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Archaization versus Modernization: The Revival of Instrumental Traditions in Riga Folklore Ensembles, Late 1970s and 1980s

Arhaizācija pret modernizāciju: dažu instrumentālmūzikas tradīciju atdzimšana Rīgas folkloras ansambļos 20. gadsimta 70. gadu beigās un 80. gados

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Summary

The article examines the revival of instrumental music traditions in Latvia as part of a broader folklore movement during the Soviet occupation. Unlike the state-supported modernization of musical instruments, the revival of traditional instruments was driven by personal motivation and individual efforts, with scholars playing a significant role through their research and publications. Due to limited resources, the revival relied heavily on experimentation and intuitive creativity which was legitimized with a reference to tradition and archaism.

The study explores how traditional instruments were reintroduced into Latvian musical life, with a focus on urban folklore ensembles, such as the influential *Skandinieki*. The sources of the research include autoethnography, interviews with the revival participants, recordings, and published media. The revival of instruments served three main purposes: accompanying singing, accompanying dancing, and purely instrumental music. These aspects are further explored, detailing the motivations, key figures, and outcomes.

Overall, the revival of instruments symbolized resistance to Soviet occupation by rejecting modernized forms and embracing archaic, pre-Soviet cultural elements. This movement cultivated the idea that traditional culture, particularly its older, simpler forms, was especially valuable and representative of Latvian identity.

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā aplūkota instrumentālās mūzikas tradīciju atdzimšana Latvijā kā daļa no plašākas folkloras kustības padomju okupācijas laikā. Atšķirībā no valsts atbalstītās mūzikas instrumentu modernizācijas, tradicionālo instrumentu atdzimšanu veicināja personiskā motivācija un individuālie centieni, nozīmīga loma bija zinātniekiem, viņu pētījumiem un publikācijām. Ierobežoto resursu dēļ instrumentu atdzimšana lielā mērā balstījās uz eksperimentēšanu un intuīcijā balstītu radošumu, to pamatojot ar atsauci uz tradīciju un arhaismu.

Pētījuma fokusā ir tas, kā tradicionālie instrumenti tika atkalievesti Latvijas mūzikas dzīvē, pievēršoties urbānajām folkloras kopām, tostarp vienai no ietekmīgākajām – *Skandinieki*. Pētījuma avoti ir autoetnogrāfiski materiāli, intervijas ar atmodas kustības dalībniekiem, skaņu ieraksti un publicētie mediji. Instrumentu atdzimšana kalpoja trim galvenajiem mērķiem: dziedāšanas pavadījumam, dejošanas pavadījumam un tīri instrumentālai muzicēšanai. Šie aspekti ir izvērsti rakstā, detalizēti raksturojot motivāciju, galvenos veicējus un rezultātus.

Kopumā instrumentu atdzimšana simbolizēja pretošanos padomju okupācijai, distancējoties no modernizētajām formām un aptverot arhaiskus, tātad – pirmspadomju kultūras elementus. Šī kustība kultivēja domu, ka tradicionālā kultūra, īpaši tās senākajās, vienkāršākajās formās, ir īpaši vērtīga un latvisko identitāti reprezentējoša.

There have been various waves of folklore revival in Latvia, but at the most general level, one can distinguish two main tendencies: those cultural expressions shaped significantly by the idea of modernization, and those opposing modernization in search of alternative forms of expression. The idea of modernization is rooted in cultural evolutionism – the notion that cultural forms develop from simpler to more complex stages. This approach is also applied to situations where earlier cultural products are consciously appropriated in a different temporal context.

Such tendencies are evident in the use of folklore both before and after the Second World War: for example, folk song arrangements for choir by professional composers, or folk dance choreographies created by trained professionals (Klotiņš 2002: 109). A defining feature of the Soviet period was that all artistic activity was expected to comply with the principles of socialist realism – serving the ideological leadership of the Communist party, enacting the vision of its leaders, promoting collective values, and being accessible and appealing to the masses.

In the name of “progress”, pre-Soviet culture was often labeled “bourgeois”, “conservative”, or “regressive”, and subjected to ideological scrutiny. Only those elements deemed “progressive” were permitted. Within this framework, folklore was likened to the creative expression of the working people. A specific kind of controlled mass artistic activity known as *samodejatel'nost'* was developed, which included vocal, instrumental, or choreographic forms intended exclusively for staged performance (for more on this, see Klotiņš 2002; Muktupāvels 2011).

Regarding the revival of folk musical instruments during the mentioned period, the idea of their modernization – introducing technological improvements so that the instrument meets the needs of contemporary music – is characteristic. For example, a typical approach was to enable chromatic instead of diatonic scales, as well as to create families of instruments – variations of the same instrument in different sizes and, accordingly, different tonal ranges. It can also be added that the initial idea of such families was likely “borrowed” from the symphony orchestra, where families of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass versions of bowed instruments, flutes, and others are present (Muktupāvels 2011: 81–82).

Different approaches emerged during the wave of folklore revival of the late 1970s and 1980s, commonly referred to as the folklore movement. This period was particularly important for the shaping of instrumental practices, as it provided patterns and guidelines for further development up to the present day. The main attention and efforts of the participants in the folklore movement were directed toward

reviving vocal traditions and repertoire, dances, and traditional singing and dancing contexts (Šmidchens 2014: 276–277), so musical instruments did not take center stage. There was also a dramatic lack of information about traditional instruments and instrumental music – just a few dozen instrumental melodies could be found in academic publications, and recordings were even scarcer, whether published or housed in the Archives of Latvian Folklore (Weaver et al. 2023: 58). At the same time, traditional musical instruments were seen as both representative of ancient culture and interesting and appealing to contemporary listeners; therefore, a significant segment of the folklore movement paid particular attention to them.

The aim of this study is to identify the ideas, resources, and influences involved in the process of how musical instruments were reintroduced into musical life. As a case study, mostly urban folklore ensembles from the city of Riga are examined, among them the ensemble *Skandinieki*, which had a significant influence on the folklore movement during the period in question and beyond (for more on this, see Ieva Weaver's article in this volume, Weaver 2025). The study is based on interviews with participants and on my personal autoethnographic approach. Having joined the folklore revival in the late 1970s, I was particularly interested in the field of traditional musical instruments, became a member of *Skandinieki*, and later founded the ensembles *Savieši*, *Kombuļi*, and *Rasa*. My emic perspective as a revival practitioner is complemented by the critical and analytical approach I developed during my five years of studying natural sciences at the University of Latvia (1975–1980). Published materials from the period in question – recordings, books, and articles – are also used.

