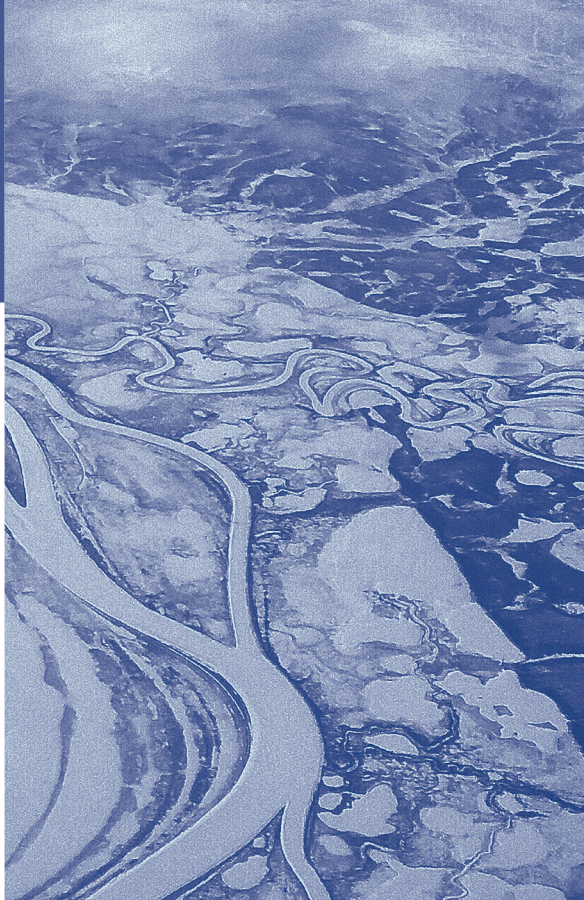


PIA SIIRALA SEEKING THE PERSONAL SONG

| Mulingaut
| Vukvunga
| Seeking the personal song

*А, мыван,
А, ыҕажавыҥын ҕулиҕул,
Анун, мынҕавалан,
Бун, ыҕа, мынҕавалан,
А, өһөһиҕавин ҕулиҕул.*

*Oh, I sing a song,
Oh, take a song as a gift,
Accept a song as a gift,
Oh, the song of a Vivenka woman.*



- 1 **Mulingaut's song for Pia** 0:55
- 2 **Mulingaut** 15:28
- 3 **Vukvunga singing** 1:04
- 4 **Vukvunga** 18:43
- 5 **Seeking the personal song** 16:06

Composed and performed by | *Pia Siirala*

Field recordings by | *Pia Siirala*

Recorded, mixed & mastered by | *Robi de Godzinsky*

Recorded in | *Pukkila Church*, 11.-13.8.2022

Photography by | *Pia Siirala* (Mulingaut, Vukvunga, scenery)

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Personal Songs are born in solitude when a human being is alone with music. Music is not performed; a person neither communicates with another person nor expresses to another person something through music. From a musician's point of view this absence of performance is fascinating.

In the Chukchi heritage, music and art were not separate entities but simply part of life. Although the Chukchi are very skilful in imitating different sounds, when singing someone else's song, the aim is not to imitate but to think of and remember that person with singing and invite them to be present. Therefore, the singing is so often emotionally charged.

THE PERSONAL SONG

In 2008 I became acquainted with the Personal Song for the first time in Kamchatka. When starting my expedition, I knew nothing about Personal Songs. I was not even sure, which indigenous people I would meet. I had found out that in Kamchatka there are Koryaks, Itelmens and Evens, but I did not know beforehand to which regions I could travel. From my earlier journeys to Sakhalin, I had an idea as to how the music might sound and I was especially curious to discover, what it would be like in the remote regions. My wish came true when I was able to travel to the Chukchi villages of north-eastern Kamchatka.

When recording songs, I did not pay much attention to the words, but I always tried to find out what the song was about. However, asking was not always possible, because one could never be quite sure whether the song had already ended. It was also awkward to speak in Russian as it was not the language used in the songs. Moreover, questions in the middle of the singing, through a relative who would have translated from Russian into Chukchi, would have broken the atmosphere and the singing might have stopped altogether. When enquiring about a song that an Elder had sung, a typical comment was that the Elder was singing their own song, their second song and after that songs of their

mother, father and other close relatives. Some people sang only one song, which was their own song or a song of their parents. For many, the occasion was very emotional and often ended in tears. If there were other members of the family present, they often cried as well. The person whose song was performed, even though they were dead, was believed to be present through the song. After a while the singer calmed down and the singing began to proceed more easily, and it was not at all rare that the whole gathering ended up in laughter. The Elders who sang regularly did not cry but laughed a lot. For them the singing seemed to be more normal. As time went on, I began to realise that people have some kind of ownership towards the songs and it was always important to mention whose song they performed.

