are more likely to take place in the arts than in other social institutions." (Blacking 1986: 7).

In studying Contra (and other song writers) we may observe that man has preserved the urge to create integral syncretic art, and to perform it directly the way it occurred before the invention of print. The vitality of folklore cannot be measured primarily by how often it is performed, but rather, by how much of it and at which level it is created. The number of Estonian runosongs is so big because there were many creators; their diversity is explained by the fact that every now and then some new, nontraditional ways and means were introduced. The basis for everything is the creator, medium, singer, who intermediates the images in his consciousness and the collective tradition to real living people. Many great folk singers stood out from the crowd of others merely because of their ability to create, to improvise using traditional methods. Looking at Contra, we see

that the creative force of people is strong, the old custom of singing new up-to-date words to old tunes is still going strong.

Contra is quite fond of being compared to folk singers. If we use the definition where folklore is what folklorists research (Claus & Korom 1991: 31), Contra has every right to sing:

Kaido Kamal on tütar kelle nimi on Kärg,
et olen rahvalaulik avastas kord Taive Särg
*Kaido Kama has a daughter called Kärg
that I am a folk singer once discovered Taive Särg*
(Contra 1999: 16)

In the previous couple of years, Contra has repeatedly performed on television, he has his own show in *Raadio 2* called “Contrarünnak” (Contra’s attack) and columns in several Estonian papers. “But now I am a star and one of the most bought poets,” he comments (Sauter 1999: 5). Having taken the material of his songs from mass media, he is now with increasing fame on the way to mass media. Whether to merge with the media or to reshape it to his face?

Examples

Transcription and notation by Taive Särg. In notes, the following additional signs are used:

↑	insignificant pitch raise of a note
↓	insignificant pitch fall of a note
ˆ	insignificant duration lengthening
˘	insignificant duration shortening
x	note of an indefinite pitch

Example 1. New songs are created by combining different words and melodies. Students joined in the 1980s the words of *The Anthem of Soviet Estonia* with the melody and refrain of the Swedish folksong *Once I walked with gentlemen*. This way the part of the betrayed maiden is taken by up Estonia, or as J. Semper has put it in the lyrics – the people of Kalev. The originally asemantic interjections *joo, joo* in the refrain have in Estonian the meaning “drink, drink!”, acquiring in the context the imperative meaning. Recorded by Taive Särg. Original published in, for example *Laulik* 1955: 5, 6.

Jää kest - ma Ka-le - vi - te kan - ge rah - vas,
 joo, joo, Ka - le - vi - te rah - vas,
 joo, Ka - le - vi - te rah - vas. Ja
 sei - sa kal - ju - na, me ko - du - maa,
 joo, joo, Ka - le - vi - te rah - vas,
 (või: ko - du - maa,
 joo, Ka - le - vi - te rah - vas. /.../
 joo, ko - du - maa.)

*1. Jää kestma, Kalevite kange rahvas
 ja seisa kaljuna me kodumaa,
 Ei vaibund kannatustes sinu vahvus,
 end läbi sajanditest murdsid sa
 ja tõusid õitsvaks sotsialismimaaks,
 et päikene su päevadesse paista saaks.*

The Anthem of Soviet Estonia

**1. Stay forever, bold people of Kalevs
 and stand as rock, our homeland!
 Your boldness did not drown in sufferance,
 you broke through centuries
 and rose to be a socialist country,
 so sun could shine into your days.**

*Kõndisin kord härradega ringi
 Rootsi rahvalaul*

*1. Kõndisin kord härradega ringi
 joo, joo, härradega ringi,
 joo, kord härradega ringi.*

Once I walked with gentlemen

Swedish folk song

1. Once I walked with gentlemen
joo, joo, with gentlemen
joo, with gentlemen.

Example 2. *Ma ei tea ju* [I do not know]. The song is based on *Smells like teen's spirit* by Nirvana. Text published in *Contra* 1996: 23–24. The notes are based on the video filmed in May 1997 in Tartu Literary House at the recital of poems by the members of Tartu Young Authors' Assembly. Recorded by T. Särg and E. Sinijärv.

