

Playing Multi-Pipe Whistles of Northeastern Europe: Phenomenon of Collective Musical Performance

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Abstract: Comparative analysis of both the construction and ways of performing of Lithuanian, Komi and Russian multi-pipe whistles reveals not only the differences existing between them but their similarities as well. The most important principle unifying these instruments is that the unattached pipes are used exclusively in sets and played only collectively. The number of both the pipes and the performers is alike. The distribution of Lithuanian set with respect to performing polyphonic *sutartinės* may be related to dividing the instruments into the so-called “pairs” by the Komis and Russians.

Keywords: folk music, multi-pipe whistles, musical performance

Very widely-known panpipes feature their distinctions both in their construction (whether or not attached to each other) and how they are played (blown either singly solo or collectively). The most widespread panpipes were those containing several or more than ten pipes fastened together. They were played by an individual performer, who played a monophonic tune (occasionally in parallel thirds). The *syrinx* of the Greeks and the Romans, the *nai* of Romanians, the *p'ai hsiao* of the Chinese and the Japanese serve as good examples of this. They were also played by the players of other nations in Europe and Asia, as well as by the natives in South America and the Melanesia Archipelagos, etc. Polyphonic music was played on the same pipes, which were fastened together and blown at the same time by two or more players in Latin America, the southern part of Africa as well as in some islands of Polynesia and Melanesia, and also in Georgia, Europe. Centres of collective polyphonic music, which is performed on similar instruments, are also known in Northeastern Europe. The pipes, however, are unattached there. As we aim to emphasize the differences in the construction of the combined panpipes and the instruments containing unattached pipes we call the latter multi-pipe whistles.

The habitats featuring collective polyphonic music-making done by means of unattached multi-pipe whistles are scattered along the fringes of Northeastern Europe: in the western part they are situated in northeastern Lithuania (the *skudučiai*), in the eastern part – in the southwest and the south of the Republic of

Komi (the *kuima chipsan*) as well as in the Autonomous (formerly National) district of the Komis of Perm (Russian Federation) (the *pöliannéz*), and in the southern part – in the regions of southwestern Russia: in Briansk (the *kuvikly*), in Kaluga (the *vikushki*) and in Kursk (the *kugikly*) (Figure 1).

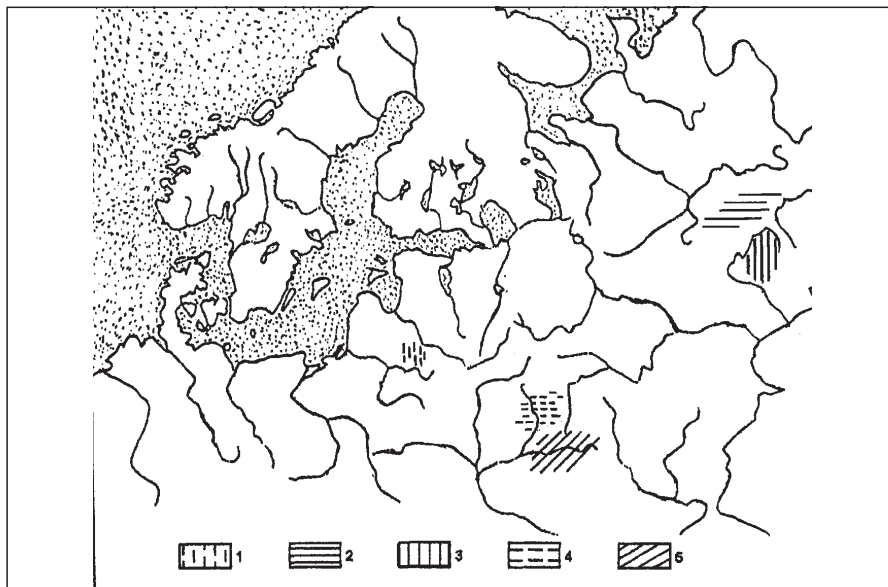


Figure 1: Distribution of multi-pipe whistles in Northeastern Europe: 1. *skudučiai* of northeastern Highlanders of Lithuania, 2. *kuima chipsan* of the Komi-Zyrians of the Republic of Komi, 3. *pöliannéz* of the Komis of Perm, 4. *kuvikly* of the Russians in Briansk and *vikushki* in Kaluga districts, 5. *kugikly* of the Russians in Kursk district

Collective instruments of Lithuanians, Russians and the Komis are used exclusively in sets. Five to eight pipes are most frequently included in the Lithuanian *skudučiai* set (Sabaliauskas 1911: 12), and four to six in the set of the Komis (Sidorov 1951: 91–92) as well as four to eleven pipes in the one of the Russians (Kulakovskii 1965: 57–67, Kvitka 1986, Rudneva 1975: 139–162).

