

The Power of Authorities, Interpretations, and Songs: The Discourse of Authenticity in the Latvian Folklore Revival

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This is a collaborative study on how, and by whom, the discourse of folklore authenticity was developed in Latvia in the 1970s–1980s and how it affected and still affects the Latvian folklore revival and post-revival practices. Influential positions and vital discussions have arisen in search of meaningful (authentic) folklore practices, such as honouring an unattainable ideal and practicing political resistance, creative ancientness, and spiritual empowerment.

▪ **Keywords:** folklore revivals, non-democratic states, authority, ancientness, creativity, contemporary spirituality

Prispevek predstavlja skupno študijo o tem, kako in kdo je v 70. in 80. letih 20. stoletja v Latviji razvil diskurz folklorne avtentičnosti ter kako je vplival in še vedno vpliva na latvijsko folklorno preporodno in popreporodno prakso. Pojavila so se vplivna stališča in plodne razprave v iskanju smiselnih (avtentičnih) folklornih praks, ki spoštujejo nedosegljiv ideal in prakticirajo politični upor, ustvarjajo starodavnosti in prinašajo duhovno opolnomočenje.

▪ **Ključne besede:** folklorni preporod, nedemokratske države, avtoriteta, starodavnost, ustvarjalnost, sodobna duhovnost



Introduction

Musicologist Allan Moore wrote that the notion of authenticity and its synonyms (real, genuine, true) is perhaps the most loaded of all the value words employed in music discourse (Moore, 2002: 209). This observation fully applies to the folklore and folk music revivals, where authenticity is a key concept both among scholars and folklore performers. In the Latvian ‘folklore movement’ (*folkloras kustība*, in this article the term is used alternatively to ‘folklore revival’¹), which began at the end of the 1970s, the notion of authenticity links to many discussions, evaluations, emotions, and disagreements. An important turn in folkloristics and ethnomusicology has been the refusal of the role of authenticators in favour of a more critical approach to the history, uses, and effects of this concept (Bendix, 1997; Bithell, Hill, 2014; Feinberg, 2018; Stavělová, Buckland, 2018).

Similarities can be seen in how the folklore revivals in different countries define authenticity. Still, there are also nuanced differences that point to the various historical, political, and social contexts where the revivals emerge: “To understand why authenticity matters and how it is lived out, we need a grasp of the social context in order to understand and articulate the complex relationships surrounding it” (Speers, 2017: 5). Authenticity researchers also pay attention to the different expectations on which the judgments of authenticity are made: “The performance of authenticity always requires a close conformity to the expectations set by the context in which it is situated” (Grazian, 2019: 192). The choice of valuable, protected, and cultivated folklore elements is often selective or even subjective. For instance, in Latvia, special attention has been paid to the authenticity of singing techniques and styles, and traditional vocal music and folksong texts have generally been prioritized in folklore documentation, research, and performance.

Hill and Bithell pointed out that the concept of authenticity is closely linked to legitimizing revivals and the issue of authority (Hill, Bithell, 2014: 19–24). In the case of Latvia, the legitimization of the folklore movement was doubly complicated because it meant not only the approval of a new aesthetic approach to folklore performances, but also the resistance to a non-democratic political regime that tried to restrict and control the movement. Latvian folklore revival became a part of a broader social movement,

¹ The commonly used Latvian term *folkloras kustība* (folklore movement) has been used publicly since 1981 and is still the primary notion to designate the folklore revival and post-revival community and process. The word “movement” points to the initial social-political aspirations of the Latvian folklore revival, especially when it became a part of the Baltic Singing Revolution, a broad social movement of 1986–1991 that led to the independence of the Baltic countries from the Soviet Union. There is an ongoing discussion on whether and when the “movement” phase ended and if gaining independence was its most vital purpose and culmination. The Latvian name for the post-revival phase is still under discussion. Meanwhile, we have decided to keep the initial “folklore movement” designation because it is an important identifier for the revival community.

the Baltic Singing Revolution (1986–1991), which aimed at the restoration of independence from the Soviet Union (Šmidchens, 2014), so in this case it is an issue not only about the folkloric but also the political authority.

The discussion on authenticity usually includes concerns about its threats. An important question posed by authenticity researchers is: “authentic in opposition to what?” (Davies, 1991: 24). A clear threat in the case of Latvia was the disruption of its cultural continuity by the Soviet occupation. Besides other consequences, it meant the process of Russification and the dominance of “funified” (Klotiņš, 1988) stylized folklore performances. Ethnomusicologist Martin Boiko defined the authenticity of the Latvian folklore revival, referring primarily to the musical style – as a strategic rejection of the elements of stylized Soviet folk music. He also drew attention to the fact that authenticity soon became an ideology that did not support individual creativity, and therefore some musicians distanced themselves from the “authentic” approach (Boiko, 2001). This article will expand the network of meanings and effects of the authenticity discourse by analyzing various sources.

The article aims to address questions posed in the current interdisciplinary studies of authenticity: under what conditions, by whom, and for whom is the concept of authenticity deployed, rejected, or debated and who profits from it; and how do notions of authenticity differ regarding objects, subjects, and collectives? (Claviez et al., 2020: xi). These questions suggest that a discourse of authenticity has actual authors, sources, and motives and that the meanings and attitudes related to authenticity can differ among various social groups. This collective study explores how the discourse of authenticity was created and used and how it has influenced the Latvian folklore revival and “post-revival” (as defined by Hill, Bithell, 2014: 28–30) practices. Various sources and methods have been used to fulfil the goal: institutional and private archival studies, analysis of media and social networks’ discourses, and autoethnography. The authors kept in mind that the folklore revival is not homogeneous, and the understandings of authenticity are diverse and changing.

