

## **St. Petersburg Brings Back Its Past: An Exploration of Ingrian Musical Heritage within an Urban Space**

The historical territory of Ingria is home for three Finno-Ugric groups—Votes, Izhors, and later Ingrian Finns—who have been inhabiting the region of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Oblast since long before the Slavic domination. A long period of repression against those Finnic groups during the twentieth century left almost no imprints of their presence in the cultural life of St. Petersburg, and led to many of their cultural practices' discontinuation. Today, the Ingrian population has drastically decreased and their language and traditions are on the verge of extinction. In 2005, there were only about 20,000 people left who self-identify themselves as Ingrian Finns; the Izhors' population dropped to 327 people in the territory of the entire Russian Federation in 2002; and approximately only twenty people self-identified themselves as Votians in 2004. The recent reawakening of the long-forgotten cultural heritage of the Ingrian population has led to the formation of several music groups that focus on local Finno-Ugric traditions. In this paper, I explore the manifestations of Ingrian musical culture in modern St. Petersburg to emphasize the cultural diversity of the city and draw attention to the importance of the revitalization of Ingrian musical heritage. For the sake of clarity, I want to point out to a lack of consensus among scholars regarding the usage of the word "Ingrian." Some associate "Ingrians" only with the Ingrian Finns or the Izhors while other scholars identify all indigenous population of Ingria as "Ingrians." In this paper, I use the word "Ingrians" as a common name for all three groups (the Votes, the Izhors, and the Ingrian Finns) associated with the historical territory of Ingria.

Using physical and digital ethnography in the form of interviews, personal communication, and virtually circulated media artifacts, I analyze the activities of two local music groups based in St. Petersburg—Talomerkit and Ingerval. Having formed nonoverlapping audiences and pursuing different creative goals, those groups work in parallel to reconstruct the music culture of the indigenous population of the city. I propose the term “non-formalization” to describe the independent nature of the recent revival of Ingrian music and advocate for the creation of the open access archives to stimulate the dissemination of Ingrian culture among the population of St. Petersburg.

### **Talomerkit**

The folk group Talomerkit is based in St. Petersburg and made of the members of the local organization “Pietarin Inkerin Liitto” which was founded in 1988 to promote traditional culture and language of Ingrian Finns and serve as advocates for the rights of Ingrians and assists in the individual cases of political rehabilitation. It is one of the very few groups in the city that present and promote local music of Ingrians using a so-called traditionally based musical approach. The repertoire of Talomerkit consists of traditional songs and dances of Ingrian Finns, Votes, and Izhors based on ethnographic recordings of researchers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as well as a few modern arrangements of those songs sung in their original languages.

Talomerkit takes an active part in the concert life of St. Petersburg and, according to its members, works on the preservation and promotion of the Finno-Ugric culture in the region.

The group was formed by the members of “Inkerin Liitto” in 2009 and the number of members of Talomerkit has changed over the years. Soon after its foundation, the group was joined by

Irina Demidova who became the conductor and leader of the group for several years. Studying folklore in the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Irina specialized in Russian Slavic music, but became interested in Finno-Ugric music in the process of working with Talomerkit. Irina helped the group to compile a new selection of songs and recorded two albums with the group. These albums *Tantsikaahan...* and *Souva Laiva* were produced with financial support of “Inkerin Liitto,” the Finnish Society of Ingrian Culture (Inkerin Kulttuuriseura), and Russian Izhora Community.