The revival of musical instruments, like other revival and revitalization movements, is related to a certain reference culture that “can be known through personal experience or, to a greater or lesser degree, reconstructed – depending on the available (or the prioritized) historical sources” (Morgenstern 2019: 12). Thus, historically informed production of musical instruments and performance, on the one hand, and personal experience fused with intuition and imagination, on the other, are two aspects to be considered and evaluated in the present study. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, two researchers were involved in the study of traditional instruments – Īrisa Priedīte, a researcher at the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum, and I, a student at the Conservatory. Historian and ethnographer Priedīte's first publication on musical instruments was the booklet *Latviešu tautas mūzikas instrumenti* (Latvian Folk Musical Instruments; Priedīte 1978), whose function was apparently to inform museum visitors about the instruments found in the museum, though without detailed description. The next work, *Ko spēlēja sendienās* (What Was Played in the Olden Days; Priedīte 1983), was a small-format book in which the presented information was more detailed, and it also contained previously unpublished sources – mainly

from the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum. A certain drawback was that several descriptions of instrument making and playing were unreliable – seemingly compiled by authors without the necessary knowledge or experience; therefore, the book's practical use was met with some concern.

While studying at the Latvian Conservatory from 1980 to 1983, I conducted research under the guidance of my scientific supervisor, musicologist Dzintars Kļaviņš (1928–2007), and defended my diploma thesis *Organoloģijas pētījumu pamatobjekti Latvijas kultūras reģionā* (Basic Objects of Organological Research in the Cultural Region of Latvia; Muktupāvels 1983). The organological information necessary for the diploma thesis was obtained both by collecting published and unpublished sources and, no less importantly, by conducting organological experiments, which included making instruments, trying out and testing playing techniques, adjusting tuning and tonal range, ascertaining musical qualities, etc. Thus, my research work was intertwined with the need to revive musical instruments in the context of the folklore movement: historical and theoretical materials were brought up to date in the research, while practical work in folklore ensembles with revived instruments provided the necessary exemplification for the diploma thesis.

In general, however, the process of the revival of musical instruments, especially in its initial stage, can be described as a series of individual, spontaneous cases; the activity was mostly personally motivated and directed toward experimentation, both in terms of instrument making and playing. It can be said that the creative, intuitive approach often prevailed over the historically informed one, thus fully confirming Juniper Hill's view on revival movements "as a form of cultural activism that uses elements from the past to legitimate change – change comprising not only reversion to past practices, but innovation" (Hill 2014: 394).

Although the process of the revival of instruments itself did not follow a specific planned direction, three main areas where musical instruments found their application can be identified: accompaniment to singing, accompaniment to dancing, and purely instrumental music-making. In the following sections, the events in each of these areas will be discussed in more detail, describing the motivation for revival, the persons involved, the musical results, and the further development.

Musical Instruments for Singing Accompaniment

Latvian traditional singing has been documented mostly without instrumental accompaniment. However, in various amateur musical practices of the 1970s, singing accompaniment was very characteristic: singing lessons in general education schools with piano as the accompanying

instrument, vocal ensembles with piano accompaniment, social singing with accordion or guitar accompaniment, popular music concerts with soloists and instrumental group accompaniment, and the like.

The folklore revival developed predominantly according to its own logic; nevertheless, it can be noted that some popular instrumental practices influenced it. Instruments uncharacteristic of traditional music, such as piano, synthesizer, or electric guitar, were not considered, but some relatively easily available instruments common in popular and folk music of the first half of the 20th century – piano accordion and also acoustic guitar – were used.

The use of the accordion was facilitated by the fact that the artistic leader of the folklore ensemble was often a player of this instrument himself or herself. Here, the ensemble *Senleja* with its leader Aina Salmane (1937–2013), or Jānis Teilāns (1941–2019), who led almost ten ensembles in the vicinity of Preiļi, can be mentioned.

The acoustic guitar was mostly played in ensembles where one of the members had rock or contemporary folk music experience, or had learnt it independently. Here one can mention the ensemble *Skandinieki*, where the artist and amateur musician Vilnis Blaževics (1940–1990) played the guitar until the end of the 1970s, or the ensemble *Bizīteri*, where the composer and songwriter Silvija Silava played the guitar. The use of the guitar to accompany folk songs was greatly promoted by Austra Pumpure (1928–2017) – a concertmaster of the Liepāja Theater who had already gained some popularity as a folk singer in the second half of the 1970s, and whose programs included quite a few folk songs, all accompanied by the guitar.

The attitude towards such a symbolically important instrument as the *kokle*, in the context of the folklore movement, was variable and contradictory in relation to different types of *kokle*. Ernests Brastiņš (1892–1942), the founder of the revived pagan religion *Dievturība*, in his writings already in the 1930s recommended the *kokle* for the accompaniment of folk songs. During that period, the process of modernizing the *kokle* had begun – ensembles combining instruments of different sizes and ranges sprung up. During the Soviet period, the consistent modernization of *kokles* resulted in modifications modeled on orchestral instrument families: this so-called concert *kokle* family consisted of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass instruments, and in them, the traditional diatonic tuning of the *kokle* was altered with the help of mechanical levers enabling the raising or lowering of the pitch of each string by half a tone. A large part of the repertoire of modernized *kokle* ensembles consisted of folk song arrangements, so the *kokle* accompanied singing, and this became a common practice. At the beginning of the folklore movement, the attitude of the participants and the audience towards these modernized *kokles* was relatively neutral – although the instrument



Figure 1. Modernized *kokles* (front row) played by members of the *Skandinieki* ensemble. 1977.

Photo from Marga Stalta's collection, photographer unknown. Archives of Latvian Folklore.

was associated with Soviet-style stage manifestations, its use was still acceptable. For example, one or several concert *kokles* were used to accompany singing in the folklore ensemble *Skandinieki* (see Figure 1) until the summer of 1979.

