

THE MUSICAL CODE OF ROUND-NUMBER BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS FOR SENIORS IN LITHUANIA

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This article examines round-number birthday celebrations for people in Lithuania using video recordings uploaded to the internet over the past decade. The focus of attention is birthday celebrations for seniors (age fifty and over). The main goal is to use a structural and semantic approach in order to reveal the cultural and social meanings of celebrations through their musical code.

Keywords: *round-number birthdays, seniors, singing, music, Lithuania*

Članek na podlagi videoposnetkov, dostopnih na spletu v zadnjem desetletju, obravnava praznovanja okroglih rojstnodnevnih obletic v Litvi. V središču raziskave so praznovanja rojstnih dni ljudi, ki so stari petdeset let in več. Glavni cilj je v pesemskem repertoarju razkriti kulturne in družbene pomene praznovanj, pri čemer avtorica uporablja strukturni in semantični pristop.

Ključne besede: *okrogle rojstnodnevne obletnice, seniorji, petje, glasba, Litva*

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this article arose several years ago upon discovering (mainly on YouTube) hundreds of video recordings from Lithuania depicting the private birthday celebrations of older persons (fifty years and older, referred to here as seniors).¹ The birthdays² are filmed by amateurs or a hired professional; the recordings are uploaded online without any editing (three or more hours in length), slightly shortened, in several parts (when there was no way to upload longer videos), or they are specially edited, aiming to reflect the most important moments of the celebration, creating a unique visual story. Video recordings of birthdays for all age groups are uploaded, beginning with children's celebrations and ending with centenaries, yet the seniors' round-number birthdays (e.g., 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75, 80, 85, 90, and 95) have their own specific characteristics. This rich visual material, full of cultural information, could be analyzed in various aspects, yet in this study the collection of video recordings is used to reveal the cultural and social meaning of birthday celebrations for seniors through their musical code using a structural and semantic approach. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: to identify the main structural elements of celebrations and their music-structural rules. The filming of birthday parties (of both private and public figures of any age) is not unique to Lithuania; such recordings are made elsewhere

¹ The author's representative collection of Lithuanian birthday recordings covering the 2008–2019 period is stored in the video collection of the Folklore Archive of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore: LTRV 823–836, 855–856, 903–912, 1190–1220, 1224–1228.

² For my study, I selected video recordings where a particular person's birthday is celebrated, taking place in the company of his or her friends, family, and close community (e.g., their village).

as well, and the videos are also available online. For comparison, I have gathered a sizeable collection of recordings of Latvian, Estonian, Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, German, and American birthday celebrations.³ Looking over them, my first impression—that Lithuanian birthday celebrations for older persons stand out in specific ways—was only reinforced, although one can encounter both interesting distinctions and certain commonalities everywhere. It seems that in Lithuania recording these celebrations and posting them on a public platform is already a trend, a need, or practically a norm. This is especially important when examining the role of senior birthday celebrations as a means of strengthening the connections between different generations in the family.

It should be added that the material presented here is closely related to my own cultural experience. I myself have had the opportunity to participate in such celebrations from time to time since my childhood. Often the round-number birthdays of relatives or friends are traditionally celebrated, and anywhere from a dozen to several dozen people are invited. When people gather at such celebrations, they already know what will happen, how they will have to act, when and what to say, what to bring, and what to wear. Children, without even realizing it, remember everything that they observe and thus they absorb the customs, and continue the tradition when they celebrate their own round-number birthdays, changing it to match their personal experiences, tastes, and needs.

As a scholar of musical behavior, it is interesting for me that the music at senior birthday celebrations can always be easily guessed: everyone knows when and what to sing, when and what music should be played. It should be noted that senior round-number birthdays are not just parties for people to have a good time with others of their own age; these are events having a significant cultural weight. Older people tend to express their cultural experiences. Round-number birthdays in a person's life (beginning with their fiftieth birthday) are today considered important threshold events, leaving what once was and symbolically projecting the future, stepping into a new stage of life. Such celebrations are a rich, repetitive, ritualized complex of actions, in line with certain canons, and full of obvious or implied symbolic meanings. The video recordings that I encountered allowed me to feel the scale of such modern rituals: they are repeated over and over again. In addition, for nearly a decade, filmed material has been uploaded online in increasing amounts. This allows us to believe that these celebrations have indeed been considered as very important events, which is why they needed to be immortalized, something to be proud of; shared. Often, there is no real understanding of just how large an audience is reached by sharing these family celebrations publicly.

³ It is interesting to note that I found very few video recordings from the birthdays of Belarusians, Lithuania's closest neighbors. It looks like the need to share these birthday celebration moments publicly online is not currently felt in this country, and thus the rituals are not disturbed using new technologies.

BIRTHDAYS CELEBRATIONS IN THE SCHOLARLY SPOTLIGHT

Researchers that study modern birthday celebrations notice certain latent signs of ancient rites of passage (Goody 1961: 159–160; Bell 1997: 100; Soldatkin 2014) as well as features of a publicly-oriented festival, drawing in its participants, an extravagant spectacle, and a private one-off party (Manning 1992; Rappaport 1992; Stoeltje 1992; Bell 1997: 120–128; Kuutma 1998: 79–80).