For a long time, staging folklore and traditional music was not accompanied by a broader and public discussion on authenticity. With the emergence of the folklore revival, the discussion on authenticity flourished among professional folklorists and in public media (two chapters of the article will elaborate on this). A less visible and documented part is the revival community’s informal, oral, and unpublished discussions. Therefore, two somewhat marginalized areas of the folklore revival and post-revival will be examined. One is an autoethnographic study by Valdis Muktupāvels on how the revivalists of folk music instruments understood authenticity with limited historical sources and information available. The second is a case study of the contemporary post-revival discourse on a Facebook group related to the recently popular concept of ‘empowering songs.’



The history of staging traditional music in Latvia

The history of staged representation of Latvian folklore is closely linked to the first Latvian National Awakening of the second half of the 19th century (Plakans, 1971, 2011: 226; O'Connor, 2003: 46). The rootedness of folklore in the past and its oral transmission created the value of authenticity, antiquity, and originality both during the First Awakening and later, during the folklore revival in the 1980s. These terms have been used synonymously at various times in the practice of traditions or in the evaluation of the performances of traditional music (Bērziņš, 1924: 4; Ramans, 1978: 5). Still, mentioning these notions did not raise a broader discussion on authenticity until the end of the 1970s.

Starting from the late 19th century, traditional music gradually made its way from the village to the stage, becoming a key element in demonstrating past traditions. Staging traditions were intended to 1) preserve them as vanishing values, 2) introduce them to others, and 3) affirm performers' belonging and worldview.

The public representation of Latvian traditional music began with the 10th All-Russian Archaeological Congress, held in Riga on 1–15 August 1896. It included a large open-air ethnographic exhibition of Latvian culture and history in the centre of Riga (Plutte, 1896; Stinkule, 2016). A theatrical musical performance was staged during the exhibition, including scenes of housework, night-watch of horses, St. George's Day celebrations, shepherds' songs, weddings, and various folk games (Unknown, 1896). Andrejs Jurjāns, the greatest Latvian folk music expert of the time, made the musical arrangement and selection of folk songs. More than 100 singers took part in the performance. The participants of the performance were likely from Riga and Latvian provinces. They had different musical and traditional backgrounds, which were unified and adapted to the scenario under the guidance of a musical pedagogue. In this event, the emphasis was placed on creating national unity among Latvians and, through the cultural values on display, placing them alongside other colonially dominant cultures in the Baltic region of that time.

Staged traditional music performances became popular in the inter-war period – after World War I and the establishment of an independent state in 1918. Then the focus was on regional cultural peculiarities, emphasizing their antiquity and uniqueness. One of the regions that gained special attention was the Western part of Latvia called Kurzeme (Courland). In the 1920s and 1930s, folk musicians from Kurzeme often visited Riga, invited by folklorist Emilis Melngailis and linguist Ludis Bērziņš. They demonstrated folk traditions and music at universities, schools, and associations (Melngailis, 1924). The traditions of Kurzeme served as the basis for the first ethnographic films made in Latvia – *Latvian Wedding in Nīca* (Latviešu kāzas Nīcā, 1931) and *The Homeland is Calling, or Wedding in Alsunga* (Dzimtene sauc jeb Kāzas Alsungā, 1935). In both films, folklorist Kārlis Straubergs, who was also

the head of the newly established Archives of Latvian Folklore (1924), participated as a consultant and scriptwriter.

Soon after the annexation of Latvia by the Soviet Union in 1940, preparations began for the Decade of Art and Culture in Moscow, which was scheduled to take place in the autumn of 1941. Due to the war and the following occupation, the Decade of Latvian Culture and Art in Moscow was postponed to 1955 (Kalpiņš, 1957: 2). Among the participants were the so-called ethnographic ensembles of Nīca and Bārta villages and a group of folk singers from the kolkhoz named after Zhdanov in the Preiļi district. The groups prepared thematic theatrical performances *Evening at the Kolkhoz*, wedding customs, and the midsummer evening. The Decade encouraged the emergence of new ethnographic ensembles in other regions of Latvia.

The beginning of the folklore revival was marked by several events in 1978. One of them was an extended concert at the Dailes Theatre in Riga on 14 October 1978. The concert was intended to reflect on thirty years of expeditions organized by Latvian folklorists and featured ethnographic ensembles, instrumental bands, and individual singers. Earlier that year, Ģederts Ramans, Chairman of the Board of the Latvian Union of Soviet Composers, spoke out against the stylizations of folk music, calling for listening to folklore in its original forms (Ramans, 1978). The lengthy folklore concert in the capital Riga, several articles on folklore in the media, and other circumstances gave a strong impulse for the emergence of a distinctive community and style of folk music performances, which in the following years developed into a nationwide folklore revival.

Institutionalized folklore studies addressing the concept of authenticity: The case of 1978

If we consider the concert of 14 October 1978 as one of the significant events, but certainly not the only one (see Bendorfs, 2021: 219–222), of the early phase of the folklore revival, it is worth looking at how it fitted into the field of the organizers' aesthetic views and folklore research interests of the time. The concert was exceptionally well received both by the general audience and by folklore professionals, so it was repeated in the autumn of the same year, on the 25th of November. In the atmosphere of late socialism, years later described as “Brezhnev’s twilight” (Cherkasov, 2005; Tompson, 2014: 111), it most likely touched a longing for national independence, which was not yet loudly articulated in the public sphere at the time but slowly unleashed in the following years (see Grīnvalde, 2021: 48, 2022: 167–168). Folklore, myths, shared history, language, and vernacular symbolic codes are essential to the so-called ethnic model of nationalism (see Smith, 1996: 446–451). Thus, the many activities of the folklore revival with the embodied manifestations of folk culture strengthened Latvian national values during the last decade of the Soviet occupation.