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, I myself played one of the modernized *kokles* (a 17-string diatonic *kokle "Līgo"*, bought in an antique shop in 1978) in the *Skandinieki* ensemble. At the very beginning of the 1980s, modernized *kokles* were also played in one of the well-known folklore ensembles in the Latvian provinces – *Madonas Skandinieki*.

The situation began to change in 1980. Guntis Veiskats, a member of the *Skandinieki* ensemble, described his feelings about this change in the following way:

At that time, there were only those ensembles of *kokle* players – over-age women with Nīca-type wreaths on their heads, who played the big *kokles* [...] And that *arpeggio* technique made me sick. I knew that I wanted exactly the authentic *kokle* – as it was played in the past¹ (interview, Veiskats 2022).

Veiskats, impressed by the Kurzeme type or small carved wooden *kokle* at the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum, made his own 8- or 9-string *kokle*:

1 Tolaik bija tikai tie koklētāju ansambļi – pārziedējušas sievas ar Nīcas vainagiem galvā, kas spēlēja lielās kokles [...] Un tas *arpeggio* paņēmiens manī radīja nelabumu. Es zināju, ka gribu tieši autentisko kokli – tā kā senāk spēlēja. (Here and throughout the article, the original Latvian text is provided; all translations are by the author.)



Figure 2. Jānis Poriķis (on the right) playing the *kokle* together with Valdis Muktupāvels (on the left), while the youngest participants of the *Skandinieki* ensemble watch. 1982. Photo from Ilga Reizniece's collection, photographer unknown. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2248, 28.

By that time, I had already started working as a carpenter-restorer at the Open-Air Museum and had already started making my own *kokle*, completely by feel, without any measurements [...] I simply looked at the general design principles, and then – out of my head² (interview, Veiskats 2022).

After learning that Jānis Poriķis (1909–1992), the maker of the *kokle* that had inspired him, lived almost next door in Jaunciems, Veiskats invited him to join the *Skandinieki* ensemble. As it turned out, Poriķis had been taught to play by Nikolajs Heņķis-Freijs (1864–1934) – a well-known traditional instrument player from the historic Suiti region in western Latvia since the 1920s. From that moment on, Poriķis, by playing with the ensemble, gave others the opportunity to see and learn the traditional western Latvian way of playing the *kokle* (see Figure 2).

He also crafted new instruments, which members of the ensemble and other interested persons could obtain.

Around the same time, interest in the Latgale-type, or large carved *kokles*, arose, and my brother Māris Muktupāvels and I – with our family roots in Latgale – were among the first to take action in that direction. Māris made his first Latgale *kokle* as

2 Uz to laiku es jau biju iestājies darbā par galdnieku-restauratoru Brīvdabas muzejā un biju jau iesācis pats savu koklīti taisīt, pilnīgi uz izjūtu, bez kādiem izmēriem [...]. Es vienkārši paskatījos tos vispārējos konstrukcijas principus, tad tā – uz dullo.

early as 1981, following a model in the History Museum of Latvia (for more on this, see Muktupāvels 2009). Soon after, I also made my own Latgale-type *kokle*, and several *kokles* were then made in my folklore ensemble *Savieši* of Riga Secondary School of Applied Arts. The students, who had learned woodworking skills, chose their *kokle* models from the Ethnography Department of the History Museum of Latvia, after which they made their instruments: Jānis Cīrulis – 12, Gints Mālderis – 3, Didzis Maurītis – 3 (all unfinished), and Kārlis Zemītis – 1, of a rather unusual shape:

The lower surface of [the *kokle*] was flat, the upper surface was flat, and in the middle it was bent like a twig; it looked like a primitive leather shoe, *pastala*, and I made something similar, just with a slightly different technology, but the shape was about the same³ (interview, Zemītis 2022).

Already in 1983, following my suggestion and the ethnographic materials I provided, as well as after studying some models in the Ethnography Department of the History Museum of Latvia, Donāts Vucins (1934–1999), a native of Latgale, began making Latgale-type carved *kokles*. He turned out to be the most productive *kokle* maker at the end of the 20th century. His instruments mostly had 11 strings and were usually known for their excellent sound (for more on this, see Muktupāvels 2009).

In different folklore ensembles, the question of using small and large *kokles* for singing accompaniment received different solutions. In general, the trend was that in smaller ensembles, songs were accompanied by *kokles* more often than in larger ensembles. For example, in the *Ilģi* (4 members) program *Zemgales dziesmas* (Songs from Zemgale), *kokles* were played in 6 out of 7 songs, in the *Kombuļi* (4 members) program *Divejōda Saule tak*, *kokles* were played in 3 out of 9 songs; however, in the *Skandinieki* (around 20 participants) program of funeral songs, *kokles* were played in 2 out of 12 songs, or in the *Savieši* (about 30 members) program *Remešu dziesmas* (Craftsmen's songs), *kokles* were played in 3 out of 15 songs. This can be partly explained by the fact that the *kokle* is a relatively quiet instrument; its sound is lost in a larger group of singers. However, it was important to have a good *kokle* player who would not only accompany by simply strumming two alternating chords, but who could play both melody and harmony, doing so with a definite touch of individuality and their own style.

While singing was the focus of the Latvian folklore revival, some elements of vocal music influenced the revival of instrumental music as well. One such element is the continuous sound of a drone. When reviving vocal traditions, it was just the

3 [Koklei] apakšējā virsma plakana, virsējā virsma plakana un pa vidu kā no klūgām tur tāds izlocīts; viņa pēc tādas pastalas izskatījās, un es [uztaisīju] kaut ko līdzīgu, tik ar drusku citu tehnoloģiju, bet forma apmēram tā pati.

recited-style singing with drone that gained special importance as a characteristic, archaic, traditional, and largely extinct – but therefore all the more important – singing style of all regions of Latvia. In the early 1980s, a story circulated among folklore practitioners about a meeting of music folklorists, where representatives from Latvia and Lithuania argued about what was unique in their country and absent in neighboring countries. It was said that Lithuanian folklorist and folk music researcher Zenonas Slaviūnas (1907–1973) said, “We have *sutartinės*”⁴, whereas Latvian folklorist and folk music researcher Jēkabs Vītoliņš (1898–1977) responded, “But we have vocal drone”.