The set as a single one was used by Lithuanians, whereas the Komis and Russians¹ grouped their pipes into the so-called “pairs” (Russ. *para-pary*, Kom. *goz*). It is interesting to note that the name “pair” did not necessarily mean that only two pipes are contained. Very often the “pair” of the Russians in the

¹ Both in Komi and Russia multi-pipe whistles made of umbellate plants were blown merely by women. In the beginning of the 20th century in Lithuania the *skudučiai* made of wood were most frequently played by men (Sabaliauskas 1904). Though there is a mention about a mixed composition of performers, too (Žilėvičius 1991: 487–493). Accordingly, to the available data from different sources pipes made of umbellate plants were blown particularly by women (Petrauskas 1895, etc.).

provinces of Briansk and Kaluga as well as that of the Komis consisted not only of two pipes but also of three, and the basic “pair” in the province of Kursk embraced even five (at times – six) tubes. Both Russian and Komi women never play singly, i.e. on pipes forming only one “pair”. Two or three “pairs” in a set as the least composition of the instruments is featured by their music making. Most frequently the pipes from two or three sets were played by three to six or more performers (*Figures 2, 3*), who divided themselves into two or, at times, into three groups dependent on the number of parts performed. A set of the *skudučiai* was usually played by two to six Lithuanians. The bulk of the repertoire was performed by playing on one or two pipes (*Figure 4*). Besides, as the Lithuanians performed polyphonic songs *sutartinės*, two or three, or two and three pipes were most frequently used by each in a couple. Such distribution in a set may possibly be linked with the division of the instruments into the aforementioned “pairs” of the Komis and Russians (Žarskienė 1993: 12).

There are two ways of playing multi-pipe whistles. The first is when pipes are blown merely by moving the head and touching either of the pipes with the lips, without moving the hands. The second is when pipes are applied to either corner of the mouth through sudden and exact movements of a hand or hands, with no movements of the head. The first way of performing, i.e. playing by shivering, twitching, shaking the head was common among Russian womenfolk in Briansk province. This can be testified not only by the facts from written sources but also the names of the “pairs” of the *kuvikly*: the Russian *spere-dergavannye* ‘twitching’ (the village of Dorozheva), the Russian *triasukhi*



Figure 2: Permian Komi women playing multi-pipe whistles pöliannéz (Chistalev 1984: 46)



Figure 3: *Kugikly* players from Chernyi Olekh village, Sudzha district, Kursk province (Russia) (Rudneva 1975: 32–33)



Figure 4: The *skudučiai* players from Jasiškės village, Nemunėlio Radviliškis rural district, Biržai district. Photo: 1913 (Paliulis 1959: 48–49)

‘shaking’, ‘shivering’ (the village of Domashevo) confirm this (Kulakovskii 1965: 61, 65). According to Olga Velichkina, the *kugikly* scholar, the first way of performing was used by Russian women in the province of Kursk, nevertheless, the mixed way of performing; i. e. with the movements both of the head and hands was also possible, as the scholar has it (Velichkina 1997). According to the other available data there were no movements of the head in the playing of women in Kursk, only the pipes used to be moved (Rudneva 1975: 140). The second way of performing was used by Komi women as well (Chistalev 1984: 55). There is a shortage of data apart from one description indicating that par-

ticularly this way of performing was practised by Lithuanians (Paliulis 1988). The second way of performing was also common among the other nations of Europe: Georgians, Armenians, Huzuls (Vertkov, Blagodatov & Iazovickaia 1975: 48, 117, 124). That the first way of performing might be older, as it is supposed, could be testified by the afore mentioned names of the “pairs” in Briansk, from which it can be guessed that the parts of separate “pairs” were performed with somewhat different movements of the head, and these movements were to be the ones by which a different character of the music played was predetermined. The first way of performing is used by the panpipe players of the tribes of the ‘Are’ Are and Kuna Indians in Latin America (Zemp).

Lithuanians and Russian women in Kursk whistled merely one pipe at a time. Komi women and Russian women in Briansk blew not only into one but also into two or even three pipes at the same time (Chistalev 1984: 55). In the province of Briansk this way of performing is called “u vir” (Kulakovskii 1965: 66, Velichkina 1998). An analogous way of performing is also known in Georgia (Beliaev 1963: 271–272). As to the Komi ethnomusicologist Prometei Chistalev, the instance of the sounding of the intervals of parallel thirds at the time of blowing two pipes by one performer is to be linked to the tradition of polyphony in folk songs of the Komis (Chistalev 1984: 55). The use of this way of performing in Georgia and in the Briansk province in Russia might also have been predetermined by traditional polyphony.