Ma ei tea ju

1. Mis pa - ha on, see po - le hea, eks
e - lan veel, kui mul ei vea. Ma
kin - ni reeg - li - test ei pea, ehk
peak - sin - gi, kuid neid ei tea. Ei
tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei
tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei

tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei

tea. Ma ei tea ju mit-te mis-kit,

ma joon ai-nult s(h)o-ti vis-kit,

ma joon ai-nult taa-ni õlt-se,

mi-da tean ma ü-le-ült-se.

Mi-da tean ma po-le tea-da,

o-len pea-ta, ä-ra pea-ta mind!

2.Ma sul-le täp-selt öel-da võin, mis

ei-le õh-tu söö-giks sõin, kuid

se-da ü-tel-da ei tea, kas

mait-ses mul-le toit ka hea. Ei

tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei

tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea.

Ma ei tea ju mit-te mis-kit,

ma joon ai-nult s(h)o-ti vis-kit,

ma joon ai-nult taa-ni õlt-se,

mi-da tean ma ü-le-ült-se.

Mi-da tean ma, po-le tea-da,

o-len pea-ta, ä-ra pea-ta mind!.../

I don't really know

1. What is bad is not good
 I'll go on living if I'm not lucky
 I do not stick to rules
 maybe I should but I don't know them

2. I can tell you exactly
 what I ate before dinner yesterday
 but I can't tell you
 if the food tasted good

3. *Ma jälle naeratama pean
kui räägin sulle, mis ma tean.
Ka sinu huulil naeratus,
kuid huuled on küll ei tea kus.*

I must smile again
if I tell you what I know
your lips are smiling as well
but the lips are I don't know where

Ref:

*Ei tea, ei tea, ei tea, ei tea...
ma ei tea ju mitte miskit,
ma joon ainult shoti viskit,
ma joon ainult Taani õltse,
mida tean ma üleüldse,
mida tean ma,
pole teada,
olen peata,
ära peata,
ära teata,
pole vaja,
kõik on jama,
kõik on jama,
kõik on jama...*

don't know don't know don't know ...
I really don't know anything
I drink only Scotch whisky
I drink only Danish beer
what do I know altogether
what do I know
is not known
I'm at a loss
don't stop
don't tell
there's no need
it's all rubbish
it's all rubbish
it's all rubbish

Example 3. *Tüütu kärbes* [Boring fly] by Contra, based on *Tom's Dinner* by *Suzanne Vega*. The refrain of the song takes from the similar asemantical sound of *tüü-tüü* or *tu-tu*. Contra has also used as a source another Estonian cover of the song by *Onu Bella*. Text published in Contra 1996: 6.

Tüütu kärbes

*1. näpin voodi nurgas kotte
und ei tule terve öö
vahelduseks tapan rotte
see on ainus meeldiv töö
närin ühte kohviuba
muud mul pole närimist
keegi lendab mööda tuba
see on tüütu kärbes vist.*

A boring fly

1. in the bed corner I scrach my balls
I cannot sleep the whole night
for a change I kill rats
this is the only nice job
I chew one coffee bean
I don't have anything else to chew
someone is flying about the room
it probably is a boring fly

Refr: tü-tü-tü-tü-tüütu kärbes..

Chorus: bo-bo-bo-boring fly

*2. rotilaipu terve hunnik
aina juurde tekib neid
edasi ei lähe tunnid
ärevalt loen minuteid
jääda magama ei julge
nagu mingi terrorist
keegi mööda tuba kulgeb
see on tüütu kärbes vist*

2. a heap of rat corpses
there will be more and more
the hours refuse to pass
nervously I count the minutes
I'm afraid to fall asleep
as a kind of terrorist
someone wanders in the room
it probably is the boring fly

3. võtan seinalt automaadi
 valanguid sealt lasen viis
 laua peale keset praadi
 tüütu kärbes kukub siis
 magades mu rind ei paisu
 pole mingit magamist
 kuskilt tuleb laibahaisu
 see on tüütu kärbes vist

3. I take the machine-gun from the wall
 shoot out five bursts
 onto the table into the meal
 then drops the boring fly
 my chest is not moving in sleep
 it is impossible to sleep
 from somewhere reeks the smell of corpse
 it probably is the boring fly

Example 4. *Bussijaamas on Valgre Raimond* [Raimond Valgre is at the bus-station]. The song is based on *Lucy in the sky with diamonds* by *The Beatles*. The refrain is based on acoustic similarity. The Estonian text is compiled of fragments from well-known pop songs (among others, by Raimond Valgre) and facts of life. Text published in *Contra* 1999: 14. Note based on the recording of the 1998 Kaika Summer School. Singing: Contra, Olavi Ruitlane and Veiko Märka. Recorded by T. Särg.