Traditionally, recited-style singing has not been practiced with the accompaniment of tonally definite instruments; for the rhythmic support of such singing, stick rattles – *egļite*, *puškaitis*, *trīdeksnis*, or *čakans* – have been used. Attempts to use the *kokle* to accompany such songs were not successful, mainly because of the monotonous melodic line and the difficulty of harmonizing such a melody. As an exception, the song *Tumsā nakts, zaļā zāle* (Dark Night, Green Grass) from the Krustpils vicinity, performed by the *Ilģi* ensemble, can be mentioned (Ilģi 1996); in their interpretation, the recited-style singing has turned into a cantilena-style due to changing harmonies, polyphony of thirds, slowed tempo, and elements that enhance the increased role of aesthetic quality.

In the early 1980s, a new instrument, the *ģīga* – a short- or long-necked fiddle with two metal strings – was born. Its important musical function, in addition to duplicating the melody, was to provide drone accompaniment for singing. Historically, the name *ģīga* was mainly associated with the monochord, which was played with a bow and used for a pedagogical purpose – to facilitate learning chorale parts at home. There were attempts to restore the *ģīga* both in the late 1930s and the late 1940s, constructing a modernized *ģīga* family for the needs of the Latvian folk musical instrument orchestra. Unfortunately, these attempts were not continued, and after the orchestra’s activities ended in the early 1960s, the instrument fell into almost complete oblivion. As a rare exception, the use of the big *ģīga* in ensemble with the modernized *kokle* in the folklore ensemble *Duvzare* from Rucava in 1979 can be mentioned (see Figure 3).

It is possible that the first attempt to restore the *ģīga* in the context of the folklore movement was connected with Guntis Veiskats. This time, the impetus for creating the *ģīga* was a *dutar* – a long-necked lute with two double strings, given to him by me. Veiskats comments on it as follows:

4 Archaic vocal form – multi-part songs with dominant seconds.



Figure 3. A big *ģīga*, played by a member of the *Duvzare* ensemble, and a modernized *kokle* (in the background). 1979. Photo from Igeta Ozoliņa's collection, photographer unknown.

I only knew the name. I had heard or read somewhere how many strings it should have, but I was very much a minimalist at the time. And I knew that the *ģīga* was played with a bow [...]. [The *dutar*] was fantastic! Somehow, I was slightly influenced by it, and I just made – completely out of my head – a neck as long as possible and a box. It was pure improvisation⁵ (interview, Veiskats 2022).

Veiskats's *ģīga* was made from one piece of wood: a carved body with a resonator board attached on top, a long fingerboard without frets, two steel strings, and wooden pegs for tuning. The original tuning of the strings, apparently following that presented in Joachim Braun's article (Braun 1971: 125), was in unison. In an attempt to find a suitable repertoire for the *ģīga*, the initial focus was on dance tunes. This can be heard, for example, in the 1981 album *Senie balsi* (Olden Tunes) recorded by *Skandinieki*, where track A5 *Ģīgas meldija* (Melody of the Ģīga; Skandinieki 1982a) seems to have been taken from the button accordion repertoire and, due to its very slow tempo, does not inspire confidence in its suitability for the *ģīga*.

5 Es zināju tikai nosaukumu. Kaut kur biju dzirdējis vai lasījis, cik tai jābūt stīgu, bet es tobrīd biju ļoti izteikts minimālists. Un es zināju, ka ģīgu spēlēja ar locīņu [...]. [Dutāra] bija fantastiska! Kaut kur es no viņas nedaudz ietekmējos un uztaisīju vienkārši, nu tā – uz dullo, tādu pēc iespējas garu kātu un tādu kasti, un tā bija tīrā improvizācija.



Figure 4. Guntis Veiskats's *gīga* played by Andris Veismanis. His singing is also accompanied by an overtone flute played by Valdis Muktupāvels. 1989. Photo from Valdis Muktupāvels's collection, photographer Pēteris Korsaks.

Already in 1982, a craftsman, Jānis Caune (1932–?) from Eleja in south-central Latvia, offered his model of the revived *gīga* and began making these instruments for sale, thus distributing them to a wider circle of interested parties. The instrument had two strings and a specially made bow for playing.

Due to the lack of evidence, it is currently difficult to describe the use of the *gīga* in the first half of the 1980s; however, sources from the second half of the decade show that the instrument was used to accompany singing (see Figure 4), mostly melodies with narrow tonal range, highlighting the drone tone.

In the album *Divejōda Saule tak* (The Rising and Setting Sun), recorded in 1986 by the folklore ensemble *Kombuļi*, the 2-string *gīga* is heard in two songs with a tonal range of a fourth and a minor sixth, with the basic tone of the melody extended like a drone. In the album *Latgolas dzīsmes* (Latgalian Songs) recorded around the same time by the folklore ensemble *Grodi*, the 2-string *gīga* is played in three songs, marking the melody or highlighting one of the tones of the prevailing harmony in a drone-like manner (Kombuļi, Grodi 1989).

The attempt to restore the bladder fiddle – a stick zither with a resonator – described both in the work of Joachim Braun (1962: 24) and in the *Atlas muzykal'nyh instrumentov narodov SSSR* (Atlas of Musical Instruments of the Peoples Inhabiting

the USSR; Vertkov, Blagodatov 1975: 97) developed somewhat unexpectedly. I prepared a description and offered it to the members of the *Savieši* ensemble who were engaged in woodworking. Gints Mālderis comments:

We made it [the bladder fiddle] in *Savieši* quickly, with one string [...] That bladder fiddle was nothing special; it was a collective effort [...] It was made exactly like that because we needed a rhythm instrument, so we carved it quickly – somehow quite terrible-looking⁶ (interview, Mālderis 2022).

After trying out different ways of producing sound, one had to conclude that the sound of the bladder fiddle is not at all similar to the cello, as one might assume when reading Jēkabs Vītolīņš's description (Vītolīņš 1972: 63). On the contrary, the gut string, struck with a bow and in contact with the dried bladder, created a whole spectrum of micro-oscillations, which suppressed the main tone and gave the sound a wild character. Nevertheless, the bladder fiddle was used sporadically as a drone instrument to accompany recited-style singing. One such instance was the review concert of folklore and ethnographic ensembles in Lielvārde on May 22, 1982, when the longest song, *Mēs deviņi bāleliņi* (We are Nine Brothers), published in the *Latvju dainas* (Barons, Wissendorffs 1904, No. 13,646) collection, was sung in a recited style and accompanied by the bladder fiddle, with a duration exceeding 15 minutes. Later, this song – accompanied by the bladder fiddle – was also recorded by Latvian Radio, but it was not broadcast, apparently because of its too-challenging sound. Nonetheless, for the members of the *Savieši* ensemble, the recited-style singing combined with the wild drone of the bladder fiddle was a representation of archaism – thus a value in itself, as it was commonly believed that more ancient origin signified a more “genuine Latvian” quality.

