
99 GEORGIAN SONGS – A PREFACE by Joan Mills

This practical workbook for singers of Georgian songs was the inspiration of the late Edisher Garakanidze, the renowned and much-loved ethnomusicologist. Edisher was well known throughout the UK and had a close relationship with the Centre for Performance Research (CPR), contributing, as he explains in his introduction, to CPR projects such as the *Points of Contact: Performance, Food and Cookery (1994)* conference and various editions of the *Giving Voice International Festival*.

The creation of this song book was quite a challenging process, for reasons I shall go on to describe, and the purpose of this updated preface is partly to pay tribute to, and acknowledge the vision and persistence involved in, both the original book's conception and creation and the subsequent revisions undertaken for this second edition.

Firstly, that such a songbook is needed is a matter of much credit to both Edisher, and his friend, close collaborator and colleague, Joseph Jordania, as well as various other Georgian musicologists who have visited the UK over the years since CPR first hosted Georgian singing workshops in Wales in 1994. Twenty years ago it would have seemed unimaginable that a book containing nothing but songs, from a country that most people in the UK would have found hard to locate on the world map, should be not only viable, but awaited with impatience. Edisher Garakanidze, who first mooted the idea to CPR in 1996, possessed that imagination, realizing that the growing interest in Georgian singing by people outside Georgia would soon demand such a text. As it happened, CPR's new publishing wing, *Black Mountain Press*, seemed to be an ideal vehicle for Edisher's idea and so Richard Gough, Artistic Director of CPR, received his proposal positively and supportively. As Voice Director of CPR, agreeing to be the main contact with Edisher for the project, I had no idea at that point how much my responsibility for the project would grow within two years.

Despite regular communication between us over the next year, Edisher's own busy schedule prohibited much advance in the project, although by August 1997 he had formed a plan for the structure of the book, as well as a title, *99 Georgian Songs*, and had also coined one of its defining qualities as '*medicine for musical difficulties*'.

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By now Edisher had begun to learn English and was improving weekly as I could tell from his letters; by the time he visited us here in Aberystwyth in November 1997, to give a workshop and spend a few days with us working on the book, Edisher had made wonderful progress with the language, having applied himself to its learning with his characteristic energy and dedication and so we managed not only to discuss all aspects of the book, but even tell each other (very simple) jokes!

From early on, Edisher was most insistent that this should be a really useful workbook for singers. *'not a book for ethnomusicologists - it is not a technical or academic book - it is for singers in the West who want to learn these songs, but want to know about the meaning, where the songs come from, singing style and so on'*.

The early translations, which the CPR had commissioned, needed considerable revision in order to make the English version match the spirit of Edisher's vitality and the depth of his scholarship yet with the informality he desired; he responded to the copious notes, questions and suggestions I sent him with characteristic concern, imagination and energy.

The next edition of the *Giving Voice* Festival (1999) had the theme *'A Divinity of the Voice'*, and we were determined this time not only to bring Edisher but also his ensemble, *Mtiebi*. We felt that this would be a very special event, and were delighted when Edisher confirmed their availability. Despite some delays arising from Edisher's frequent travelling, teaching, researching, rehearsing two ensembles and running workshops, the book remained a vision and passion for Edisher; in fact, he was somewhat anxious about getting it completed. He said it was such a good idea that if we didn't do it soon, someone else would, and he felt he really wanted to move the book on as soon as he was able.

It was not to be. In September 1998, he and his family suffered a catastrophic car accident, which killed not only Edisher but also his teenage daughter Marika and wife Nino. Gigi, his son was seriously injured but miraculously survived.

On recovering from the initial shock of the terrible news, we at CPR proceeded with renewed determination to realize Edisher's vision for publication. Furthermore, whilst his son Gigi's recovery was slow it was assured and we felt that the publication of his father's book could at least eventually provide a small income from royalties that might contribute towards supporting his education.

Despite our resolve and commitment, reaching the moment of publication was not easy. For a while we were all so shocked by the loss of Edisher that we had no heart to begin and nor did it seem appropriate to ask any of his grief-stricken colleagues, family or friends for the practical help needed. In the event, all rallied to the cause, although despite much searching it

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was impossible to find Edisher's notes on the songs to which he had referred in our correspondence.

In April 1999, mainly through the determination of Frank Rozelaar-Green, who organised a much wider tour for them, *Mtiebi* did indeed visit the UK and we hosted them at *Giving Voice* to give a performance and workshop. It was an act of great courage to be there, without their dearest friend who had led them since he founded the choir in 1980, but with his son Gigi in their midst, taking his father's place, supported by his 'Mtiebi fathers'. Joseph Jordania, whom we had also invited to *Giving Voice*, members of *Mtiebi*, and other guests at *Giving Voice*, Helen Chadwick and Caroline Bithel, all worked with us at CPR to plan how to complete the book. We began to collect together the songs that had been taught in workshops in the UK, mainly by Edisher, Joseph, and Nato Zumbadze, (Edisher's colleague from the Conservatoire in Tbilisi, leader of the women's ensemble *Mzetamze*), as well as to speculate and consider which other songs Edisher would have planned to include, and to begin to collate them into some possible order.