1. Muusi- kas kuu-len ma üht mui-nas-jut-tu, ma
 ar- mu-nud teis- se, sa ja muu- si- ka.
 Hel-mi, mull' näi- ta, kuis käib Bin- go lo- to,
 nii et ma võik-sin män-gi- da.

Loo-dan ma tões-ti, et ü - le sest saan,
 et sa ei ar - mas - ta mind,
 und po - le öö - sel, sest i - gat - sen sind, si - ni -
 lind. Löögid x x x ||
 Bus - si - jaa - mas on Valg - re Rai - mond!.../ 3 korda

Valgre Raimond is at the bus station

In music I hear a fairy-tale,
 I am in love with another
 you and music,
 Helmi, show me how to play Bingo
 so I could play it.
 I really hope I'll get over it
 that you do not love me,
 I have no sleep at night
 because I miss you, bluebird.
 Valgre Raimond is at the bus station!

Example 5. *Kuldre (Kuldne) marsirood* [Kuldre (or Golden) Marching Company]. 1981. Based on the *Sex Pistols*' version of *Yankee Doodle*. Text published in *EÜE laulik* 1998: 20–21.

Kuldne marsirood Kuldre 1981

*1. Käest lastud kuldne noorus,
 pead longus sabad sorgus,
 nii sammub nukralt malevasse
 Kuldre marsirood,
 mis sest, et meid on vähe,
 kuid meelest eal ei lähe
 need päevad, mis said veedetud meil
 marsiroodus koos.*

The Golden Marching Company

1. The golden youth wasted
heads bent, tails hanging
there is miserably marching to student camp
the golden marching company
it doesn't matter that our number is small
but we shall never forget
the days we spent together
in the marching company

*Refr: Elu – see on pidu,
elu – see on pidu,
elu – see on pidu,
kui me marsirood on koos.*

Chorus: Life is a ball
life is a ball
life is a ball
when our marching company is together

*2. Ning kadunud on sootuks
meil viimne elulootus
ja sellepärast võtame,
mis võtta annab veel.
Vist viimseks jääb see suvi,
sest meie vastu huvi
on tundma hakanud üks ühing
nimelt EHHEHHEE.*

2. And we have completely lost
the last hope to survive
therefore we shall take
whatever there is to take
probably it will be our last summer
because there is no association
showing interest towards us
and that is EHHEHHEE

*Refr: Elu – see on pidu...
Chorus: Life is a ball ..*

*3. Nüüd sööme EÜE leiba
ja loodame veel leida
me natukene vabadust,
mis ükskord oli meil.
Ja kui kord puhkeb sõda,*

*siis loodame, et mööda
ta läheb meie kodumaast
ja eeskätt EHHEHHEEST.*

3. Now we eat EÜE's bread
and still hope to find
a bit of freedom
which we once had
And when a war strikes out
then we shall hope that
it will pass our country by
and particularly EHHEHHEE

Ref: Elu see on pidu...

Chorus: Life is a ball ..

4. *Ehhehhees on pidu 3x*

kui me marsirood on koost

4. There is a ball in Ehhehhee
when our marching company is apart

Example 6. *Euromais* [Eurocorn]. The very popular song of Students' Building Brigade (EÜE) from 1982. Based on the American folktune *Yankee Doodle*. Note based on a concert by the group *Euromais* on the concert *Kuningad tõusevad tuhast* at Linnahall on 24. 11. 1990. Personal collection of Peep Puis. Text published in *EÜE laulik* 1998: 36–37.

EÜE ja Euromais

vaen - la - sed on ve - ri - sed, neist
 mõrt - suk i - ga nel - jas, nad
 käi - vad möö - da Ve - ne - maad, pomm
 ko - ti - ga on sel - jas.
 E - Ü - E ja Eu - ro - mais on
 tüht - ne NA - TO pe - re, meil
 Rea - gan, That - cher, Pi - no - chet teeb
 pai ja üt - leb: te - re!
 I love That - cher!