The concert at the Dailes Theatre was organized by two institutions in cooperation. In terms of personnel, both represented the culturally educated and responsibly-minded segment of the population of occupied Latvia. The Folklore Sector of the Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences was a successor of the Archives of Latvian Folklore (1924) and the principal folklore research centre of the Latvian SSR. Already in the early years of Soviet occupation, as noticed by researchers of the disciplinary history of folkloristics, the agency of the Archives' employees had developed in the interaction between acceptance, resistance, and collaboration (Kēncis, 2019: 221–222). The other event organizer, the Literature Propaganda Department (established in 1968), was part of the apparatus of the Latvian Union of Soviet Writers, whose main tasks were to organize promotional events for literature (Eversone, 2016). Both institutions, following the principles of Soviet governance, were built on a unified model; the prototype was to be found in the colonial centre, Moscow, i.e. in the Russian establishments of science and culture. Albeit with some autonomy, institutions of such significance operated on a subordinate basis.

With the 1978 concert, the question of authenticity was first addressed within the Institute, and the workplace magazine *Vārds un Darbs* (Word and Work) became a platform for highlighting the problem. Published from 1965 to 1988, the issues of this small-circulation magazine contained both official information, articles saturated with Soviet ideology, and informal written communication, including humorous reflections and greetings on holidays, between the various departments of the Institute and their staff (Grīnvalde, 2021: 30–59). The concert coverage was given in *Vārds un Darbs* issue 3/4 (51/52), published at the end of 1978. However, the resonant ideas also appeared in several issues of 1979 and sporadically in later years. In the pages of the magazine, researchers such as Zaiga Sneibe, Vilis Bendorfs, Benedikta Mežale, Rita Drīzule, and, to a certain extent, Edīte Olupe discussed the issues of authenticity of folklore performance.

Already the section of papers that introduced the event marked a contrast between the conventional and largely inert view of folk traditions, present at the Institute for several decades, with a focus on textual studies (Bula, 2011: 20) rather than performance, and, in contrast to that, the fresh issues highlighted by Arnolds Klotiņš in his paper 'Actual Tasks of Folk Art Protection and Propaganda.' Elza Kokare, the long-term Head of the Folklore Sector, presented an ideologically well-tailored paper, 'Folklore in the Past and Today.' She reflected on the "contemporary functions" of folklore genres, including the educational and "mass organizing" role of folk songs and other oral forms. Klotiņš, in his turn, spoke about the importance of "authentic folklore ensembles", highlighting their ability to delve into the specificity of folklore and pointing out that these ensembles should preferably not be removed from their usual environment for stage performance (Sneibe, 1978: 22–23). Klotiņš's paper, which was summarized in the Institute's magazine, was later published as an

extended article in the press (Klotiņš, 1978); thus, his views were made accessible to the wider public.

The concert, as seen by then-young musicologist Zaiga Sneibe, was a milestone to take a step back and look critically at how much alienation from tradition has occurred over time. Putting the value of authenticity, i.e. unbroken tradition, at the forefront, she described the striking encounter with the three Dignāja singers as “full of pristine freshness and without stage acting. For most of the audience, this ensemble, which can be called a true ensemble of authentic folklore, was undoubtedly a revelation. The singing of these elderly rural women was a testimony to the great artistic impact of a well-preserved, distinctive regional tradition and a performance untouched by routine” (Sneibe, 1978: 24). Musicologist Vilis Bendorfs was very expressive about the general tendency to present music folklore in a stylistically processed and staged way, comparing it to “food heated up four times” (Bendorfs, 1978: 28). He also repeated the idea that stage folklore is the surest way to kill tradition (Bendorfs, 1979: 26).

Reflection on the 1978 concert shows that the Institute played an ambivalent role then. On the one hand, it still represented official Soviet scholarship and was subordinate to the colonial centre, Moscow. On the other hand, among the researchers at the Institute, there was a need to look for points of contact between the folklore revival and the established folklore researchers. Authenticity was one of the key concepts in the dialogue between the two parties.

Media discourse on authenticity in the rise of the Latvian folklore movement: 1978–1988

The authenticity of folklore in Latvia has been publicly and widely discussed since 1978. In extended articles published by the major newspapers (*Literatūra un Māksla, Padomju Jaunatne, Cīņa, Māksla, Karogs, Liesma, Dzimtenes Balss*), intellectuals – musicologists, folklorists, composers, poets, cultural journalists, as well as the functionaries of the Communist Party and pseudonymized authors, discussed the understandings of authenticity and the emerging folklore movement. Detailed articles, discussions, and reviews indicate the growing importance of folklore in society but also point to the aspect of control as these publications were teaching about acceptable and “right” ways of performing folklore and the duties of the performers. The newspapers were the public platform for the folklore revival, where both the messengers and the critics of the movement were voiced. The media were also used for developing terminology and definitions for the new cultural situation.

The most influential role in theorizing the movement was played by the musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš (1934). In 1968, he started doctoral studies at the Institute of Art History of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR in Moscow and, in 1975, defended



his doctoral thesis on the aesthetics of folklore usage by Latvian composers. Klotiņš had a vast horizon of knowledge and ideas, especially in the fields of aesthetics and sociology of music. In his visits to Moscow and Leningrad, he expanded his intellectual network and attended events. He had access to a broader range of academic literature, including the works of Western researchers. He was familiar with the ideas and activities of the Folklore Commission of the Union of Composers of the USSR and participated in the events organized by the USSR in collaboration with the UNESCO institutions such as CIOFF (the International Council of Organizations of Folklore Festivals and Folk Arts founded in 1970). Since 1971, Klotiņš has been a researcher at the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia (then the Art Sector of the A. Upīts' Institute of Language and Literature at the Latvian SSR Academy of Sciences).

