

POLAR VOICES



Eingvngvut

1.12.2022, 19:00

Modelarium hall, University of Prishtina,
Faculty of Architecture, Kosovo

Doctoral concert of Pia Siirala, Sibelius Academy,
University of the Arts, Helsinki, Finland

Ensemble XXI Kosova

Conductor

Lygia O’Riordan

Programme

Pia Siirala

Polar Voices

Pengengkeu – Night watch

Omryl’kot – Jalhgytyk – Roaming

Mulingaut – Lullaby-fugue

Rol’tytval – Jarar – Drum

Ulitas’s walk for violin solo

Programme notes

Time

We are accustomed to thinking that time moves in one direction and is divided equally into hours, minutes and seconds. Thinking about time in this way is not the way nature works. In the indigenous north-eastern Siberian traditions concepts such as minutes, seconds or weeks do not exist. All these terms were introduced to the indigenous languages through the Russian language and to this day the indigenous people use these terms only in Russian. What does this mean in practice? The indigenous people observe time as day and night, the moon circle, seasons, becoming older, a heartbeat, waiting, being born and dying. For the Arctic indigenous peoples time is flexible. Sometimes there is a hurry, sometimes there is a lot of time. The difference in thinking can also be noticed with singing, where the song does not have a beginning or an end, but instead is constantly somewhere in between. The rhythms are not divided evenly, and they cannot be split into equal units, but rather the rhythm is constructed from different pulsations, which join together organically. Time does not only move forward, but it circulates. Life is cyclic. Nothing is new. Rather something has returned into circulation. This kind of philosophy of life is reminiscent of the phenomena in nature, where self-repetitive cycles form.

Without memory, time and the three other dimensions are meaningless. Without memory the world would shrink to the moment of *Now*. Although we are used to thinking that we move only forward on the linear line of time, without having the possibility to move backwards, we in fact, constantly move backwards in our thoughts. To remember is to move to the past and with the help of memory we can move freely in time.

Personal Song

In Arctic indigenous cultures the Personal Song means that every child is given its own personal melody when they are born. Later when people are adults, in the Chukchi culture they create their own song, which is as natural as speaking. In other words, singing is not a repetition of something that one has already heard, but as spontaneous as a conversation. 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.

In the Chukchi heritage, music and art are 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. The Chukchi say that the Personal Song comes to them in the evening before going to sleep or at night when they are alone in the Tundra herding the reindeer. The composition, *Polar Voices* is inspired by the songs of the indigenous Chukchi and Koryak people whom I have met during my field trips to the Arctic. Each movement in *Polar Voices* is named after the person whose song the movement is based on.

Polar Voices

1. movement, *Pengengkeu on a night watch*

Pengengkeu (b. circa 1933) – Chukchi Elder from eastern Chukotka. Later in life he moved to the indigenous village of Yanrakinnot.

Excerpt from a travel diary: 18.8.2009, Yanrakinnot, Chukotka

A whale hunter, Kutilin and I went to visit the oldest Elder of the village, the reindeer herder Pengengkeu We went up a wooden staircase to a shack that

seemed to have been hastily built from planks. This was Pengenkeu home. Inside there was a stove, on top of which were leather boots, a kettle and cast-iron iron. Above the stove there were socks and other outdoor clothes hanging up to dry. One had the impression that Pengenkeu had recreated a yaranga inside his house. Otherwise, the room was fairly empty, apart from a few chairs and a table, on top of which were two mugs. Pengenkeu was calm and taciturn but moved rather agilely. He sang some short songs and chatted a little with Kutilin who translated for me. Pengenkeu told me that a song is born in his head when is in the tundra herding reindeer.