Talomerkit has its origins in an earlier group that was founded at the beginning of the millennium. Anthropologist and a well-known expert of Ingrian traditions and culture Olga Konkova formed an amateur choir, primarily from among the students of the Finnish language at “Inkerin Liitto” to sing traditional Ingrian songs. At that time, the choir consisted of sixty people, and one of the singers was Vetka Lappalainen who now sings with Talomerkit. As Vetka revealed to me in a personal conversation: “Olga chose some of the loudest people in order to perform ancient runes. Then it disintegrated due to internal differences, and we formed the group Talomerkit.” Even though “Inkerin Liitto” is the organization founded by the Ingrian Finns, they also act as the all-Ingrian organization and do not separate their traditions from that of other Ingrians, the Izhors and the Votes. Thus, the repertoire of Talomerkit includes songs of all these three groups. To form the repertoire of the group, members of Talomerkit mainly relied on archival materials, the studies and personal collections of Konkova, recent Finnish song collections, and on the book *Ingrian Folk Songs (Народные Песни Ингерманландии)* compiled by Eino Kiuru, Terttu Koski, and Elina Kylmäsuu in 1974. Published by the Karelian branch of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, this volume is the only thorough collection of Ingrian songs

published in Russia during the Soviet period. Currently, Talomerkit does not have a leader, but they still take an active part in the concert life of St. Petersburg and work on the preservation and promotion of the Finno-Ugric culture in the region. Throughout their existence, Talomerkit has performed at the Ingrian celebrations in St. Petersburg such as Joulupäivä (Christmas), Kalevalan päivä (Kalevala Day), Laskiainen (Shrovetide), Juhannus (St. John's Day), and Inkerin päivä (Ingrian Day). They also regularly visit Ingrian diaspora communities in Estonia and Finland and perform at local festivals and events in St. Petersburg dedicated to the heritage and culture of numerically small indigenous peoples of the North-West of Russia or Leningrad Oblast specifically. Thus, Talomerkit's target audience predominantly consists of either Ingrians and enthusiasts participating in the local celebrations in Russia as well as neighboring Finno-Ugric countries, or those interested in the heritage of the indigenous peoples of North-Western Russia. As a result, Talomerkit is participating in the construction of the Ingrian identity, musical and social, which aims to highlight the ethnic distinctiveness of the Ingrian population of St. Petersburg from the dominant Slavic identity. Moreover, along with other members of "Inkerin Liitto," they regularly participate in various municipal events aimed at fostering exchange among representatives of various ethnic groups and diasporas living in the city.

### **Ingerval**

Ingerval (the name that combines the words Ingria and Kalevala) is a contemporary band from St. Petersburg that performs traditional Ingrian and Vepsian songs, mixing them with electric instruments and electronically processed sounds. Formed in 2018, Ingerval has already established itself in many festivals of ethnic music in Russia and became the finalist for the first all-Russian internet-based competition, "Stereotypes of the Future," in the field of experimental

ethnic music and dance. Compared to Talomerkit, Ingervalva occupies a niche of popular music and its treatment of Ingrian musical material is more radical and transformative

The members of Ingervalva do not necessarily have ethnic connections to Ingrians, but perceive their heritage as a constituent part of the multi-ethnic musical and cultural identity of St. Petersburg and use it as a tool in their musical creative process. The repertoire of Ingervalva consists of traditional songs, both Finno-Ugric and Slavic, from the North-Western region of Russia. With its experimental approach to the local traditional music, the band coexists in parallel with other local groups that treat Ingrian musical heritage as the material that does not need much alteration. Ingervalva creates an alternative, multi-ethnic music identity which accentuates the coexistence of Slavic and Finno-Ugric traditions within the modern urban space of St. Petersburg.

As the leader of the group Gregory Mazhuga said to me: “Our main principle is to fool around with the songs to our heart’s content, so they become almost unrecognizable. To break all foundations and annoy traditionalists and conservatives!” Initially, having concerns about the reaction of the native Ingrians to their arrangements, the musicians of Ingervalva sought to get the approval from Olga Konkova. In a conversation with the members of Ingervalva about their modification of the traditional Ingrian and Vepsian songs, she said: “Of course! This is so cool. We have our own approach to this music, which is more traditional. Yours is different, but you have all the rights to do so because it is clear that doing that, you are promoting it in a more accessible way.” Ingervalva often collaborates with musicians of Ingrian background. One of their long-time friends and collaborators is Ksenia Kanevskaya–Reshetova, an ethnic Izhora. The

orientation of Ingervalva is thus directed toward a broader multi-ethnic Russian and international audience. The group participated in the prestigious festival of ethnic music *Muzyki Mira* (World Musics) in St. Petersburg and most recently appeared in the festival *Serditse Evrazii* (The Heart of Eurasia) held in Bashkortastan in June 2019, after which Ingervalva's performance of the song "Ala Poika" in the Izhorian language was featured on the Russian federal TV channel.