The Komi and Russian women practised diverse techniques of performing. Permian Komi women produced overtones as they blew hard while playing the *pöliannéz* consisting of comparatively long tubes (Chistalev 1984: 47). This technique was used both in the province of Briansk (Russia) and in Georgia. Otherwise, Komi-Zyrian women, Russian women and Lithuanians did not practise blowing hard in their playing. The overtones produced by means of hard blowing were considered a disadvantage of the playing. These strong breaths might be a phenomenon of later origin and they might occur on purpose to expand both the scale of sounds and the capacities of the instrument itself. In Komi blowing on pipes was made by using peculiar “strokes”: the joining of notes, the “pushing” of a note and an extremely quick slide of notes (*glissando*) exposing chordal consonances (Belitser 1958: 360). A peculiar terminology was used to characterize the techniques of playing. The technique of playing of the performers in Kursk (Russia) was extremely complex: one note was to be short while the other was to be drawn and the third one was to be emphasized. The player who was not able to adjust herself to all requirements of playing was usually told – “you can’t adjust yourself to us” (Russ. *neladish*’). This term used by women in Kursk (Russ. *ladit*’, *slazhivat*’, *podlazhivat*’ ‘to adjust to sth.’) was

up to the standards concerning the production of a right sound, pitch and rhythm (Starostina 1989). Women in Kursk used the technique of producing two notes in one breath. It was called by onomatopoeic words *khudukat'* or *fudukat'* from the syllables *khu-du*, *fu-du* (Velichkina 1993).

Russian women, like Komi-Zyrian women, produced particular vocal sounds as they blew their pipes. In the Kursk province merely the player who played on the “pair” consisting of five pipes produced such vocal sounds. Such performing was regarded as onomatopoeic: Russ. *fifkan'e* – from the exclamatory syllables *fif-kaf*, Russ. *fiukan'e* – from *fiuf*, Russ. *khiukan'e* – from *khiu*, and the like.² The players who were able to produce these exclamatory syllables were less in number in comparison with those who played accompanying parts. The ones producing vocal sounds must have a high-pitched voice, and they must be able to adjust it to the pipe: “When the *fif-kaf* are produced by your voice the sound must be equal to the sound produced on the high-pitched pipe as well as the low-pitched pipe” – this was an explanation of one of the *kugikly* players from Kursk. The players who have great experience in producing the vocal sounds make them more often and more exactly in comparison with those who have less experience. The making of the vocal sounds of the previous ones is more original from the point of view of the rhythm, and it is constantly varied (Figure 5). The players in Briansk uttered the exclamations *ga, a, gau* at the time of their playing. This way of performing was also given onomatopoeic names, such as the Russian *spaukan'e* (village of Dorozheva) and *papkan'e* (village of Domashevo) (Kulakovskii 1965: 61–62, 65). While playing their *kuima chipsan* Komi-Zyrian women produced the syllables *ufi-ufi* or *fiv-fiv*. As to P. Chistalev, an instance of blowing in accordance with the accompaniment of such vocal sounds is an extremely complex and rare in use (Chistalev 1984: 56). The analogous way of performing – the interchange of the instrumental sounds and the guttural voice is also known in Romania (Herdea 1988), northeastern Serbia (Dević 1984: 42–43) and in some of the nations of Central and Southeastern Africa.³

The aforementioned instance of the Komis could testify to the fact that in Komi this tradition was nearly extinct by the mid-twentieth century. Every part played on the Lithuanian *skudučiai* was named after particular syllables, for example *ti-ti-tiūt-ti-tiūt*; *tiūt-ti-ti-tiūt*; *ut, ut, un-tu-ti*, and the like (Figure 6). The assumption could be made that these syllables might be the remaining examples of vocal sounds once played on pipes and produced by a human voice simultaneously. That the syllables are of utmost importance could be testified by the fact that they served as a background not only for the names of separate parts played but also for the names of mu-

² According to Olga Velichkina the first exclamatory syllables are expressed by the exclamations, *khiu*, *fif*, *fef*, and the second ones – by *ka*, *kaf*, *faf* (Velichkina 1994).