Another instrument, the use of which gradually became associated with singing, is the guimbarde. In 1980, the *Skandinieki* ensemble acquired two “Schwartz”-type guimbardes. Through experimentation, I reached the point of being able to play a melody and also instructed other interested parties. In the album *Senie balsi*, track B4 *Spēle uz zobām* (Playing the Guimbardes; Skandinieki 1982a), one can hear a melody I played together with Veiskats, which can also be found in Emilis Melngailis's publication *Latviešu dancis* (Latvian dance) as a *kokle* melody (Melngailis 1949, No. 346). Originally, it was supposed to be a polka tune, but in the mentioned recording it completely lacks the character of dance music due to both the slow tempo and the barely audible melody line. It is not surprising that with this level of performance

6 Mēs to [pūšļa vijoli] *Saviešos* uztaisījām ātri, ar vienu stīgu [...] Tā pūšļa vijole nebija nekas tāds, tas bija tāds kolektīvs darbs [...] Tā pūšļa vijole tieši tā arī tapa, jo mums vajadzēja tur ritma instrumentu, tāpēc mēs to ātri kaut kā pabriesmīgi izgrebām.

technique, the guimbarde did not become a dance music instrument, but due to its mysterious, energizing sound, it increasingly began to represent ritual, magical, or ancient associations. This can be heard clearly in the already mentioned album of the *Grodi* ensemble (Kombuji, Grodi 1989), where the very first song begins with an interplay of drums and guimbarde in D, whereas the singing accompanied by the *kokle* is a tone higher – in E; apparently, such tonal dissonance is a less important factor than the presence of the guimbarde's symbolic image.

Musical Instruments for Dance Accompaniment

The role of choreographic forms in the early stage of the folklore movement was less significant compared to singing. This was largely related to the way folklore ensembles operated – through public performances, brief commentary, and involving the audience as much as possible. Round dances with singing turned out to be a very effective form of engaging performance, but they did not require musical instruments. Still, the demonstration of couple dances required instrumental accompaniment, which in turn required a skilled player with an appropriate musical instrument. It is also known that when choreographic folklore was documented at the end of the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century, the characteristic dance music instruments of the time were the diatonic accordion, violin, zither, mandolin, and double bass in various ensemble combinations. However, the availability of these instruments – except for the violin – was quite limited during the period under study.

In the situation of the folklore movement at the end of the 1970s, the real instrument accompanying dancing was most often the piano accordion, but a violin was also suitable for this purpose, as was the case, for example, in the ensemble *Skandinieki* in the second half of the 1970s. However, the characteristic dance music sound of the ensemble *Skandinieki* was created in 1979. The ensemble obtained two non-playable Estonian bagpipes without reeds, but very soon, thanks to the experimentation of me and Veiskats, the reeds were prepared and the bagpipes could be played (for more on this, see Muktupāvels 2020). Projecting the instrumental ensemble, I made arrangements of four dances for two violins, bagpipes, and a hornpipe – a primitive clarinet with six fingerholes, actually, a herder's instrument, but I added it probably because of my desire to give the ensemble an ancient, archaic character. The idea of the arrangements was that the bagpipes duplicate the part of the first violin, the second violin plays a third lower, and the hornpipe duplicates the second violin, but in a slightly simplified way. Over time, after several public performances, both the second violin's part of lower thirds as well as the need for a



Figure 5. Instrumental group of the *Skandinieki* ensemble: bagpipe, two violins, recorder, hornpipe, "devil's drum". 1981. Photo from Ilga Reizniece's collection, photographer unknown. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2248, 30.

hornpipe were abandoned, and the ensemble of violin and bagpipes was established, both playing and interpreting the same melody in their own way, marking the rhythmic accents with drums or with a stick rattle "devil's drum" (*Skandinieki* 1982a, track A1; 1982b, tracks A1, A4; see also Figure 5).

As a result of relatively intensive concert activity, such an instrumental lineup became established in the public's consciousness as representative of the ancient, authentic dance music ensemble. For a while, the sound of the dance music of the *Skandinieki* ensemble was enriched by a German-type diatonic button accordion (the accompaniment side buttons play a tonic chord when pushed), played by me, which I learned by myself through experimentation. It can be heard on the album *Senie bālsī* (*Skandinieki* 1982a, tracks A6, B5), but this practice was not continued in the *Skandinieki* ensemble.

It could be that the first restored bagpipes in Latvia, made according to the museum artefacts, were created at the Riga Secondary School of Applied Arts in 1982 or 1983. Kārlis Zemītis, a member of the folklore ensemble *Savieši*, intended to make several wind instruments – pipes and bagpipes – characteristic, in his opinion, of the Latvian people, as his diploma work. He comments:

I was very interested in the bagpipes, but I started with pipes because it seemed simpler. I made quite a lot of them, and they were all such experiments for me [...] I saw [the bagpipes] [in the museum] and made them as ethnographic, quite precisely. I pressed Ingrīdīna [Ingrīda Brence – a member of the *Savieši* ensemble]; her father could get the skins there [...] And then I specially asked them to make it so that it would be like a bag. And then I proceeded there quite a bit, softened it all [...] And shaping with a lathe – it wasn't complicated [...] It was difficult with those reeds. I really wanted to have the reeds similar to the ethnographic ones. My experience at that time was that they sounded very good for a short time, but they quickly wore out' (interview, Zemītis 2022).

The most important reason why the instrument was hardly played was "when you play, you can't dance" (meaning that dancing would be his first choice), and "those girls were so pretty both now and then" (meaning that he was much more eager to dance with the pretty girls than to play instruments).