EÜE and Eurocorn

1. Our enemies are bloody
 every forth is a murder
 they roam about Russia
 with a bomb in their backbag.

Chorus: EÜE and Eurocorn
 are a united NATO family
 whose heads are caressed by Reagan, Thatcher, Pinochet
 and who greet them
 I love Thatcher!

2. *Kuldpagunites huntamees*
on märatsemas Poolas
ja neegripealik Kuubamaalt
saeb palmipuid Angoolas.

2. Junta man with golder shoulder straps
is raging in Poland
and a black chief from Cuba
saws palm trees in Angola.

3. *Kuid meile kuulub Iirimaa.*
Hong-Kong ja veel Quajaana.
Port-Stanley kuulub meile ka
ei anna teda ära.

3. But Ireland belongs to us
and Hong-Kong and Guyana.
Port-Stanley also belongs to us
we won't give it away.

4. *Käi persse, ablas asiaat,*
su kõri närib kohe
ükssarvik, lõvi kuninglik
ja Vana Wales'i lohe.

4. Fuck you, greedy Asian,
your throat will be promptly bitten through
by a unicorn, a royal lion
and the ancient Welsh dragon.

5. *Kui Vene karu pöörane*
La-Manche'i alla jõuab
SIIS JUMAL KAITSEB INGLISMAAD
seob metsalisel lõuad.

5. When the frenzied Russian bear
reaches La Manche
THEN GOD WILL SAVE ENGLAND
ties the jaws of the beast.

6. *Kui Satterfieldi piknikul*
mind tabas sõjauudis,
siis tõstan tassid kõrvale,
teed rüüpan välikruusist.

6. While at Satterfield on picnic
I was struck by the news of war
then I put aside the cups
and drank tea from the field mug.

Example 7. *Jüriöö eelseisund e. Pardiajajatele* [Condition before Jüriöö]. The uprising of Jüriöö in 1343 is the most important instance of armed resistance against German oppressors in the Estonian history. Words by Jaan Malin, melody from *Yankee Doodle*. Sung by the quintet *Viies ratas*. Recorded by Jaan Malin in 1997. Text published in Malin 1990: 29.

Condition before Jüriöö

Me oleme nii verised, et silme ees läeb mustaks.

Ja tühje sõnu me ei tee, sest teame, et meid ustaks,

We are so bloody, our sight grows black.

And we make no empty words as we know we'd be believed,

kui välja ütlesime kõik, mis otsib väljapääsu.

Meie sõnadest ei ole nendel mingit pääsu.

if we said out all that looks for outlet.

They have no way to escape our words.

Kuid humanistidena me ei soovi nende surma

nüüd. Pikkamisi naudime vaid vere vänget hurma.

But as humanists we do not wish their death

now. Slowly we enjoy the strong enchantment of blood.

Nad tuleb panna mõistma, et ei ole kerge olla

kirp töötü hiiu parra sees. Mis sest, et neil sääl polla

They have to be made to understand that it is not easy to be
a flea in the beard of a jobless giant. So what if they don't have

ehk ühte teist ja kolmandat. Meid laske omaette

siin maa pääl elutseda koos, ning ütlemata ette,

this, that and the third. We are left alone

to live together on this earth, and without forewarning

kas ennast tühjaks väänata ning jagada see sinna,

kust keegi naasemist ei näe, sest põhja saab vaid minna.

whether to wring oneself dry and give it there

where no-one sees return as north is the only way.

Nad võtavad kõik võimuga ja irvitavad pääle.

Ei säändne sund või vohada, ei hoopis lootä hääle.

They take everything by force and mock in addition.

No such force should thrive, nor should hope for good.

*Sest vägivald teeb veriseks ja susib vastuhakku.
Kes jääb meist siiski paigale, kes tõmbub ära pakku.*

Because violence makes one bloody and prods to mutiny.
Who of us still stays here, who flees to refuge.

Example 8. *Ei eesel pole elevant...* [A donkey is not an elephant] by Indrek Rüütle. Inspired by the American folktune *Yankee Doodle*. Text published Rüütle 1997: 29–30.