When the Latvian folklore movement emerged, folklore revivals were already established in the neighbouring republics of Estonia, Lithuania, and Russia (Olson, 2004; Šmidchens, 2014). They impacted Klotiņš's conception through the circulation of ideas and practices. In our search for direct and provable connections and influences, Klotiņš emphasized the influence of Estonian folklore ensemble "Leegajus" and composer Veljo Tormis and mentioned the ethnomusicologists Eduard Alekseev (the then Chairman of the Folklore Commission of the Union of Soviet Composers) and Izalij Zemcovskij, as well as Dmitrij Pokrovskij and his at that time well-known ensemble. Though it is important to clarify that because the folklore revival in the Baltics had a political, nationalistic component next to the aesthetic aspirations to cherish and study the "authentic" forms of folklore, the history of Latvian folklore revival can't be equated with the conceptual model developed at the then political and intellectual centres in Russia. Still, the historical connections between the Baltic and Slavic folklore revivals and, more broadly, the international network of folklore revivals in and out of their political contexts is a field for further investigation.

During the formative years of the folklore movement (1978–1981), Klotiņš published several extensive newspaper articles (Klotiņš, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1982). He intended to theoretically position and legitimize the movement, polemicize with other publications, defend the movement from its critics, explain the specific features of folklore performances, and propose the terminology and definitions, including for 'authentic folklore'. In 1988, when Latvia first organized the international folklore festival "Baltica", he reappeared with an extended newspaper article (Klotiņš, 1988) where he called for the renewal of a broader discussion that was diminished during the previous years.

The background of the theory described by Klotiņš was the internationally used division of folklore festivals and performers into three types. He got familiar with this typology from an informational treatise on the objectives and approach of CIOFF, which he acquired on his visit to Russia sometime before October 1978. Klotiņš also referred to the 1978 decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the

Soviet Union that folklore propaganda should be expanded. Klotiņš presented a clear program at the Dailes Theatre's folklore concert on 14 October 1978 and in a following long article (Klotiņš, 1978). He criticized the third type of folklore stylizing groups, which were mostly folk-dance groups in Latvia. He described the roles and characteristics of the first (authentic groups) and the second type (ethnographic groups). Apart from these three types, popular music performers were also mentioned as acceptable appropriators of folklore heritage.

Klotiņš's definition of 'authentic folklore' included the following characteristics: it is spontaneous, orally inherited, unconsciously performed, unspecialized, the performers have not been trained professionally, and it is not separated from life, work, and customs ("unseparated art" Klotiņš, 1978), as well as rooted in agriculture and patriarchy and born of inner necessity, not for spectacle or amusement (1988). He suggested that the word 'authenticity' is used as rarely as possible and only with a precise meaning. Authenticity is interpreted as a kind of unattainable ideal with folklorists and musicologists as its gatekeepers, separating and protecting it from everything else: academic and popular music, specialization, professionalization, staging, theatricalization, reproduction, commercialization, entertainment, replication, and passive reception (1979). Even the rural music groups of the older generation, who have inherited the local folklore orally, were not considered truly authentic, with rare exceptions. They were characterized as "having the breath of authenticity", "rooted in authentic tradition" (Čaklā, 1981), or "relatively authentic" (Klotiņš, 1982).

During the first years of the folklore revival, the second type of folklore performers was called "contemporary ethnographic ensembles" (separated from "authentic groups" until 1981–1982), "reproducers of folklore heritage" (or simply "reproducers"), and "imitators". Their main characteristics were that they consciously learned folklore and imitated or cautiously arranged it as close as possible to the original. Their tasks were creating folklore integrity without differentiating genres, naturalness, the unmediated closeness of performers and audience, searching for folklore bearers in their surroundings, and learning from them (Klotiņš, 1981). Their performances were evaluated on the scale of "ethnographic correctness".

Klotiņš stressed that establishing groups of the second type was the most expected and needed activity. Because they learn folklore consciously, staged performances do not endanger them, so they could satisfy the growing demand for folklore performances and were promoted for the task of "the main keepers of folk-art memory [...] because, in the conditions of our republic, they could become the most suitable purifiers, animators and forwarders of folklore traditions" (1978). That way, Klotiņš allocated an important social function to these groups: to be promoters of social change, "enlivening folklore heritage for the audience [...] and awakening the audience to co-creation" (Klotiņš, 1981), "promoting spirituality and non-formalized, therefore deeper human relationships among ourselves" (1988). These ideas were unwelcome by the Soviet regime.



There is an essential dimension in the discourse of authenticity that has strongly influenced the history of the Latvian folklore movement: it is the role of functionaries of the communist party and the KGB. A more detailed analysis of this is out of the scope of this article and should be elaborated on in further publications (several publications that include information on controlling and limiting professional and amateur folklorists in the 1970s and 1980s are Latvija Šodien, 1982; Zālīte, 1998; Raipulis, 2006). Klotiņš remembered a saying of Latvia's Minister of Culture of that time (1962–1986), Vladimirs Kaupužs, a Soviet-trained musicologist himself: *“If we allow everything that is in folksongs to be sung, then we are doomed”* (Interview with Arnolds Klotiņš on 14 February 2022). Composer Imants Zemzaris has publicly formulated a similar observation: *“Among officials, there is a constant fear of folklore, say what you will, but this feeling does not let me go”* (Zemzaris, 1987). Professional and amateur folklorists experienced interrogations by the KGB, dismissals from work, suspensions of publications, and critical and sarcastic articles in the media. The folklore revival was criticized for *“sectarianism of apartment folklore”*, *“sickly archaic liberties”*, *“strange masquerade acts”*, *“various ‘fashionable’ meditations”* (Dambrāns, 1984), *“a metaphysical approach to the values of folklore and ethnography”* (Atvars, 1981), *“archaization of folklore”*, *“mechanical imitation of old customs”*, and *“idealization of the feudal and pre-feudal way of life”* (Atvars, 1983). The movement's concept of authenticity appeared to be a dangerous position threatening the sustainability of the Soviet system.