Following those emotional but purposeful meetings at *Divinity of the Voice*, the book slowly but surely took shape. The conditions in Georgia at that time sometimes made the processing of the music files come to a standstill. Quite often low power or interrupted electrical supply meant that the work Edisher's nephew, Irakli Garakanidze had undertaken, to transfer all handwritten music onto computer files, had to be temporarily abandoned, and sending them to us electronically proved impossible. Eventually we had to give up on email and wait for a visit from Gigi who brought the music files to us on CD.

And so everything in this book travelled between Georgia, Australia (where Joseph Jordania now lived and worked) and the UK many times. Family, friends and colleagues all gave freely of their time and skills, managing to help when they could, and although this meant reaching publication was a slow process, the resulting book was prepared with care, love and respect. The first edition was published in April 2004. This was not, and still is not, a commercial project but a very personal one for each of us involved. People have been happy to work on it because they wanted to contribute in some way, out of respect for Edisher, and because they felt it was a small return for what he had given them through his teaching and friendship.

Having achieved a degree in ethnography, Edisher's son Gigi re-formed *Mtiebi* with members of Edisher's youth choir, *Amer-Imeri*, as well as some of the older members of the original choir, and put into effect Edisher's vision of a folk theatre with songs sung in the context of the scenarios in which they are used in Georgia. Gigi came to the UK several times, both with *Mtiebi* and alone to perform and lead workshops. Gigi was married to Magda, whom he had met when they were both members of *Amer-Imeri*, in May 2010 and their baby son Ilia was born on Christmas Day 2011. Tragically Gigi died very suddenly in June 2012, possibly

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as a result of long term health problems caused initially by the road accident that took the lives of the other members of his family. He was just 30 years old. A portion of the income from this second edition will go to Magda and Ilia.

This book includes Edisher's extensive introduction and the 99 songs we think he would have chosen (arranged in order of ease, each with an English translation of the text and contextual notes prepared by Joseph Jordania), plus a map of the regions from which the songs come, as well as photographs and some links to Georgian choirs in the west. It offers a complete guide to singing the wonderful folk harmonies of Georgia, whether you are a beginner, or a long-term enthusiast. This second edition has been fully revised and updated and benefits from the addition of 12 extra traditional songs, specially selected and arranged by Joseph Jordania. CPR is greatly indebted to Joseph for his tireless support: for his meticulous work on not only the original version, but on the corrections and revisions to the new edition, for his enthusiasm and very helpful suggestions. Without Joseph's generous involvement this project would have been impossible to accomplish.

In Edisher's description for one of the first workshops in Georgian song that he led for the *Giving Voice* project he wrote:

Everybody without exception has the ability to sing, just the same as to laugh, cry, and run. It is from God. Many people sing only when they are alone, never for or with other people (because of shyness). But it is not even half the joy the music brings. Singing together is completely different. Singing in common gives the occasion to take into consideration another person, to give him or her something, but at the same time also find pleasure oneself. And my and your pleasure together- is a happiness!

Speaking for myself, sharing in this happiness has become a vital ingredient in my life; I have learned so much from singing Georgian songs and from teaching them to others. I am a singer but not a trained musician; singing these songs has improved 'my ear', my sense of structure and rhythm, understanding of modes and intervals, my vocal tone. I have always been interested in the purpose of song, but Edisher's teaching made me want to explore this at a much deeper level, whilst watching him work made me value my own process as a teacher in a new way. More than this, he helped me value myself as a singer. He understood how much singing means to me at the deepest level, how much it is an expression of my being. The extraordinary fact is that he was able to do this for everyone he worked with. If we ask how exactly he did this for each of us, it would be difficult to describe. It would sound so simple: he listened, he paid attention, he was patient, he repeated what was necessary and beamed when we got it right, he gave us the sense of sharing the song, of ownership through singing, and all of this with extreme generosity and good humour, with passion, and such great heart. Edisher once talked about participants in a workshop taking a '*step towards working at internal obstacles and complexes and one step to an internal freedom*'.

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Maybe this is another clue to why Edisher was so loved and revered as a teacher and friend, even by those who met him once or only very briefly: his urge to help us be free from the isolation to which we might be condemned through lack of confidence or skill, and his desire for us to experience the joy of singing the wonderful traditional songs of the world, created over centuries to be sung 'in common'. I think he truly understood the psychological importance of the voice, and shared Alfred Wolfsohn's philosophy (1896-1962) that 'the voice is the muscle of the soul'.

Whatever else we know about Edisher, we can say with confidence that he left an extraordinary legacy. His love of Georgia and her traditional folk songs has touched an ever-increasing number of people here in Britain, spreading outward from Wales and his first visit to CPR in Cardiff in 1994. The first edition of the book sold to individuals and choir leaders all around the world. All of us, who were inspired by his gifted teaching and experienced his dedication to the songs he collected and shared, are blessed to have shared in this legacy. The publication of Edisher's vision: 'a really useful work-book for singers', has allowed many others to experience the pleasure of singing what he declared, (with a pride reserved only for his folk culture), 'the best folk harmonies in the world'.

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