*1. Ei eesel pole elevant,
ei ammuilma kaamel –
meid vabastas juut Washington,
nüüd hangeldada saame.*

1. A donkey is not an elephant
and far from a camel –
we were liberated by the Jew Washington
now we can speculate.

*2. Ei tavad enam takista,
ei ammuilma seisus,
kui käpa all ka Pakistan,
kui väljas iseseisvus.*

2. The customs do not hinder
and so does not social status,
if Pakistan had been conquered
when independence is outside.

*Refr: Tegime, mis suutsime,
nüüd anda tuleb lisa,
me kapital poejuutide,
meil taevajuut suur isa.*

Chorus:
We did what we could
now we have to give more,
our capital came from merchant Jews,
the heavenly Jew is our great father.

*3. Me sõdurid Somaalias
on seni täitsamehed,
meid jälgivad kõik kaamerad,
meist kirjutavad lehed.*

3. Our soldiers are in Somalia
they have been okay up to now,
all cameras are watching us,
papers are writing about us.

*4. Me sõnum Briti kroonile
on: minge pätid persse,
au vabamüürlastoonile,
Gott strafe universe!*

4. Our message to the British crown
is fuck you bums
praise to freemasonry
Gott strafe universe!

*5. Kolmsada aastat maailma
üks idiotsus nikub,
miks tegu teete kraamiga,
mis mängud ära rikub.*

5. For three hundred years
the world has been fucked by an idiotism,
why do you deal with crap
that spoils all the game.

*6. Kui tülitama kipute
siis näitame afekti;
nüüd hõikame – “come here all boys”
noh, tulge meie sekti.*

6. If you come to bother us
then we demonstrate affect;
now we shout – “come here all boys”
well, come join our sect.

Example 9. *Kassatshekk* [Cashier's receipt]. The song was written in 1992 in the times of transition and economical crisis. The song is based on a dancing song *Kasatshok*, by Kustas Kikerpuu. Text published in *Contra* 2000: 24. Note based on a video made in the room of Tartu Young Authors' Assembly in Tartu Literary House on the 7th of November 1997. Recorded by T. Särg and E. Sinijärv.

Rubato

Siis vii - maks tõu - sep Vas - ja ka ja
 pük - sit jal - ga veap. Sest en - ne koi - tu Tal - li - na veel
 õh - ku lask - ma peap. Ja kui - gi jalg sul va - lu - tap, ees
 oo - tap ko - du - tee, sest pea - gi saa - teid a - lus - tap Os -
 tan - ki - no Te Ve - e - e - e - e - e!

Allegro

Kas - sa - tshek - ki kee - ru - ta - des kii - relt möö - dub
 öö, ku - ni kee - gi noa, sel -
 ga sul - le lööb. Ja üks au - to -
 maa - di - va - lang ra - pu - tab sind veel,
 mi - na o - len see, kes nõn - da teeb.
 Toi - du - poest va - ras - ta - sin sin - gi,

üm - ber sel - le joo - nis - ta - sin
rin - gi. Kas - sa - tshek - ki kee - ru - ta - des
kii - relt möö - dub öö, si - nu jaoks ei
e - nam koit - ma löö, ei löö.

Cashier's receipt

Then at last Vanya gets up too
and pulls up his trousers
because before dawn
he has to blow up Tallinn
and even if your leg aches
a road home awaits for you
because soon the programme will start
on Ostankino TV

Chorus:

swinging the cashier's receipt
the night passes quickly
until someone hits
a knife through your back
and one machine-gun burst
shakes you for a while
I'm the one who's doing this

Chorus: from foodstore

I pinched a stake
about it
I draw a circle
swinging the cashier's receipt
the night passes quickly
for you the dawn no longer comes

Example 10. *Killukesti yesterdayst* [Fragments from yesterday]. Based on *Yesterday* by *The Beatles*. Contra uses in his songs simultaneously different well-known symbols, objects and facts. In the current song, we can see hurled together the names of Estonia's best swimmers and politicians, obscenities, the patriotic song *Kaunistagem Eesti kodjad* (Let us decorate Estonian homes) carrying national spirit and the Estonian tricolor flag. This all serves to present the opposition between the beautiful yesterday and sadly real today, expressed in both the idea and structure of the song – our yesterday's dreams of an independent state were more beautiful than the reality. The original has been published in Estonian in *Laulge kaasa* 1966: 11–13; Contra's cover in *Contra* 1996: 30. Note based on a video made in the room of Tartu Young Authors' Assembly in Tartu Literary House on the 7th of November 1997. Recorded by T. Särg and E. Sinijärv.