Instrumental music developed differently in the folklore studio of the University of Latvia, known since 1980 as *Dandari*, which specialized in the preservation and popularization of traditional dances. In the late 1970s, they collaborated with the folk music band of the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics, which included a piano accordion, a violin, and sometimes also a chorded zither and percussion.

Acting as a folklore ensemble since 1980, they continued to use the piano accordion to accompany dances, which was sometimes replaced by the bayan. Depending on the composition of the participants and their musical skills, the accordion was often accompanied by a violin and various percussion instruments, such as a stick rattle *trīdeksnis*, triangle, etc. A chorded zither in poor condition was found in the university warehouse; after some repairs, they attempted to play it, though not very successfully.

Having purchased *kokles* made by Donāts Vucins, they sometimes used them to accompany slower dances. For a short time, the tuba was used as a bass instrument for the band; however, its further use was discontinued following the opinion of an authoritative "expert" from the Emilis Melngailis's Folk Art Center, who argued that it was not suitable for a folklore ensemble (interview, Spīčs 2024).

By the mid-1980s, with improved knowledge of dance music traditions, they bought a traditional leviņš-type diatonic accordion and learned to play it. Around

7 Man tās dūdas ļoti ieinteresēja, bet es sāku ar stabulēm, jo likās tā vienkāršāk. Tās es diezgan daudz sataisīju, un man tie visi bija tādi eksperimenti [...] [Dūdas] es noskatīju [muzejā] un uztaisīju tā kā etnogrāfiskas, diezgan precīzi. Es Ingrīdīnu mocīju, tur viņas tēvs varēja dabūt ģērētās ādas [...] Un tad es speciāli lūdzu, lai uztaisa, lai tā kā maiss tur būtu. Un tad diezgan tur ņemos, mīkstināju to visu [...] Un virpošana – tas jau nebija sarežģīti [...] Ar tām mēlītēm bija grūti. Man ļoti gribējās, lai ir tā kā etnogrāfiskās no tās niedrītes. Mana toreizējā pieredze bija tāda, ka kaut kādu īsu laiku tās ļoti labi skanēja, bet ātri nolietojās.

the same time, they also acquired a button zither made by the traditional instrument maker Rūdolfs Ivansons (1907–1987). Thus, the ensemble, initially made up of various random and not particularly traditional instruments, was reshaped by the late 1980s into a traditional rural music band – with diatonic accordion, violin, button zither, and percussion.

Musical Instruments for Instrumental Playing

The actualization of several instruments in the folklore movement is related to an important sphere of traditional culture – herding and herders’ music. To present this aspect, folklore ensembles included herding calls, songs about herding, shepherds’ games, as well as herders’ musical instruments in their performances.

Compared to dance music instruments, these are simpler and made of natural materials – birch bark, wood, horns, animal or bird bones, grass, reeds, etc. However, their apparent simplicity often masks the need for specialized knowledge of construction, playing techniques, and other skills, without which the revival of these instruments is very difficult or even impossible – unless approached through creative experimentation to rediscover or reinterpret these practices.

Since these experiments also involved finding ways to play something meaningful, they resonate with what Juniper Hill described regarding the revival of ancient music: “Ancient music as departure for experimental improvisation and personal expression” (Hill 2014: 404).

Demonstration of herders’ instruments in the performance of a folklore ensemble directly or indirectly pointed towards the aspect of archaism: it was believed that herders’ instruments originated in prehistoric times; this idea was also found in both popular and specialized literature – for example, in Jēkabs Vītoliņš’s *Latviešu tautas mūzikas instrumenti* (Latvian folk music instruments; 1972: 53–54) and Īrisa Priedīte’s *Ko spēlēja sendienās* (Priedīte 1983: 19–20). Players and audiences imagined that the sound of these instruments served as a kind of testimony to older cultural layers.

Another important aspect of presenting these instruments to the public was the idea of their autochthonous origin – from local, natural resources. Thus, these instruments signaled Latvian identity more strongly than, say, internationally known and later-adopted ones such as the violin, diatonic accordion, or zither.

This aura of ancientness was so powerful for the revival participants that it could overshadow “uncomfortable” details – such as the fact that the wooden horn, whose signal often introduced the performances of the *Skandinieki* ensemble, actually

came from Estonia, or that birch bark playing techniques had been learned from a German musician during his ensemble's visit to the Open-Air Museum.

One of the first herders' instruments to be revived was a reed, and Guntis Veiskats comments on this:

I heard about the reed pipe, but once on one of the *Skandinieki* trips [...] it was some kind of autumn, and there were rye straws somewhere. And I took one such thick rye straw and thought of cutting a reed in it, cut it and unfolded it, put it in my mouth with the whole reed, pressed the hole with my tongue. Then I blew it, and it turned out that you can play on it. And I cut a couple of fingerholes in it and [...] I remember the surprise of the people sitting around when I started playing it, yes. And then I tried the same thing with canes, and then we played a lot in that way there⁸ (interview, Veiskats 2022).

In addition to being demonstrated as a herders' musical instrument, the reed pipe acquired other uses as well. Ernests Spīčs, the head of the folklore studio of the University of Latvia, comments on inviting me to conduct a master class on musical instruments and about its results:

When you came to make reed pipes, it was [19]82, if I'm not mistaken; it was the first year when we accepted about a hundred participants in the folklore studio, and then you made those reed pipes. Then Uģis Dravnieks came [...] and he and Zigmāriņš [Zigmārs Kristsons; both were members of the folklore studio of the University of Latvia] played those reed pipes so well⁹ (interview, Spīčs 2024).

In fact, the reed pipes played by the talented folk musician Uģis Dravnieks (1966–2009) for the folklore studio's dance music band were a kind of instrument that gave the musical accompaniment a specific character of sound and thus greater recognition. A different use of reed pipes could be heard on the LP *Kansanmusiikkia Sibelius-Akatemiasta* (Folk music at the Sibelius Academy; Sibelius Academy 1983), which I received from students of the Sibelius Academy in 1984; in this recording, reed pipes, like other "primitive" instruments, were used in the creation of experimental sonic compositions with elements of ethnojazz, and such an approach seemed to

8 Dzirdēts bija par niedru stabuli, bet vienu reizi vienā *Skandinieku* braucienā [...] tas bija kaut kāds rudens un tur bija rudzu salmi kaut kur. Un es paņēmu vienu tādu pamatīgi resnu rudzu salmu un izdomāju uztaisīt tam mēlīti, iegriezu un atlocīju, iebāzu mutē ar visu mēlīti, aizspiedu caurumu ar mēli ciet. Tad iepūtu, un izrādījās, ka uz tā var spēlēt. Un es tam iegriezu pāris robiņus un [...] atceros to pārsteigumu apkārt sēdošajos, kad es viņu sāku spēlēt, jā. Un tad es pamēģināju ar niedrēm to pašu, un tad mēs tur daudz ko spēlējām tādā veidā.