Such strong attraction of non-native musicians to a particular music was theorized by the ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin in his widely cited book *Subcultural Sounds: Micromusics of the West* (1993). He coined the word "affinity intercultures" to describe the widespread activity of adoption/adaptation/sometimes appropriation by non-natives of various cultures.

As a newly-established music group without direct ethnic connection to Ingrian culture, Ingervalva took a stand on discovering and reintroducing Ingrian music heritage to Petersburgers. Certain parallels can be observed between the steps taken by Talomerkit and Ingervalva in repatriating Ingrian music legacy. Both groups are forced to use only secondary sources in constructing the repertoire due to the extinction of the population with firsthand knowledge of Ingrian oral poetry or instrumental music. Georgy Mazhuga says the following about his attempt to go on a field expedition to one of the local Ingrian villages:

We were planning to go to the village of Pudost (Puutosti) to talk with an old woman, who has been collecting Ingrian songs. Equipped with the recorders and thinking that we would now be able to record some unique material, we were preparing to hit the road, but she got seriously ill and had to cancel our meeting. So, in the end, it did not work out. And now nobody really remembers. This was about seven or eight years ago, and she was the only contact we were able to obtain.

The musicians of both groups— Talomerkit and Ingervalä—emphasize the scarcity of Ingrian musical material, especially those available for public use. Similar to Talomerkit, Ingervalä relies on the book *Ingrian Folk Songs* as the primary source of musical material. The other two sources on which Ingervalä relies on are the choral composition *Forgotten Peoples* composed by Estonian composer Veljo Tormis in 1992 and the dissertation of Erik Reid Jones at the University of Maryland, College Park (2006) that analyzes this composition by Tormis. Also of the great importance for repatriation of Ingrian music is the website “Votian and Izhorian Folk Songs.” This is an open access digital project that presents a selection of archival and contemporary recordings made by Estonian singers of Izhorian and Votian folk songs, which were compiled by the Estonian researcher Janika Oras.

Such a situation proves the value of published academic and historically informed artistic projects and shows the importance of the applied work that many scholars, including ethnomusicologists, are undertaking. The example of how musicians like Ingervalä and Talomerkit are gleaning all available material demonstrates the need for active participation of academics and music professionals in repatriating Ingrian musical heritage back to the population of St. Petersburg. Instead of storing precious artifacts of Ingrian culture in archives that are scattered across several countries, those materials should be digitally and physically published and made available to the general public.

The groups Talomerkit and Ingervalä can be considered as one of the core revivalists of Ingrian music in contemporary St. Petersburg. This revival of traditional Ingrian music is somewhat a unique case in terms of its independent nature manifested in disconnection from the public

school education and lack of support from the state. The folklore departments in the St. Petersburg Conservatory and other universities in the city are exclusively focused on the Slavic tradition and do not include the teaching of local Finno-Ugric music in their curriculum. Moreover, as Aina Jakkola from Talomerkit points out, the folklore departments in St. Petersburg even serve as an obstacle for the dissemination of traditional Ingrian culture as they take possession of archival materials. The unwillingness of the folklore and music departments to share their archival recordings and materials with the general public, including people interested in revitalization of Ingrian music, has a crucially negative effect on the dissemination of Ingrian tradition because of the disrupted cultural continuity of that community. Comparing the revival of Ingrian music to earlier global music revival movements, I propose that this process could be characterized as “non-formalization” of traditional music of indigenous peoples of the St. Petersburg region defined by its independent nature manifested in disconnection from the institutions of musical education and lack of support from the state.

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