Besides the reviewed press discourse in 1978–1988 with a focus on Klotiņš's theoretical views, this study did not include other sources (event brochures, lectures, academic publications, methodical materials). By focusing on the emergent historical discourse analysis, we also left out the later retrospective publications by Klotiņš in academic journals (2002, 2008). Generally, press discussions are permeated by the idea that folklore performances must be scientifically well-founded and *“sealed”* by professionals, emphasizing the *“scientific informative function of ethnographic ensembles”* (Kokare, 1982). Several types of authorities appear in the media: art professionals and academics who were supportive or critical of the aesthetics of the new folklore performances, and party functionaries trying to control its social impact. Folklore performers were often amateurs, and their views were not so visible in the media. Their values were based on ethnic nationalism, patriotism, informal relationships, self-initiative, and a DIY approach. This group of people grew and began to play an increasingly decisive social role, creating a new way of interpreting folklore and a lifestyle alternative to Soviet norms. Besides the official publications, oral, unpublished discussions took and are still taking place among the movement's members. Therefore, the following chapters will analyze the interpretations of the authenticity by the folklore performers and their attitudes to this concept.

Authenticity as ancientness in the revival of musical instruments

This chapter is based on an autoethnographic study by Valdis Mukstupāvels. The validity of this method, as suggested by David Hayano (Hayano, 1979), rests on the in-depth association of the researcher with the studied group: the researcher has been an active member of the folklore revival movement since 1979, and participants of this movement have considered the researcher as one of them. Following Leon Anderson's idea, this autoethnographic text's objectivity is based on reflexivity by involving other sources and marking sociocultural context (Anderson, 2006).

As was presented before, the musical interests of the participants of the folklore revival were primarily connected with singing. However, since its beginnings, a certain interest was also directed at musical instruments. To characterize the initial period (1978–1981) of the revival of instrumental music traditions, three main interacting aspects that determined the course and peculiarities of this process are to be mentioned: the claim for authenticity, availability of information and materials, and personal experience and creativity.

The idea of authenticity in the field of instrumental music was not as clear, strict, and discussed as in vocal music, and it is reasonable to look for a set of alternative qualities which represented or explicated the idea better. Among these qualities, one could mention closeness to ethnographic samples and truthfulness, but a special role was attributed to ancientness.

It was informally agreed among participants of the folklore revival that the older or more ancient the tangible or intangible item is, the more valuable it appears to the user. Such a view was partly rooted in the romantic idea of the “golden age of independent Baltic tribes before the Teutonic conquest in the 13th century, followed by the seven centuries of slavery”; the genuine Latvian culture was thought to have been corrupted by the conquerors. The relative age of the items of traditional culture was evaluated following commonly accepted evolutionist ideas. As an example of such ideas, possibly having affected folklore revival practices, the article ‘Latvian Folk Music’, originally written in 1879 by composer and folk music researcher Andrejs Jurjāns and republished in 1980, could be mentioned. He considers three kinds of folksongs: the first – songs originating before the Teutonic onslaught (before 1200), they have a tonal range from a third to a sixth; the second – originating during serfdom (1200–1800), their tonal range is about an octave and they display “old church music scales”; the third – songs of the period of liberation from serfdom (after 1800), displaying harmony and containing leaps outlining a triad. In the same article, the periods of musical development are also described. Music of the first or undeveloped period consists of sound and noise; the instruments are only “noise instruments” (percussion) and the most primitive one-tone woodwinds. The first tonal scales consisting of three to four tones developed in the second period, and the instruments are woodwinds with two



to three finger holes. All other scales, including major and minor scales displaying harmony, as well as stringed instruments and “elaborate” woodwinds, developed in the third period (Jurjāns, 1980: 20–24). Furthermore, the idea of “genuine” or “local” versus “borrowed” or “migrated” instruments was circulated. Comparatively simpler instruments – clappers, rattles, drums with the body made of a trunk, carved *kokles* (a box zither of Baltic origin) with no more than 12 strings, wooden and clay pipes, ocarinas, reeds, horns, wooden trumpets – were considered as “genuine”, whereas more elaborate instruments – cylindrical drums, multi-string zithers, hammered dulcimers, mandolins, violins, harmonicas, clarinets, bagpipes, metal horns, and trumpets – were treated as “borrowed”.

The claim for authenticity in the initial period of folklore revival (up to 1981) seems to closer resemble an ideological hint than a demand, because any activity to include instruments was considered important or benefit-producing *per se*. Thus, members of the *Skandinieki* music group were, since its foundation in 1976, performing with a guitar and a set of modernized concert *kokles*; or musicians of the *Bizīteri* group since 1980 with a guitar, violin, and a modernized bass *birbynė* (herders’ clarinet of Lithuanian origin). Valdis Muktupāvels obtained a 17-stringed modernized *kokles* in 1978 and was playing the instrument with *Skandinieki* until the beginning of the 1980s, when finally traditional and more “ancient” 9–11-stringed instruments were made and played.