9 Tad, kad tu atnāci ar niedru stabulu taisīšanu, tas bija [19]82. gads, ja nemaldos, tas bija pirmais gads, kad mēs piepēmām folkloras studijā apmēram simts dalībniekus, un tad tās niedru stabulītes taisīji. Tad atnāca Uģis Dravnieks [...], un viņš tā tīri labi kopā ar Zigmāriņu saspēlēja tās niedru stabulītes.



Figure 6. A set of *gārši* played by the *Skandinieki* instrumental group. 1982. Photo by Alfrēds Stinkuls. Archives of Latvian Folklore, LFK 2264, 12.

reflect the essence of folk music much better than choral harmonizations or rigid settings for instrumental ensemble.

Members of Riga and provincial folklore ensembles tried to find, besides the reed pipes, other wind instruments that could be imagined as archaic and of local origin, and that would also be interesting from a musical point of view and, no less importantly, easy to play. I proposed such an instrument called *gārši*, synthesizing two different versions of Baltic one-tone whistles: a version documented in Latvian Vidzeme – a panpipe made of reed tubes of different lengths glued together with the help of pine resin and played by one person, and a version known in Aukštaitija – the north-eastern part of Lithuania – a set of 2–7 separate one-tone pipes made of the tubular plant *Angelica archangelica*, and played by two or more players, each blowing one or two whistles.

The proposed set of *gārši* included a 5-tone panpipe (C, D, E, F, and G) played by a soloist, one or more two-tone panpipes (C and D), and several single-tone whistles tuned in unison (D). The repertoire of *gārši*, according to my idea, would be an instrumental version of Sēlija's (a south-eastern Latvian region) characteristic recited-style singing with constant and alternating drone. This music was sporadically performed by the *Skandinieki* and *Savieši* ensembles in the early 1980s (see Figure 6), since 1985 – by the folklore ensemble *Kombuļi*, and was also taught in several master classes led by me.

The *kokle* had a great potential to be used for purely instrumental music. Thanks to Jānis Poriķis, the *kokle* repertoire in the *Skandinieki* ensemble in the early 1980s was comprised of dances from the Suiti region. Māris Muktupāvels, a member of the ensemble at that time, tried to expand the *kokle* repertoire with melodies from Latgale or, more precisely, their interpretations:

When I started to play the *kokle*, the Latgalian *kokle* tunes seemed to be more varied and interesting compared to the repertoire of the Suiti region in Kurzeme (interview, Muktupāvels 2008).

A significant impulse toward the next developments in the *kokle* playing style arose from the visit of amateur restorer of ancient Russian musical instruments, Vladimir Povetkin (1943–2010), to Riga in 1982. He was particularly interested in the *gusli* – a close relative of the Baltic psaltery-type instruments – and his idea about playing, as I can remember, was “*gusli* – my thoughts”, which can be interpreted as a kind of impromptu music-making. This idea was well accepted by some Latvian *kokle* players, who started to improvise rather free, unconventional interpretations of traditional tunes and did not care much about how closely it adhered to the established view on the authentic tradition.

The next significant impulse for the *kokle* playing came from the recordings of the Finnish trio *Primo* (= Primitive Music Orchestra, 1984), who exposed archaic runo-singing and *kantele* tunes to improvisation and polystylistic interpretations, with a touch of blues and other styles. These approaches influenced the performances of small folklore ensembles, first of all *Ilgi* – one of the best-known Latvian bands, who began interpreting traditional music with more space for intuitive, creative music-making, improvisation, and incorporation of elements of jazz, rock, early music, and other ethnic traditions. The band leader, Ilga Reizniece, has labelled this approach as “postfolklore” (Boiko 2001: 116, 117), and it has become a model for many other ensembles in Latvia.

The members of the folklore movement essentially tried to distance themselves from the established pattern of folk-music-based compositions, especially those by Romantic-style composers. To a large extent, this separation was due to the fact that Soviet-style stage folklorism was fundamentally rooted in such a Romantic approach. In this context, one musical event deserves a special mention. On December 29, 1985, a concert was held at the National Philharmonic, the first part of which was dedicated to Baroque music, while the second part, according to composer Imants Zemzaris’s intention, featured interpretations rooted in the deepest layers of folk music: compositions from Bela Bartok’s cycle *From forty-four duets for two violins*, performed by violinists Indulis Sūna (1950–2022) and Jānis Bulavs (1949–2023), alternated with my improvisations using ancient folk musical instruments – reed pipe, hornpipe,

bagpipes, *kokle*, guimbarde, etc. – presenting musical material from Emilis Melngailis's collection. The description in the concert program read: "E. Melngailis (1874–1954) – From the collection of folklore records *Latvju dancis*. Authentic folk melodies are performed by Valdis Muktupāvels" (Koncerts 1985). Thus, it turns out that the playing of traditional instruments – revived within the folklore movement and influenced by intuitive creativity and ethnojazz – was perceived as representing "authentic" traditions in the situation of the mid-1980s.

Promotion of Knowledge about Ancient Musical Instruments

Among the participants of the folklore movement, an un verbalized mission was relevant – to educate themselves and others about various aspects of ancient local culture and to popularize related folklore materials. At a time when public awareness of traditional music instruments was negligible, much of the popularization activity was carried out by folklore ensembles that had these instruments at their disposal. This usually took place during ensemble performances, demonstrating the playing of the instrument and describing its construction, playing style, and context of use through brief comments. A member of the ensemble could also tell a tale or legend about the instrument or share something from their own experience.