Yes-ter-day, u-ju-mi-ses vöi-tis
 Ind-rek Sei, küm-nes tu-han-des Ste-
 fa-no Mei ja sa-jas meet-ri-s
 Ste-wart Ray. Sa-vi-saar
 Ot-sas-so-ni-ga on ke-na paar,
 ai-nult sel-lest a-ru ma ei saa, kumb kumma
 ot-sas on, ei a-ru saa.
 Kes küll mõel-da vöis, et on
 ei ja veel kord ei.

Miks mul on jäl - le põis, kui-gi
 vii - ma-ti jõin *rit.* yes - ter - day - ei.
a tempo
 Pee - ru - kott on üks i - ga - ve - ne
 ve - re - kott, ei - la te - gi mi - nu
 küü - nis prööt, nüüd kõlb - ma - tu on
 loo - ma - sööt. Kau - nis - ta
 ko - jad kol - me ko - du - vär - vi - ga,
 et siis po - jad saak - sid koon - du - da ja
 nen - de jär - gi joon - du - da.
 Tri - ko - loor - ne lipp alt on
 val - ge, kes - kelt must,
 ei - la i - ga tipp u - nis -
 tas sust u - nis - tust - ust - ust - ust - ust.

Example 11. *Korraks vaid* [For a (short) time]. Based on a popular Estonian love song from the 1960s (by R. German, lyrics by K. Kikerpuu), turned into political satire by the Estonian band *Talong*. The original chorus: “Only for a time I was with you. It probably must be so, that we were together only for a time, and you left.” The new chorus, sung by *Talong* depicts a foreigner from the East. The rest of Contra’s cover is less political than’s *Talong*’s, he uses different Estonian popular songs.

Note based on a video made in the room of Tartu Young Authors’ Assembly in Tartu Literary House on the 7th of November 1997. Recorded by T. Särg and E. Sinijärv. Original published in *Lauluraamat* 1998: 152.

Korraks vaid

Kor-raks vaid taht-sin tul-la sii-a e-la-ma,
 kor-raks vaid, nüüd ei saa-gi e-nam mi-ne-ma,
 kor-raks vaid, kuid siis ter-veks e-luks jäin,
 kor-raks vaid, mis ma e-nam te-ha võin. Kolm
 kol-pa läk-sid rii-du maa-põh-jas pi-me-das, nad
 o-lid sin-na vii-dud ka suu-res pi-me-das, ei
 tead-nud, kes on tut-tav ja kes on võõ-ras just, nad
 vas-tas-tik-ku tund-sid kõik pöö-rast võõ-ras-tust.

Kor - raks vaid taht-sin tul - la sii - a e - la - ma,
 kor - raks vaid, nüüd ei saa - gi e - nam mi - ne - ma,
 kor - raks vaid, kuid siis ter - veks e - luks jäin,
 kor - raks vaid, mis ma e - nam te - ha võin.
 E - si - me - ne ar - mas - tus mul saa - bus ju - ba koo - lis,
 kah - juks nei - u see mi - nust vä - ga vä - he hoo - lis,
 mi - ne - ma läks tei - se - ga, kes is - tus au - to - roo - li,
 poo - le aas - ta pä - rast kat - ki jät - tis ü - li - koo - li.../

Comment

The mid-1990s were an interim period, after Estonia had become independent of the Soviet Union and had not yet become part of the European Union. One overflowing gifted young man from Võru – who in times past would have made a great village singer – sang and recited everywhere his verses. Some of the poems he made up himself, some adapted on the example of well-known singers. His songs were entertaining, but also reflected on the problems of the contemporary Estonian society. In the decade since then, much has changed. First of all, living in independent Estonia and the European Union has become an everyday reality. A merry and enterprising country boy has become a media star and well-known poet, father of two, and together with his wife a leader of rural development in South Estonia, Urvaste village.

It is quite probable that as a researcher I chose from Contra's works the part that spoke to me the clearest. Compared to people who had lived under the Soviet rule of fear, censorship and social oppression, Contra shone with personal courage, the delight of creating and communicating, independence of political and aesthetic correctness, making him able to gaily word the joys and disappointments of both Estonian daily life as well as regaining national independence.

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