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, there was a dramatic lack of information about traditional instruments and instrumental music, let alone the possibility of purchasing these instruments. In the academic publications of traditional music, just a few dozen instrumental melodies could be found; moreover, the most important of them could only be found in major libraries or even in specialized collections.

Even more lacking was the availability of recordings of traditional music. Two vinyl records – *Latviešu folklorā. Alsunga* and *Lībiešu folklorā* – were published in 1981 with only some examples of violin and zither ensemble, or violin solo. A mini album of hammered dulcimer music *Latviešu tautas instrumentālā mūzika* was published in 1984, and the anthology *Latvijas PSR muzikālā folklorā* in 1986, containing very few instrumental examples, including the only one existing bagpipe music track (Muktupāvels, 2020: 16). Some enthusiasts were searching for instrumental music at the Archives of Latvian Folklore, discovering but a dozen *kokles*, four mouth-harp, and very few violin and harmonica recordings in the collection. Thus, the real activities to include instrumental music in the revival were sporadic and largely dependent on the musical experience and intuition of the participants.

The third aspect – personal experience and creativity – had varied expressions, and its real manifestations were as numerous as the membership in the folklore movement. People with previous rock band experience tried to establish a similar instrumental setting in a folklore ensemble – solo, rhythm, and bass parts, with a more or less elaborate percussion part. Thus, in the early *Iļģi* music group, the former member of a rock band

Juris Riekstiņš played a bass part resembling that of a bass guitar but on a traditional zither. The instrumentation in the *Bizīteri* music group was congruent with that in a rock band even more: solo – violin, rhythm – acoustic guitar, bass – bass *birbynē*, percussion – a tall rattle-stick. Music teachers familiar with Carl Orff’s music education system tried to apply similar principles to music-making in a folklore group: everybody should participate, even if it is a very simple musical role, easy-to-learn instruments such as recorders and percussion are welcome, intuitive musical interaction can replace score.

The importance of each of the three aspects can be exemplified by the first published traditional instrumental music recording *Senie balsi* (1982), by *Skandinieki*. The group was generally considered a flagship of the folklore movement in Latvia, and it also presumed high respect for the criteria of authenticity. The cover sleeve text author Arnolds Klotiņš wrote: “When reproducing folklore materials, the musical text (melody, harmony, form) is left intact. But in creating the ensemble (instrumentation, texture), *Skandinieki* have been guided by ethnographic samples or descriptions, they have followed the principles of folk improvisation” (Skandinieki, 1982). Such traditional instruments as hornpipes, duct flutes, monochord, harmonica, *kokles*, mouth harps, and bagpipes are presented on the disc. Though most of these instruments are traditionally played solo, or in a small ensemble if it is dance music, 5 of the 11 tracks feature ensembles of some melodic instruments accompanied by as many as 13 different clappers and rattles, which is far from being considered traditional.

The intent of the ensemble is clear – to present as many “ancient” instruments as possible, thus pretending to have revived a significant stratum of traditional culture. Also, the ancientness of the musical content is marked by the album’s title *Senie balsi*, meaning ‘the ancient melodies’. Thus, the ideological setting to demonstrate the “original” (meaning ‘non-Soviet’) culture has overshadowed the importance of authenticity. Guntis Šmidchens has made a similar conclusion about the *Skandinieki* folkloric activities in this period: “For them, the struggle for authentic folklore was part of a larger political battle for Latvia’s independence from Soviet control” (Šmidchens, 2014: 276–277).

In general, it can be concluded that at the initial stage of the folklore revival, the very activity of doing something and of exposing the most ancient strata of music culture has been more important than copying recent ethnographic examples. Ancientness was thus the dominant idea of the claim for authenticity.

Authenticity and the contemporary phenomenon of ‘empowering songs’

The current discussions on the authenticity of folklore practices in Latvia remain ongoing and comprise various perspectives on how to approach folklore sources and what can be considered authentic. One of the authenticity discourses besides those earlier described has a connection to contemporary spirituality. Looking for deeper (“esoteric”)



spiritual meanings and powers of folklore leads to redefining older repertoires and creating new customs (see Bowman, 2014). The spiritual interpretations of folklore are a significant source of authenticity for many folklore enthusiasts in contemporary Latvia. The endeavours to understand and interpret folklore's symbolic and spiritual meanings were important for the revivalists already in the 1980s but have gained more popularity in the 21st century. Contemporary spirituality is nowadays practiced in sauna or fire rituals, in assigning meanings and powers to ornaments or plants, and in other forms such as folksong meditation events. Revived and new meanings are often applied to the folksong texts, adding a new layer of interpretations to the folklore symbolism's previous academic or religious readings. Still, the folklore practices in the contemporary spiritual milieu of Latvia have been under-researched.

We took a closer look at a new phenomenon of 'empowering songs' (*spēka dziesmas*), which is grounded in the contemporary spirituality worldview and has become increasingly popular in the past decade. This term appears in some contexts of Latvian culture before the 2000s, referring to songs within a religious context or patriotic songs. It also appears in articles to which the participants of folklore revival have contributed. Sometimes, it seems to be used as a synonym for folksongs (Grudule, 1989; Stalts, Stalte, 1989). In other cases, 'empowering songs' are described as older folksongs "with more spiritual substance" (Krogzeme, 1996). While some references to the term can be found before the 2010s, those were exceptional cases, and the term was not yet widely used.

A significant event that raised the popularity of 'empowering songs' as a concept was the publication of a book and compact disc *Spēka dziesmas*, by the Latvian Folk Wisdom Association Latve in 2012. The book contains 27 songs, many of which are well-known folksongs, and there are also some authored songs in the aesthetics of Latvian folklore. The compiler Sarmīte Krišmane (Strautmane at that time), well known in the field of contemporary spiritual folklore practices, has published several books on similar topics and held seminars about the 'empowering songs'. Every song in the book is complemented by personal opinions and interpretations of its meanings and symbols called "code keys", by Krišmane as well as Ieva Ančevska and Ģirts Ančevskis.