The first movement creates an impression of slowly passing time. On a wintery night the Tundra is silent and calm. It is the reindeer herder, Pengenkeu's turn to be on the night watch, herding the reindeer. He listens in the dark. He must stay awake and be alert, in case there is danger. The wolves could appear from nowhere. The reindeer dig up the lichen with their hooves and occasionally stop to listen. The reindeer herder's time is passing slowly. Nothing is happening. Pengenkeu has not come to the Tundra to sing, but in order to stay awake he begins to sing his own song. He stops his singing from time to time to listen and to be sure that all is in order with his reindeer who continue digging lichen. The stars are bright in sky. Pengenkeu continues singing until the Northern Lights interrupt his song. He watches the dancing lights until they fade out and he continues to sing. When Pengenkeu listens or watches his surroundings, he never sings.

This movement represents a world seen and heard through Pengenkeu's eyes and ears. The stars are always in sky, but he only sees them when he watches them. The reindeer dig the lichen all the time, but he notices it only occasionally. The Tundra and the silence are always present, but he feels it only when he concentrates on listening. His song is constantly in the back of his mind, but he only now and then sings it out loud. Only the Northern Lights that dance in the sky capture his full attention when he faces his own fears.

There are six different time elements in the movement, which move in motions independent of each other. However, they create a whole, in the same way that random sounds in Nature create a space where the tension of silence leads to the next sound.

All the elements in the music are based on Pengengkeu's song. Pengengkeu sang only the motif of his song to me, and I imagined how he would have continued, had he sung for longer.

Apart from the static low sound of the Double Bass, all other time elements repeat the song in different pitches. The elements are the following:

Lento – Reindeer herder Pengengkeu sings – peaceful, slowly flowing motion, played by the violas, cellos or double bass in turns.

Pesante – The reindeer digging the lichen from underneath the snow – constantly interrupted motion played by the celli and occasionally the violas and the Double Bass.

Lento e sostenuto – The night sky and the stars – almost static motion, where the violins form clusters

Andante – The Northern lights – Wavering motion where the violins, viola and cellos create expanding and diminishing clusters

The night in the Tundra – static, almost motionless element, a soundscape, where the Double Bass plays a low, vague sound without a definite pitch

Fermata – marked over tones or pauses representing listening and being alert



1. Pengengkeu's song

2. movement, *Omryl'kot – Jalhgytyk – Travelling*

Personal Songs are used in several situations. They are sung while herding the reindeer but also when travelling. When singing, the journey passes quickly. Chukchi often designate songs specifically for travelling. The main theme of the second movement is Omryl'kot's travel song.



Omryl'kot (b. 1935) – Chukchi Elder and a highly respected reindeer herder from southern Chukotka near the Kamchatkan border. After the reindeer herding ceased, Omryl'kot moved to the indigenous village of Meinipylgino.

Excerpt from a travel diary. Conversation with Omryl'kot:

24.6.2009, Meinipylgino, Chukotka

We sang all the time when we were herding in the Tundra and shouted “ooo-ook”, so that the wolves would hear us. When we do not sing, the reindeer think that we are sleeping, as if there are no people, and the wolves can attack the reindeer. When a human being sings, the reindeer become calm. In the spring, when it is still dark, a bear can scatter the reindeer and a reindeer might escape its herd. A wolf is not dangerous for people; it is more dangerous for the reindeer than a bear.

The other song in the second movement is a travel song by Tinatval's father, which I heard sung by Tinatval in Chukotka.

Tinatval (b. 1922) – Chukchi Elder from the Khatyrka Tundra in southern Chukotka near the Kamchatkan border who later in life moved to the indigenous village of Vaegi

Excerpt from a travel diary: 11.6.2009, Vaegi, Chukotka

Tinatval was a dignified looking Elder. The lines of tattoos on her forehead, cheeks and chin were clearly visible. In former times, the tattoos on girls' faces were a mark of the wealth of the family. The more prosperous the family, the more lines were tattooed on their faces. Tinatval did not speak any Russian. Tinatval's daughter popped in for a visit but left quite quickly as Tinatval didn't want to sing in front of her. Tinatval sang many songs that were dedicated to her brother, Omruvye. Some of them were her father's travelling songs. She sang me sixteen songs until she finally said that she was tired. She told me that often songs developed in her head in the evening before she went to sleep.