³ Information of Pedro Espi-Sanchis from Republic of South Africa, 1992.

pitched ones to the vowels “u” and “a” (Kulakovskii 1965: 62). The linking between separate vowels and the pitch could be also observed in music making of the Lithuanians. In the region of Biržai and Vabalninkas most frequently the first and the second parts (played on pipes producing the highest pitch) are identified with syllables “ti-ti-tiū-ti-tiut” and “tiū-ti-ti-tiūt” respectively. Thus, the vowel “i” or the soft vowel “iu(iū)” are prevalent, whereas the part played on pipes producing the lowest pitch is identified with the vowel “ū”. These lowest voiced pipes in addition to the other names were also called “basses”. Similar regularities can be observed in vocal folk music of other European nations, as well. The connection between phonetics and melodic patterns could be observed in the *krimančuli* singing tradition of the nations in northern and eastern Caucasus, where the ornamentation of triads features the correspondence of every pitch to a certain vowel: “u” corresponds to the highest pitch, “a” – to the middle one and “o” – to the lowest one (Alekseev 1986: 59–60).

It is difficult to ascertain whether the aforementioned syllables used by Russian women in Briansk could imply the same as the “notation” of both Lithuanians and the Komis of Perm, or was it merely a vocal imitation of the playing of the instrument? The example in the Kursk province could serve as evidence of close interrelation of these two processes. In the absence of the *kugikly* its sounding used to be imitated through women voices. This performing was called *dadykan’e* in Russian, which originated from the syllables “da”, “dy”, “di”. The exclamatory syllables, such as “fyf”, “viv”, were also used for the imitation of diverse parts (Rudneva 1975: 287). In the absence of the *skudučiai* Lithuanians imitated the blowing on them through their voices, as well. Similar phenomena could be also observed in the musical folklore of different nations. In the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina) songs are sung that feature the second part executing the syllables “gan-gan” or “gn-gn” imitating the musical instrument named *guzla*. The syllables are pronounced instead of the lyrics. The songs are called “ganga” or “gangelitsa”, and the performing of them was very frequently accompanied by this instrument (Richtman 1970).

The repertoire played by Komi and Russian women most frequently consists of dance music compositions. They made foot stamping as they played, the other women also danced according to the melodies performed. The playing of the *kuvikly* by women in Briansk was accompanied by rhythmic clapping, stamping, whistling, the *ikha* yelling (Kulakovskii 1965: 60). Womenfolk in Kursk were not indifferent to the sounds produced by the *kugikly* as well – they joined the music by stamping feet at the same rhythm, and incorporating occasional insertions of their singing part (Agazhanov 1949: 8–10). Komi women lined up with one another and then went round dancing in a chain. By making stronger stamps with one foot they made constant rhythmic figures (Chistalev

1984: 57). Lithuanians very frequently play while standing or walking (Sabaliauskas 1904, Paliulis 1988). We have no available data testifying to the fact of the instance of dancing and playing the *skudučiai* at a time with respect to Lithuanians. Yet, one of the most frequent polyphonic songs *sutartinės*, which used to be blown, are four-somes, and they are the ones that are danced, too. The combination of the instrument, voice and movement attest that the music-making with multi-pipe whistles is a manifestation of archaic syncretic art.

Comparative analysis of both the construction and ways of performing of Lithuanian, Komi and Russian multi-pipe whistles reveals not only the differences existing between them but their similarities as well. The most important principle unifying these instruments is that the unattached pipes are used exclusively in sets and played only collectively. The number of both the pipes and the performers is alike. The distribution of Lithuanian set with respect to performing polyphonic songs *sutartinės* may be related to dividing the instruments into the so-called “pairs” by the Komis and Russians. The fact that the first way of performing by moving, twitching and twisting the head might be older than the second one is testified by the names of the “pairs” of the *kuvikly* of Briansk (Russia). A diverse character of the music played was predetermined by different ways of performing. Diverse techniques of performing were aimed at expanding both the possibilities of the means of expression of the instrument and even the scale of notes. As far as the syllabic-rhythmic “notation” of Lithuanians and the Komis of Perm and the imitation of the voice through the instrument by Russian women are concerned the connection between the melodic patterns and phonetics might be observed. The syllabic naming by Lithuanians as well as the naming of the music performed by the Komis of Perm and the exclamatory utterances of Russian and Komi-Zyrian women are linked to the imitation of the sound produced by the instrument and serve as evidence of a common background for music making with multi-pipe whistles with respect to the nations of Northeastern Europe. The exceptionality of collective polyphonic music – making as a separate phenomenon and its possible relictiveness might be testified by the sincretism of the performing manifesting itself in the joining of the instrumental, vocal and dance elements.

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