This chapter is based on a qualitative study of a public Facebook group *Spēka dziesmas. Risinājumi* (Empowering Songs. Solutions), created on 18 November 2019 and containing more than 2000 members in August 2023. The group was created by music producer and singer Inese Muižniece with the permission of the book publishers. The group initially aimed to find and discuss the original sources of published melodies and song text combinations included in the *Spēka dziesmas* book, which does not contain such references (Muižniece, 2019a). It was stated that the group does not discuss the "private symbolism" (Hanegraaff, 1999) of songs proposed by the book compilers or users; however, it became a platform for a broader discussion on authenticity and freedom of improvisation in traditional music. Thereby, the New Age perspective of

the book is complemented by questions and interpretations of its perceivers, and it can be seen that some of the initial questions of the folklore movement are still significant.

Among the Latvian folklore performers, there is a wide and ongoing discussion of the “right” approach to folklore sources and how to practice folklore in the modern world. The Facebook group discussions contain references to previously formulated opinions, for instance, the contrasting definitions of Latvian folklore *versus* Soviet folklorism (Boiko, 2001; Muktpāvēls, 2011). A similar contrast is vivid in the discussions of ‘empowering songs’ – “authentic” is formulated as a synonym for something old (“the old folklore”, primal, ancient, original, unchanged), real, or even correct. In contrast, anything else is “newly created ‘esoteric’ post-folklore”, artificial, changed, and incorrect (Draguna, 2019; Muižniece, 2019b).

When identifying the border between authenticity and inauthenticity, improvisation can be considered as one idea that draws such a line. Still, there is also an argument justifying improvisation and authorship as a legal approach to folklore sources. As one of the most active posters in the group Valdis Jurkovskis writes, “Discussions about the right and wrong song texts are groundless if we remember how many hundreds of variations of one song have been written down” (Jurkovskis, 2019). Nevertheless, debate participants are encouraged to be careful with self-made changes, and it is stressed that folklore carries a code of the nation that can be lost when folksongs and other forms of folklore are modified (Muižniece, 2019b).

Sarmīte Krišmane explains the demand for ‘empowering songs’ in society: “I think that the soul and heart have memory and people want something real and substantial, and folksong is what awakens that thoroughness. Because the folksong has gone through all the circles of time, all the political and economic games, and has remained clear. And this clean part is inside each of us. The folk song just helps to keep it clearer” (Krišmane, 2015). The book’s songs have been complemented by a discussion about the meaning of symbols weaving through the song texts. However, it is mentioned that it is only their perspective, and any user can choose one of the many layers fitting their views best (Krišmane, 2012: 5). The fact that many of the song texts have been arranged by the main author Sarmīte Krišmane is not mentioned, and brings up the question of how much of the folklorized text combinations are recently made by particular authors, and what difference it makes to the song users. The presence of an author can be evaluated as unappealing: “I think I did not buy this book exactly because, when flipping through it, I encountered the ‘breaking off the branch’ and attached verses. And probably something else strange, not acceptable to me” (Lemhena, 2019). “Breaking off the branch” is a modified folksong line that was actively debated in the Facebook group, as well as a general poetic reference to the most popular discussion object, namely, the ethics of changing folksong texts (breaking branches when going through a silver birch forest). Known authorship can even evoke a feeling of one’s previous musical experience being deformed: “Now I am waiting with a shattered heart



how many more of the published songs will turn out as someone's innovation – and not the authentic, ancient folksongs" (Draguna, 2019).

As was visible in the previous quote of the book's author, spiritual interpretations are often present when there is an attempt to explain authenticity through the origins of a song. In these cases, particular terms like "national code" or "channelling" are mentioned that are used by healers and other spiritual practitioners. The impulse to such interpretations could come from the book itself as it can be categorized as a New Age publication with references to neo-shamanism: "In *dainas* [Latvian folksong texts], we speak in pictures, and it is the oldest, shamanic kind of perception of the world" (Krišmane, 2012: 6), and "throughout the text, one can find different terms of Eastern religions such as mantras, transcendental environment, reincarnation, etc., mentioned and explained" (Krišmane, 2012: 89). The continuous popularity of 'empowering songs' with over 10,000 copies of *Spēka dziesmas* sold and followed in 2014 by the second edition *Spēka dziesmas. Uguns* (Empowering Songs. Fire, same publisher) suggests that the book users and performers of 'empowering songs' are generally a much bigger network of people than the Facebook group discussing the sources of songs. It means that besides understanding authenticity as keeping the songs in their original form and knowing their sources, another way of authentic experience is to use folklore in a more generalized and free way, in search of ethnic spiritual identity and power.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the previous research on the history, contexts, and values of the Latvian folklore revival in line with the interdisciplinary authenticity studies and the comparative research of folklore and folk music revivals in different countries. Since the end of the 19th century, Latvian (music) folklorists introduced folklore to the public by organizing folk music concerts. Their knowledge and understanding of folk music and their aesthetic views shaped the tastes and perceptions of the public. Though, for a long time, the staged folk music performances were not accompanied by a broader discussion on authenticity, the notion was most likely treated as self-explanatory. A turning point was the late 1970s when the number of folklore groups grew rapidly, creating a folklore movement. The various backgrounds and approaches of the groups raised the need for a broader discussion on authenticity and folklore interpretations. The foundation of the discussion was laid during the initial stage of the movement (1978–1981), and it continued to develop from those years on. The article furthers the academic discussion on several issues concerning the meanings of authenticity.