In 2009 on my field trip to Chukotka, I began asking questions about people's Personal Songs. On this journey I was also told that the Personal Song is a song given to every child at birth by their parents or grandparents at the same time that they are given a name. Later in life adults create their own songs. To me the most interesting singers were not the well-known, acknowledged experts of the traditions, since their singing was already a performance. Instead, those who sang at home when they were alone, were of the greatest interest. Many of the songs were originally born in the Tundra, whilst working, roaming the Tundra and herding the reindeer, picking berries, mending the clothes or putting a child to bed. Usually, I heard them sung by Elders in the villages where they had moved to from the reindeer herding camps.

Melodic motifs are born during the singing and these become the Personal Song. These are not “ready” songs of a certain length, where there is a fixed melody, rhythm or structure. Rather they are tonal motifs, which are the building blocks of the song. The words might change, which effects the rhythm and length of the song and often people sing without any words. Some people repeat the rhythm more precisely than others or repeat the order of the melodic motifs or indeed the form. This does not depend on the length of the song. Often, however, I heard the melodic motif only once without repetition or words. When a singer performs someone else’s song, the performer can vary it quite freely.

MULINGAUT AND VUKVUNGA

In 2008 in the indigenous village of Vivenka in Kamchatka, I met with a Koryak Elder, Mulingaut who gave me my Personal Song as a gift. In my travel diary, I describe my visit to Mulingaut:

23.2.2008 – VIVENKA

“There she was, finally sitting in front of me, Darya Andreevna Mulingaut, a 93-year-old Koryak Elder. The Russian name and patronymic had been added to her name later. Her Koryak father, who was born at the end of the 19th century, couldn’t possibly have had the name “Andrei”. In her own language her name was simply Mulingaut. After a while, Ludmila Pesuchen also appeared with her drum. At first, I played the violin for them, which they listened to with curiosity and great concentration. Then both women donned their kukblyankas (a fur coat in one piece, which is pulled over one’s head) and started to play, sing and dance.

Mulingaut had a strong low voice, which was typical for those who had been born and raised in the Tundra. I had never heard anyone sing as she did. It didn’t remind me of Chukchi singing, but neither was it like the singing that I had heard.

Obviously, it was from an older tradition. I was struck by her vivacious drumming and by the way in which she created different dynamics and colours. She began by drumming very silently, holding the drum upright, which created a sound that was drier with less reverberation. She then gradually lowered the instrument into a horizontal position whilst simultaneously making a huge crescendo. The sound of the drum became more sonorous and more hollow. The rhythmical pattern was simple and was either divided into 2 or into 3. It was typical for Mulingaut to sing and drum in turns. Generally, indigenous singers here in Kamchatka begin and end their singing with drumming, but Mulingaut could stop drumming and continue singing or continue drumming and rest her voice. Whilst singing she used words, but at times it was just a melody. In some of the songs one could recognise verses, but they varied in length, as the words dictated the melody's line. Mulingaut and Ludmila took turns in drumming and dancing.

Mulingaut went out to the kitchen to prepare some food. After a while Mulingaut came back into the room. She had taken off her kukhlyanka and sat down on a stool and started to sing again, this time without accompaniment. While she sang, her body swayed from side to side, as if doing so to the beat of an invisible drum. The character of the songs varied from contemplative humming to boisterous songs that imitated animal sounds, ending with bursts of laughter. There was no need to beg her to sing. She sang for her own enjoyment. She continued a lot longer than I had expected and not once did she complain about being tired. She told me that she would give me one of her songs as a present."

The next year in 2009, I met a Chukchi Elder, Vukvunga in the indigenous village of Vaegi in Chukotka. In my travel diary, I describe my visit to Vukvunga.

10.6.2009 – VAEGI

“We stepped into the courtyard of an old, whitewashed log house. Beside the fence three sticks had been driven into the ground, making up a triangle, from the top of which, a chain was hanging with a kettle at the bottom. Long poles were placed against each other to be dried for firewood for use in the winter. On the roof of the shed, a yaranga cover, made from reindeer skin was folded. A yaranga is a Chukchi yurt, a fur tent where the reindeer herders live in the Tundra. Sergei opened the squeaky, rickety door and let me in. I lifted up a thick cloth curtain and stepped into a corridor full of firewood from which we entered a room. Inside a frail, tiny old lady dressed in a sleeveless cotton blouse and fur dungarees and a woollen hat welcomed us. She was clearly delighted to see Sergei and started to chat with him in Chukchi in a singsong voice. She was very vivacious and burst into laughter easily. Sergei translated as much as he could for me of what Vukvunga was saying to him in Chukchi. Vukvunga was from the Khatyrka Tundra. She remembered vividly the times when the reindeer herders were labelled as Kulaks and forcibly dispossessed of their reindeer that were then collectivised. The reindeer herders hid their herds in the deep mountain passes, fighting for their independent way of life to the bitter end. Vukvunga was born and grew up at a time when the reindeer herders and their

families owned their herds. The many tattoo lines on her face were indicative of her family's wealth.