Folklore ensembles, or even broader local communities, often invited guest speakers. Thus, in the first half of the 1980s, I delivered several dozen lectures with demonstrations, as well as master classes in making and/or playing instruments, starting with lectures at the Folklore Friends Club and continuing to classes at the Folklore Faculty of the Folk University organized by the House of Art Workers, which can actually be regarded as a current offer of informal education for a broad public in the capital.

Already in the early 1980s, the Ethnographic Open-Air Museum intended to contribute to the promotion of public awareness of folk musical instruments by preparing slide sets and musical recordings. Īrisa Priedīte organized a photo session, focusing both on instruments and playing. The playing of instruments was also recorded, but initially in a rather amateur way – on the museum premises with a magnetic tape recorder and a microphone. In the spring of 1982, the museum reached an agreement with the All-Union company *Melodija* to make a recording for a long-playing record. For this purpose, Jānis Poriķis and I were sent to the company's sound studio in Moscow; both traditional *kokle* and a large number of herders' instruments were recorded. For unknown reasons, the intended record was never released; only part of the recording was published in France in 1985 as part of a joint

project between *Melodija* and *Le chant du Monde* – a series of albums *Voyage en URSS: Anthologie de la musique instrumentale et vocale des peuples de l'URSS*, comprising 10 LPs, one of which was *Musical art of the peoples of the USSR. Estonian/Latvian instrumental music* (Melodija 1985) (for more on this, see Muktupāvels 1987b).

A description of some of herders' musical instruments, their making, and use was prepared by Priedīte in her article *Ar stabuli, tauri – norām pāri* (With a pipe, trumpet – across meadows; Priedīte 1984). The symbolism of musical instruments and instrumental music-making was explored in the article *Latviešu tautas mūzikas instrumenti un to lietošanas semantika K. Barona "Latvju dainās"* (Latvian folk musical instruments and the semantics of their use in K. Barons' "Latvian folk songs") by musicologists Arnolds Klotiņš and me (Klotiņš, Muktupāvels 1985). This article was not intended as a practical guide, but rather to spark interest and provide in-depth perspectives on traditional instrumental music.

In the mid-1980s, a decision to publish methodical materials on folk musical instruments was made by a state institution – the E[milis] Melngailis's Folk Art Center¹⁰, one of whose functions was methodical support and control of the folklore movement. Folklore specialist Liāna Ose proposed that I prepare such materials for the needs of folklore ensembles, and it was done based on the previously mentioned diploma thesis materials. A softcover book, *Tautas mūzikas instrumenti Latvijas PSR teritorijā* (Folk musical instruments in the territory of the Latvian SSR; Muktupāvels 1987a), was published in 1987 and was distributed among Latvian folklore ensembles.

Sensing this public need for published information about traditional culture that would allow personal participation in its practice, and at the moment of the rise of the folklore movement, immediately after the 150th anniversary celebration of the compiler of the first fundamental collection of folksong texts, Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923), one of the largest Latvian publishing houses of that time, *Liesma*, initiated a set of three folklore-related articles to be included in the thematic collection of articles *Padoms* (Advice) for educators and parents, offering an up-to-date perspective on topical pedagogical issues. In one of the three articles *Kur tava kokle?* (Where is your *kokle*?) by me, the making of more than ten simple and not-so-simple instruments is described, including panpipes, reed pipes, birch bark, buzzer, various clappers and rattles, and *kokles*. In the introduction to the article, I invite "parents, teachers, educators, and older brothers to learn an almost completely forgotten part of heritage – folk musical instruments" (Muktupāvels 1988: 146).

10 At that time, the name of the institution was E[milis] Melngailis's Republican Scientifically-Methodological Center for Folk Art and Cultural-Educational Work.

Evidently, the promotion of knowledge about traditional instruments was primarily in the hands of the revival participants themselves. Some sporadic activities by state institutions were a positive contribution; still, they were not enough to initiate a purposeful and structured process.

Conclusions

The revival of instrumental music traditions has been a part of a broader folklore movement. It took place in a situation where the specific cultural practices of the totalitarian Soviet state prevailed; these were introduced in occupied Latvia and had supplanted the main cultural development trajectories established before the Second World War. The revival of musical instruments was not the central focus of the folklore movement, but it created some symbolically and musically significant practices.

Unlike the modernization of musical instruments, which was supported by state authorities during the Soviet era, the revival of traditional instruments was more personally motivated and thus largely dependent on the individuals who carried it out. In a situation where published sources for revival were very limited, the researchers involved in the process were of great importance, significantly influencing it through their practical activities and current publications. Moreover, in the context of limited resources, experimentation played a significant role, as did intuitive creativity, which was legitimized by focusing on local materials and simple technologies, as well as by following archaic examples of vocal music.

Although at the end of the 1970s it was not clear how the revival of musical instruments should proceed, there was a gradual abandonment of modernized instruments and forms of music-making influenced by popular music. Instead, revived instruments were introduced, and various new forms related to the accompaniment of singing and dancing were established. It became quite common, especially in small ensembles, to play *kokles* to accompany singing. For this purpose, an instrument called the *ģīga*, whose similarities with the traditional *ģīga* were so small that it can actually be considered a new instrument, began to be used more and more. The guimbarde also established itself as an instrument accompanying singing, mainly because of its archaic image. On the other hand, another instrument – the bladder fiddle – was used only fragmentarily due to its challenging sound quality.

Along with the revival of traditional rural dance music bands, bagpipes combined with violins and other instruments played a role in the dance accompaniment, thus emphasizing the importance of an older tradition. The addition of various percussion instruments – *tīdeksnis* and “devil’s drum” – played a similar role in enhancing the sense of antiquity.

One of the oldest categories of musical instruments – herders’ instruments – became an important field of experimentation, using the local origin of the instruments and their connection with the thousands-of-years-old farming sector – animal husbandry – to legitimize these experiments. At the same time, the use of these instruments, especially the reed pipes, promoted individual expression and gave experimentation a touch of avant-garde or new forms of music that reflected the era.

In general, it can be seen that the revival of musical instruments supported the overarching task of the folklore movement – resisting the Soviet occupation and the cultural forms introduced by it. This was most clearly demonstrated by the deliberate rejection of modernized instruments. The idea of archaic strata of traditional culture as representing the pre-Soviet, the “especially valuable Latvian”, was cultivated, giving preference to more primitive instruments or even creating new instruments that conformed with the idea of ancientness.

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