One is the question of authority and legitimacy, namely, who had (and has nowadays) the "rights" to understand and interpret authenticity fully: academic experts, public intellectuals, artists, journalists, functionaries of the Communist Party (or contemporary

policymakers and bureaucrats), or folklore performers. Discussants legitimize or limit the meanings and uses of authenticity. Based on several case studies, this article takes a closer look at different meaning-makers and discussions: the circle of professional folklorists, the public media and a theoretically well-educated musicologist, an early revivalist of folk music instruments, and an online group discussing contemporary interpretations in the frame of new spirituality. The most active or educated discussants have remarkable influence over the folklore interpretations and practices; still, the understandings of folklore and authenticity are varied and do not result in homogenization. For instance, ethnographically-informed and spiritually-experienced performers both search for the origins and true meanings of folklore, even if their approaches contradict one another. The second issue is the dynamics between professional and amateur folklorists and between institutionalized and informal knowledge. During the early years of the folklore revival, public influence shifted from academic professionals to practicing amateurs. Participants of folklore revival started to fill the niche of activities previously associated with professional, institutionalized folklorists – organizing expeditions, creating private archives, and publicly performing folklore and radio and television programs and publications. An influential factor was also the KGB activities. During the 1970s, several leading folklorists were suspected and scrutinized, and were forced to restrain from participation in the growing folklore movement that was regarded with caution. Other reasons also led to a somewhat distanced relationship between the Archives of Latvian Folklore and the participants of the folklore movement.

Returning to the question “under what conditions, by whom, and for whom is the concept of authenticity deployed, rejected, or debated, and who profits from it,” a concise answer would be that the revival community and authenticity discussion in Latvia developed in a non-democratic context. The pursuit of authenticity turned out to be a position dangerous to the sustainability of the political system. Besides the political context, there were also aesthetical considerations that differed among the leading academics and musicians. One can conclude that the “community” of authenticity discourse was and is very diverse and leads to a rich network of the meanings and uses of the notion. Besides legitimizing and restricting the movement during its initial phase, the authenticity discourse also shows the folklore performers’ unceasing and vital search for meanings and revision of values and practices.

The article adds to the previously studied meanings of authenticity in the Latvian folklore revival. The questions discussed in contemporary folklore communities have much in common with the ideas that originated in the initial phase of the folklore movement. However, further research would be needed to see the gradual changes in the discourse. Besides the influential and restricting definition by musicologist Arnolds Klotiņš and other experts in the first decade of the movement (1978–1988), the understanding of authenticity as creative ancientness, as keeping informed about the sources or unlocking the spiritual code of the song texts can be distinguished. It can



be seen that the meanings of authenticity vary in different social networks and periods. However, the main difference might be between more disciplined and freer approaches to folklore. A shared interest in folklore unites diverse interpretations; still, the differences create smaller communities where authenticity can be, or not be, a specific concern.

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Moč avtoritet, interpretacij in pesmi: diskurz o avtentičnosti v latvijskem folklornem preporodu

Skupna študija raziskuje, kako in kdo je v letih 1978–1988 v sovjetski Latviji razvijal in uporabljal diskurz folklorne avtentičnosti ter kako je ta vplival in še vedno vpliva na prakse oživljanja latvijske folklore. Za temeljito raziskavo teme so bili uporabljeni različni viri in metode: študij institucionalnih in zasebnih arhivov, diskurzivna analiza medijev in družbenih omrežij ter avtoetnografija.

Odrskih predstavitev folklorne v Latviji do leta 1978 ni spremljala širša javna razprava o avtentičnosti. Z vznikom folklornega preporoda v poznih 70. letih prejšnjega stoletja so se razprave razmahnile med poklicnimi folkloristi in v javnih medijih. V dveh poglavjih članka je analiza teh razprav s poudarkom na notranjih in javnih stališčih poklicnih, institucionaliziranih folkloristov, zlasti muzikologa in teoretika latvijskega folklornega preporoda Arnolda Klotiņša. Manj viden in dokumentiran del so neformalne, ustne in neobjavljene razprave preporoditeljev. Da bi predstavili njihove glasove, sta v nadaljevanju preučeni dve področji folklornega preporoda in popreporoda: avtoetnografska študija Valdisa Muktupāvelsa o tem, kako so avtentičnost ob minimalni količini razpoložljivih zgodovinskih virov in informacij razumeli zgodnji preporoditelji ljudskih glasbil, ter aktualni diskurz v skupini na Facebooku, povezan z nedavno priljubljenim konceptom »pesmi za opolnomočenje« v kontekstu sodobne duhovnosti.

Članek pogloblja razpravo o več vprašanjih. Prvo je vprašanje avtoritete in legitimnosti, in sicer kdo je imel in ima »pravico« do razumevanja in razlage avtentičnosti: akademski strokovnjaki, vidni intelektualci, umetniki, novinarji, funkcionarji komunistične partije in drugih vladnih institucij ali izvajalci folklorne. Druga tema je dinamika med poklicnimi in amaterskimi folkloristi ter prenos javnega vpliva z akademskih strokovnjakov na prakticirajoče amaterje. Latvijski folklorni preporod se je v zadnjem desetletju Sovjetske zveze razvijal v nedemokratskih razmerah, prizadevanje za avtentičnost pa se je pokazalo kot stališče, nevarno za vzdržnost političnega sistema. Poleg nedosegljive ali »nevarne« avtentičnosti so se v iskanju smiselnih folklornih praks pojavila tudi druga vplivna stališča in pomembne razprave, npr. o ustvarjanju starodavnosti ali duhovnem opolnomočenju.