Vukvunga took her enormous drum and began to warm the skin on top of a ring on the stove as she rubbed it. I hardly had time to take out my recording equipment when she was already in full swing. Vukvunga began by beating the drum dramatically and then began to sing, as if casting a spell with a deep low voice. I felt as though I was witnessing true traditional singing that was being born at that very moment. Moreover, I later discovered that Vukvunga had not just sung personally for me but had dedicated her song to me. This meant that by singing it to me, she had given me my very own personal song, in the same way that parents and grandparents gave Chukchi children their first songs. The singing was powerful, primevally wild, captivating and full of melisma. The singing and speaking alternated seamlessly and it was impossible to differentiate between them. It was difficult to recognise a melody, but the voice was expressive and full of emotion with different colours and dynamics. The pitch of the drum and the pitch of the voice did not seem to bear any relationship to each other. I was spellbound after hearing her.”

INTRODUCTION TO THE COMPOSITION

Originally, I had planned that this composition for solo violin would be the last artistic component of my doctorate entitled the *Birth of a Personal Song*. The idea to compose my own Personal Song was inspired by my meetings with two Elders, Mulingaut and Vukvunga whom I met on my field trips. The Chukchi themselves say that a Personal Song is born, not composed. The song suddenly comes to them while they are alone. The song is not thought through in advance, neither is it improved nor critically examined by the singer themselves or anyone else. Although it is an expression of a moment, it stays in the person's mind from its birth, and is sung often. The song is not repeated without changes, but is in a constant creative state, just as speaking is. In naming my composition, I changed the word *birth* into the verb, *seeking*, since I realised that I cannot compose a Personal Song (a song of identity according to Chukchi traditions). On the field trips I am seeking a disappearing singing tradition, the Personal Song. The same way, in the artistic process, I am seeking what is at the heart of a Personal Song. Therefore, I changed the name of the composition to *Seeking the Personal Song*.

The listening process of the music of Mulingaut and Vukvunga became much more personal in comparison to my earlier experiences. The Chukchi

imitate animal and especially bird sounds very skilfully. Since I was in the position of a child who had been given a song, I decided to begin with an imitation of their songs, not with the intervals or rhythmical structure, but rather with the atmosphere that they created. I do not analyse the songs through my composition, but reveal elements that will make me reflect about what kind of associations they create, and what kind of bridges I build between them and my own earlier musical experiences.

The composition was born and shaped in a different way from my earlier compositions. It is more a meditation than a drama, more drifting from one random thought to another as opposed to building a form. It has associations to music of the subconscious or dream music and its essence is the sense of playing in solitude. It is born from the experience of a musician who has grown up in the European tradition of classical music and her reaction when she hears the singing of the Arctic nomadic reindeer herder. It begins under the strong influence of the two reindeer herder Elders, Mulingaut and Vukvunga who were born and who lived in the Tundra. The impressions in the two first movements emerge through the imitation of the elements heard in their songs and the atmosphere, that caught my attention with the associations created by their songs.

The first movement, *Mulingaut*, begins with feeling my way towards the song, which has not yet begun. Finally, it begins and flows on-wards until it stops again to listen. Then the song is inverted like a reflection on the surface of water. When it is calm the picture is clear, but when it is windy, the picture becomes blurred. The mirror variation of the original song becomes a typical Chukchi melody.

The second movement, *Vukvunga*, is an association between Vukvunga's song and the sounds of the awakening of nature in early spring that I had heard on my skiing trips in March 2021, when I continued my search for the atmosphere in her singing.

In the third movement, *Seeking the Personal Song*, I join together the songs of Mulingaut and Vukvunga. When their intertwined songs had finished with all that they had to say, the last rhythm of Vukvunga's song kept ringing in my head.

It was like the beginning of a path leading to random meetings with the Chukchi singers Tevlyantonau, Pengengeu, Eingengeut whom I had earlier got to know. At the end a Marche funèbre begins. This is not based on any Chukchi song that I had heard but was similar to them. With this Marche funèbre I return back to my own musical roots.

Pia Siirala is currently completing her doctoral studies at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts, Helsinki, Finland. Her artistic research, “Aspect of Hearing”, concentrates on the music of the indigenous people, particularly the Chukchi people in north-eastern Siberia, where the ancient musical tradition is still a living tradition. Inspired by this indigenous music, Siirala has created several compositions. Pia Siirala studied at the Sibelius Academy, the Budapest Liszt Academy and at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory. She is the concert master of Ensemble XXI. Pia Siirala has performed as a chamber musician and soloist throughout Russia, Europe, Australasia and the US.

Pia Siirala's research has been supported by



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