

ANATS Bursary Report
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The Community Music Activity (CMA) seminar is a pre-conference seminar of the International Society for Music Education's biennial conference. In 2018 it was held in Tbilisi, the capital of the Republic of Georgia and the title of the conference was 'Inspiring Curiosity: Celebrating Diverse Voices of Community Music'. One of the primary reasons Georgia was chosen to host the conference was the traditional vocal polyphony singing styles that are performed in communities around the country, which was among the list of UNESCO Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001 and was relisted on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008. This led to the conference themes being centred on the voice even though the CMA encompasses a wide variety of community music practices, practitioners and researchers from around the world. The CMA commissioners are dedicated to providing opportunities for delegates to meet local musicians working in the community and we were treated to workshops, performances and papers from many Georgian musicians and music educators among many others from around the world.

The conference involved much singing. The welcome session took the form of a singing circle led by Nana Mzhavanadze, teaching an assortment of Georgian songs and dances from different regions. Singing led by several delegates followed this and I led a song and dance from the Torres Strait, which was joyfully received. Each morning the delegates started the day with song before keynotes, presentations, papers and workshops. We attended an excellent workshop with Dr Malkaz Erkvanidze, a Georgian ethnomusicologist who taught us several Georgian songs and about the vocal production and style used in Georgian vocal polyphony. He challenged us to sing in trios within an hour of arriving and learning a new song in the Georgian language and style. We were spoilt with performances from different ensembles and soloists each day including Ialoni (women's choir), Tbilisi State University Choir, Rustavi Choir (men's choir) a children's ensemble, a harp soloist and piano soloist. The day I arrived in Tbilisi I was lucky enough to attend Art Gene, a folk music and dance festival, which showcased outstanding performance practices from right across Georgia.

Georgian delegates shared the history and current practices of traditional music in Georgia, which mostly consists of a distinct vocal polyphony. Ethnomusicologist Dr Gia Bagashvili gave a keynote presentation on the different types of vocal polyphony in Georgia, which predate the arrival of Christianity in the 4th century AD. He described the 15 different regions in Georgia (including alpine, semi-desert and river regions within the small country) that each have their own unique style of vocal polyphony, which is usually in 3 parts but occasionally is in 2, 4 or more parts. He introduced us to the krimanchuli, a special type of yodel used in the Guria region and described how in some areas trios improvise within the polyphonic style. He also presented on the 'Symbolic importance of eternity and wine in Georgian drinking songs'. Rusdan Tsurstumia presented 'Georgian traditional music: cultural memory, intercultural context

and revival tendencies'. She described the different forms folk music currently takes and how this has been influenced by Soviet occupation, later independence and different approaches to perpetuating folk traditions. It was a privilege to learn about these vocal traditions in their country of origin from esteemed musicians and academics, particularly as there are few opportunities to do this in Australia. Since returning home, I have enjoyed sharing some of the repertoire and context I have learned in my time in Georgia with my choirs and colleagues.

Community musicians from around the world presented their work relating to Georgia also. Professor Caroline Bithell discussed 'Finding voice and community in the UK and Georgia', describing how Georgian vocal traditions have played a significant role in the Natural Voice Network and how Georgian singing workshops are quite common across the UK. Dr Gillian Howell presented on 'Community music and post-war healing in Georgia' from her time there several decades ago. Other presentations on singing included a session on community music singing in Japan, experiences of an intergenerational choir in Canada, perspectives on the value of group singing and a prison choir project.

I contributed a paper entitled 'Estonian singing traditions as an impetus for community-building and expressing Estonian cultural heritage in Australia'. As an early career researcher, this experience was invaluable for me to receive feedback on this research, which is ongoing. Experienced academics in the field were generous in offering suggestions for ways I could approach the next phase of the research. Unexpectedly, my paper instigated a discussion surrounding the idea of nationalism and the ways it is expressed differently in various contexts and climates. My paper described the way Estonian-Australians are proud of their heritage and identify strongly with Estonia as a nation, particularly its singing tradition. I discussed a large Estonian song festival that played a significant part in Estonia achieving independence from the Soviet Union and how Estonia's national identity has been and continues to be important for Estonia's struggle for and maintenance of freedom. The Republic of Georgia has a history of Soviet occupation also, and the similarities between the two countries and the importance of folk singing in maintaining a cultural identity through the Soviet era had many parallels. Delegates from Austria and Hungary, however, responded from a different place, suggesting that where they are from, a strong sense of nationalism is viewed as a dangerous reminder of how nationalist ideologies, such as those of the Nazis, can have devastating effects.

My heartfelt thanks goes to the ANATS National Council for making it possible for me to attend this conference. I am more than happy to speak to any ANATS members interested in Georgian vocal polyphony or who would like to discuss anything relating to the conference, location or contacts I have made.

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