

**23rd Annual (2011) Koizumi Fumio Prize**

**PRIZE LECTURE (FULL TEXT)**

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**The Mona Lisa of oral tradition**

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Dear members of the Fumio Koizumi Trust and the Koizumi committee!

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen!

I hope my age gives me the right to start with some memories.

This is the third time I have received international recognition from Japan, each at intervals of about 20 years.

The first recognition came in a review by Minoru Morita, was entitled “Izaly Zemtsovsky as a Musical Folklorist”, and was published by the 1968 Proceedings of the Slavic Studies Society of Tokyo University. This came as a complete surprise to me. At that time Morita-san couldn’t have imagined that he was writing about someone his own age: I already was the author of five books.

The second time I was asked – by phone! – to listen to a Japanese song “*oiwake*”, and to identify different songs that would be ethnically parallel to it, and musicians who could perform those songs at a festival and conference in 1990. This was done by the initiative of the dear and unforgettable Professor Tanimoto Kazuyuki. As a result, my wife— the ethnomusicologist Alma Kunanbaeva— and folk musicians of different Eurasian traditions from the former Soviet Union were kindly invited to Esashi.

However, the highest honor from the Fumio Koizumi Trust has come to me just now— another 20 years later.

I perceive in this honor not only a recognition of my modest merit, but also a fundamental quality of the modern Japanese perspective on the music of the world. This point of view closely resembles my principles of research and, I hope, also the work of two outstanding students of mine, Yuri Sheikin and Joseph Jordania, who were previously honored with the Koizumi Prize. I have in mind, in particular, the Japanese ability not only to enjoy the unique, but also to seek and find what is shared by apparently unrelated phenomena.

Cultures can be both closed and open to one another. Stated briefly, I suggest calling this the "*oiwake* phenomenon". As we are all aware, the musical parallels to *oiwake* are known along the vast expanse of the Great Silk Road. With Alma Kunanbaeva I wrote a large article in Russian on this subject — it recently was published in St. Petersburg with the title "*Homo Lyricus, or Lyrical Song in the Ethnomusicological Stratigraphy of "Folk Culture"*". The term "stratigraphy" refers to the arrangement of musical layers. Let me clarify my conception.

Ethnomusicologists in the last half-century have worked primarily to prove both the equal worth and self-worth of all the music of the world, and the uniqueness of each musical tradition. This approach is important and productive, but — it seems to me — insufficient. Comparative ethnomusicological studies have practically disappeared. The scope of traditional research topics has become smaller. The ethnomusicological discipline is increasingly focused on what *divides* us. But we can't be satisfied with such a focus. Music does not just divide people — music also connects and unites all people.

More and more rarely we think about this — as a result there is a growing skepticism today about the search for musical universals.

I admit that musical *universals* in the strict sense of the word do not exist. Yet I am absolutely convinced that there is something profound and important that unites all the music cultures of the world.

Ethnomusicologists cannot stop thinking about what is common to all humankind— about music as a unique art that involves realizing the human potential for both perceiving things *aurally* and expressing things *orally* — about *Homo musicus* — regardless of location or language. I am currently developing this thesis. International recognition from Japan, which I consider a

methodologically independent country — the country of the “*oiwake* phenomenon” — inspires me to continue working on this topic and in this direction.

As a matter of fact, all of my research has been focused on discovering an answer to the nature of this mysterious *deep of the deep*. This also was true when I was studying the role of music in ethnogenesis, the phenomenon of the lyrical song, the methodology of ethnomusicology, the theory of musical intonation [Russian *intonatsia*] and genre, and what I call the "historical morphology" of the song or the folklore sources of compositional creativity. My concept incorporates not only the music of different continents and eras, but also the musical art of all types and genres, including those which are not considered to be music in a given culture (such as, for example, many genres of ritual and children's folklore, epics, and religious liturgy).

All of my research activity, which already extends over 56 years (if my first folklore expedition in 1956 is considered as a beginning), can be combined into three broad areas:

Folklore and the composer: not only in the traditional aspect of the musicological study of folklore origins and sources in the art of composition, but also by taking a more innovative approach— the study of how, in their works— in the very music, not in theory— composers “open” folklore and its laws, to hitherto unknown knowledge;

Russian folklore: (ritual, lyric and epic) (a) in its unique system of genres and (b) in its various Eurasian connections and relations. I have proposed a new scholarly discipline, which I called *ethnogeomusicology*, as well as new research approaches, in particular the *historical morphology of the folk song*. This is the title of a series begun in 1987 with a volume called "Following the Spring Song from Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto", and before that with a monograph on the Russian “prolonged” song in 1967; and finally;

The History, Theory and Methodology of Ethnomusicology: In this regard I not only endeavor to offer something of my own, but also to bring back into the academic community something which has been unjustly forgotten from the legacy of Russian thought about the music of the oral tradition. Since the 1960's I've been concerned with fundamental questions of scholarly research, which are designed to lead to the discovery of *nature*, that is, the core, or the very essence of the music of the oral tradition. This interest intensified when I started investigating the question of “music and ethnogenesis”, that is, the role and place of the music of the oral tradition in the study

of the *ethnic history* of different peoples— right up to the musical basis of the modern ethnic map of Eurasia. In regard to the role of the music of the oral tradition in the history of music, I transferred traditional analytical focus from the usual history of music to music as history— music as an historical document.

These three major research areas involve three basic theses, three creeds— the three fundamental maxims of Russian scholarship— as I understand them.

The first belongs to Vladimir Odoyevsky: “Translate the feeling of an ethnicity into technical language” — that is, base your rationale for musicological analysis on what forms our ethnic sense and is recognizable by ear instantly, like a mother’s voice.