The melody creates an impression of running reindeer in a windy tundra. Random jingling of bell sound can be heard with the pizzicati of violins.



3. Tinatval's song

3. movement, *Mulingaut – Lullaby-fugue*

This movement is built on two themes. From a lullaby hummed by Mulingaut, I have composed a fugue.

Mulingaut (b. circa 1915) – Koryak Elder and a master of traditional Koryak singing, drumming and dancing. She was born before the Russian revolution and had spent all her life in the Tundra. She clearly remembered the days before the village of Vivenka was established.

Excerpt from the travel diary: 23.2.2008, Vivenka, Kamchatka

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, would not have had the Russian name "Andrei". In her own language her name was simply Mulingaut. 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. Obviously, it was from an older tradition.

Mulignaut begins singing the lullaby Mulingaut but soon stops and says: *I have forgotten! It was a long time ago! A Lullaby to a child. Wait! I have forgotten...*

The melody hovering withing a second in micro intervals is despite being short full of expression.



3. Mulingaut's song

The other song is Eingnevngaut's song.

Eingnevngaut (b. 1927) – Chukchi Elder, a reindeer herder from southern Chukotka who later in life moved to the indigenous village of Vaegi.

Excerpt from the travel diary: 11.6.2009, Vaegi, Chukotka

We went to visit Eingnevngaut who shared a flat with her son in a two-storey building. She was in bed because she felt unwell, however we still stayed for tea. I gave her my gifts and she gave me dried fish and a long strip of dried reindeer. I asked her whether she remembered any old songs and she began to quietly hum a simple melody, but then complained about her cough.

When I asked from Eingnevngaut, if she could sing for me a song that she would remember she began to hum this melody. Eingnevngaut's song is fragmented and introvert. Its atmosphere creates a contrast to Mulingaut's theme. She begins to sing the song as if somewhere in the middle and sings the song for a while and stops unexpectedly. Her song emphasises that singing is and everyday matter, which reminds of knitting a sock, when one takes the knitting needles for a while and knits a few rows and then puts the unfinished socks back to the wire basket.



fugue. Mulingaut's lullaby theme then changes direction and together with its mirror theme played by the cellos and double bass begin to approach each other from opposite directions until they are within a tritone apart from each other. Meanwhile the second violins and the violas play a misterioso 2nd contrapuntal theme and its mirror theme. This theme is my tribute to Mulingaut. Finally, the voices reach the tone of D to play Mulingaut's lullaby theme one more time creating an echo effect.

4. movement, Rol'tytval *Rol'tytval – Jarar – The Drum*

Rol'tytval (b. 1950) Chukchi reindeer herder from southern Chukotka who later in life moved to the indigenous village of Meinipylgino

Excerpt from the travel diary: 26.6.2009, Meinipylgino

After my concert Rol'tytval visited me. Whilst we made fish soup together, she told me that she had worked in the tundra for a long time. She first tried the drum, which I had borrowed from the club, but it was in bad condition and she asked Kytgaut if she could borrow her drum. Her songs were long as they often are with the people living in the tundra.

In Rol'tytval's song the lower tones of the melody remain unchanged as the resonance of the drum beat locks them into an unchanging pitch. However, the upper tones of the melody gradually rise so that the interval between the lowest and highest tone meanders, increasing from a small third to a diminished fifth.



5 Rol'tytval's song

The rhythm of the song follows a typical southern Chukchi drumming style, whereby the division of the rhythm (4 to 3) changes regularly. The song adapts the rhythm of the melody, in contrast to the northern Chukchi, whose drumming creates a background for the song and where the drumming and the song are not synchronised with each other. In the orchestral score I have used ornamentation to emphasize these changes. The drum of the Chukchi has a ritual meaning. The drum is never taken out of the yaranga (Chukchi yurt made of reindeer skin) as the spirit of the home lives in the drum and with drumming they call their ancestors. In one yaranga there might be several drums of different sizes. Drums are used in celebrations and rituals and can be played by a guest as well.