The second is based on a paraphrase of Goethe and formulated by the ethnographer Lev Sternberg: “Who knows one people knows none”. Hence the urgent need for comparative (and especially comparative typological) research.

The third was also taken by me from the covenants of Sternberg: “All humanity is one”. That implies that we are justified in discerning global features that are common to all humanity.

It is important to realize that all these fundamental assertions and approaches can be demonstrated with any source material— not just of one ethnicity or genre, but also of any volume or size, from a typical genre form to a single melody. Oral tradition cannot exist without such forms: typology is the cornerstone of oral tradition. I confess that I have always had a special analytical interest and have sought a special analytical challenge in single melodies. This is exactly what an ethnomusicologist does! An ethnomusicologist is capable of taking an individual melody and asking in what contexts and perspectives (always in the plural) it can and should be studied.

Admittedly, we do not know and cannot know the meaning of the melody alone, taken out of context, so to speak in a vacuum. A melody always exists in a particular context— including the context of perception— in conditions created either by **its** tradition, or by **our** tradition.

Our context is easier for us to recognize, although we often don’t recognize its influence on our perception of a folk melody. But for a traditional context we are required to attempt a

reconstruction. This is the main problem and the main goal of ethnomusicology, as I understand it.

However, there is a third context in modern ethnomusicology. This context results from so-called participatory observance. According to the American ethnomusicologist Timothy Rice, when a researcher feels himself or herself to be somewhat outside and somewhat inside the tradition—having the perception of “neither precisely that of an outsider nor that of an insider”...

*Listen to the recording of the Kazakh lyrical song “Balkadisha” (the version of the outstanding traditional poet-composer-singer Aqan seri (1843-1913) with the dombra accompaniment) at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?hl=en&v=nZldlflhiok>*

**БАЛҚАДИША**

Жай, сабырлы және мұңды  
Спокойно, с мягкой грустью ♩=152

Де-ге-син Бал-қа-ди-ша,  
Ә-ке-ңе өл(е) өл-ген-ше

Бал-қа-ди-ша, кү-йе-уің сек-сен бес-те,  
қа-рыз-дар-сын, беріп-ті те-ңің тау-ып,

шір-кін-ау, шал Қа-ди-ша,  
шір-кін-ау, бар

а- а- ай! (домбыра)

(1) Musically speaking, what makes us assume implicitly that this is a typical Kazakh song?

(2) *Is this song really exclusively and only Kazakh? What indicates whether its structure is a good representation of a typical Kazakh song or is unique, and goes beyond traditional Kazakh music?*

(3) *What are the universal common factors in it? Which are obvious, and which are not fully obvious, but could be illuminated by a specific analysis?*

It is impossible to answer these questions and give the necessary analysis in the format of a short speech. Of course, we could say much about this melody from all three viewpoints, especially if we consistently expand the “circles” of its comparative study, and yet, admittedly, we cannot ever be completely certain about what distinguishes it. Why is this so? I think this does not imply a lack of analytical skill, but something more fundamental. I am convinced that no matter what kind of analysis and no matter how carefully it is done, there always is a certain sense of mystery, a certain *unsolveability* to a true work of art. And the reason is not only that art in general and music in particular does not lend itself to being retold in ordinary language. The reason is much deeper. I will say this: music, though it isn’t a language in the usual sense of the word, has a linguistic quality and, as such, it has the quality of having a targeted recipient. The secret lies in the fact that every true work of art has not just one, but several targeted recipients (not always consciously addressed), and each recipient, whether real and evident, or latent and undetected, has his or her own hearing capacity and hearing requirements...

*From this I form my concluding hypothesis:* we might come somewhat closer to unraveling this mystery if we presume that music has a minimum of four target recipients. Music is targeted simultaneously at (1) the present, (2) the future, (3) the past and (4) eternity.

Art is addressed not only to the immediate recipient—that is, the audience, society, even the artist, or performers—willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, but also to its future existence. Beyond this, as the poet Joseph Brodsky recognizes, “you have the audience not only in the present or in the future, but also in the past”. Stated otherwise, art does not work—this is the strength of art’s tradition (especially in the music of the oral tradition). But even this is not enough — the target or recipient of music is as much physical as metaphysical.

Truly great art is never limited, so to speak, only by what is human—inherently it is addressed to the entire world, to the whole cultural universe — to what I metaphorically call heaven, or the realm of songs, melodies and musical ideas— which I name the “melosphere” (from the Greek *melos* plus *sphere*). As the French linguist Gustave Guillaume argued, “the sources of human language do not come from a small *Human-versus-Human* opposition; they come from a great *Human-versus-Universe* opposition”. I would say that this is where we find art’s greatest, and most mysterious, most ineffable target recipient — a target recipient so lofty that it *lifts us up*, extends and expands our various selves — and by so lifting us, the invisible but very real “melospheric” target recipient brings us into a state of innermost “*rightness*” .

It is only because of ethnomusicology that we can recognize the analytical mystery of the universe as the fourth target recipient. The recognition of this mystery in no way weakens the discipline of ethnomusicology; this is the reason why ethnomusicology is such an extremely fascinating discipline with an immense breadth of horizons.

I dare to hope that my proposed approach is not just another perspective on the music of the oral tradition, but a fundamentally new paradigm of scholarly thinking. New research problems are being prioritized by using this paradigm, a new set of analytical tools is being proposed, and thus we can achieve a deeper and, I would say metaphorically, more *three-dimensional* understanding of the music in the oral tradition.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Izaly Zemtsovsky

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