ULITA'S WALK

I have dedicated my composition to the Nivkh Elder Ulita whom I initially met on my first field trip to Sakhalin in 2004. Prior to that I had heard her through the recordings made by Lygia O'Riordan. During my second field trip in 2006 I met her again.

Ulita (b. circa 1916) – Nivkh Elder, Sakhalin. Ulita was born before the Russian Revolution of 1917 in Sakhalin. Ulita herself did not know her exact age. People's birth dates were often remembered by the year of a particularly good fish catch. Her memory was like an endless treasure chest - full of legends, fairy tales, stories and oral traditions. She remembered old ritual rhythms and the words that they were created from and how people mumbled them to themselves. Ulita could give a first-hand account of what it was like to be at a bear ceremony and how the ritual dances were performed. She was a living example of how the oral tradition develops at every retelling. I remember the first time that I visited her when she told me a mystical and somewhat frightening legend of the mountain people, about a woman who was transformed into a bear and gave birth to twin bear cubs.

Excerpt from the travel diary: 22.11.2006, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Sakhalin

When I arrived at Ulita's she lay in her bed, small and frail. The bones in her arms were poking through her skin. I decided straight away to play the violin for her. Without telling her what I was going to play, I imitated the Nivkh instrument, the Tynryn, which is a string instrument. Ulita raised herself up slightly in the bed and said, 'Tynryn - that is the Tynryn.' She said this in Nivkh, but her daughter translated it into Russian for us. Then I asked her daughter to take Ulita's hand and hold it above my left hand as I played a tremolo so that she could feel it and understand how I was doing it. This was because of Ulita's blindness. She raised herself up even more and started to speak rapidly in Nivkh. She began to repeat the rhythms and accompanied them with the movements of the bear dance using her arms and her hands.

According to the Nivkh world view, life is divided into three parts. Life on earth is the shortest in length. After death people (and animals) go to the Underworld. Life there is longer, and everything is the opposite, i.e. the day is night, the night is day, the summer is winter. Ulita told me a story about someone who by accident got lost in the underworld before death and nobody gave him anything to eat or drink because the people there didn't see or hear him. The life under the ground has three layers for men and four for women. Therefore, the Nivkh bury men with three layers and women with four layers of clothes. From the depths of the earth a living creature eventually ascends to the Upper World amongst the spirits and birds and returns back to earth. Despite this story, the composition itself is not a narrative, but develops musical motives solely through music.

The idea of the form is taken from Mussorgsky's *Pictures of an exhibition*, where the walking theme leads the listener from movement to movement. The main theme of the composition is Ulita's theme, the so-called *walking theme*, that runs through the whole work in different pitches and with differing characters.



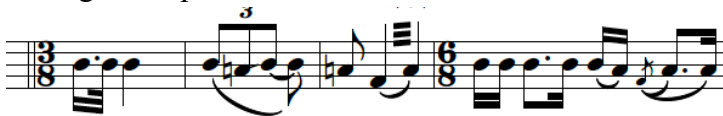
6 Ulita's "walking"-theme

The composition is in five sections, following the cycles of life. There are no breaks between the sections. Apart from the themes of Ulita, I use themes of five other singers characterizing the different sections: Ulita becomes very sick as a child and the Shaman cures her.



7. Nyavan's, Shaman-theme

Ulita grows up



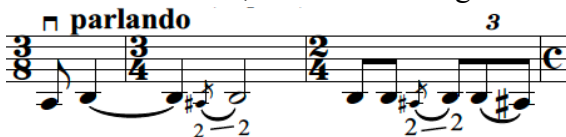
8. Hitkuk's, Jealous wife-theme

Ulita visits the four-layered underworld, which is represented with a 4-part fugue.



9. Ulita's lamentations

In the Underworld, she meets a long dead Nivkh



10 Odrain's theme

Ulita arises into the Upper World amongst the birds, the wind and the spirits of the sea.



11. Efkek's theme

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