Many scientists note the importance of birthday celebrations in creating and supporting social connections. According to Victoria Williams, “A birthday [...] marks the anniversary of a person’s birth and serves as an annual rite of passage that charts the progression of an individual through his or her years of life” (Williams 2016: 42). She continues, “It is traditional to give gifts to people celebrating their birthday as this is a way of reconfirming their place in society. Similarly, a shared birthday cake and birthday meal stress that a person having a birthday is accepted within society at large.”

Andrey Yevtushenko studied anniversaries as a sociocultural phenomenon using materials from Russian culture, and created an anniversary typology (Yevtushenko 2012: 8). He defines an anniversary in the following way: it is a form of cultural memory fixed by tradition; it symbolically encodes an image of the past and creates a certain cultural myth, representing the contents of cultural memory and transmitting its meanings (op. cit.: 9). He believes that an anniversary is also a phase of collective life, in which the individual (much more intensively than in everyday life, publicly, participating in collective ritual actions) displays their belonging to the group and solidarity with its values (op. cit.: 8). The author notes the importance of anniversaries as a ritual action symbolically connecting the past, present, and future, as a means of creating a special connection (originating from belonging to a group that is connected through their use of a certain cultural code) in the sociocultural space (op. cit.: 7–10).

Olga Kalacheva (2003) notes the importance of birthday celebrations in forming individual as well as collective identities. She studies Soviet-era and post-Soviet birthday celebrations in Russia, paying particular attention to the celebration’s actions and the differences in the assessment of its elements, depending on age group and gender.

Youth birthday celebrations, an important social ritual notable for its own norms, are studied by Egor Malov. His work is based on material collected in the city of Novosibirsk (Russia) in 2009–2010. The author elucidates the socially predictable, significant structural elements of birthday practices such as greeting the guests (and prior preparations), the feast (and preparations), the content of communication, music and games, toasts and well-wishing, the cutting of the cake ceremony, presenting gifts, and the end of the birthday party (Malov 2011: 66–67).

Finnish sociologist Anna-Maria Salmi delves deeper into the peculiarities of annual birthday celebrations in Russia based on the 1993 structured diaries of teachers from St Petersburg. She notes that birthdays are one of the most important celebrations in Russia

(Salmi 2000: 31), and highlights such ritual elements as birthday presents, a sumptuous table, bottles and toasting, singing and dancing, and so on. The author reaches the conclusion that

birthdays mirror a distinct type of Russian sociability, molded by larger social and economic constraints and opportunities. Thus, the birthday has a significant role in building and maintaining social networks that can be further explained by the context of trust. Birthdays also illustrate the importance of informal exchange relations for daily survival in contemporary Russia and show how celebrations are connected to networks, sociability and exchange. (Salmi 2000: 31)

She believes that birthdays in Finland are insignificant, marginal events compared to Russian ones.

Lithuania, Russia's neighbor (just like Finland), after experiencing a strong (forced) Russian influence for many decades (unlike Finland), feels the effects of this influence even today. Therefore, the cultural and social values of birthdays in Lithuania are culturally closer to Russia, and not Finland.

Liudmila Arcimavičienė (2010) makes note of cultural differences, having performed a cognitive analysis of birthday well-wishing texts in Lithuanian and English. She finds that English texts of birthday wishes are more anthropocentric, while those in Lithuanian are oriented towards general social realities; less attention is paid to the individuals, but more to their environment.

Two medical (psychiatric) psychotherapists from Vilnius University (Lithuania), Darja Rojaka and Sigita Lesinskienė, carried out a written survey of over 330 medical students from Vilnius University in their fourth and fifth years of study, examining the importance that students assign to birthday celebrations. The analysis showed that the forms of birthday celebrations are changing in relation to past practices, but the importance of birthday celebrations is broadly recognized among students. Students consider birthdays an important personal event and try to celebrate them every year. Regardless, "the birthday is important not only to the celebrating person, but also to his or her family, friends, and significant others" (Rojaka and Lesinskienė 2018: 110).

Children's birthdays are highlighted (mostly in the USA and Israel) as examples of the rise of consumerism, commercialization and material culture⁴. They are a tool for creating social power (Clarke 2007; Lee Katras, and Bauer 2008), an important socialization factor in the forming of gender differences (Otnes and McGrath 1994), and entrench the prominence of numerical age as a prime classifier of the individual in modern Western social order (Shamgar-Handelman and Handelman 1991).

⁴ Jack Santino, researcher on the commercialization of traditional holidays in the U.S. points out that commercialization of holidays starts with the recognition of traditional customs and activities "as potentially profitable and exploitable by various industrial interests" (Santino 2005: 43). On the other hand, "people use the products of mass culture to create meaning within the contexts of their own priorities and their own lives" (op. cit.: 51).

The importance of music and issues surrounding the musical content of birthday celebrations are usually not raised, although it is often stated that music, singing, and dancing are self-evident components of the celebration; an integral part of rituals that establish, maintain, and strengthen social relations (e.g., Pesmen 1995; Salmi 2000; Kalacheva 2003: 20; Malov 2011: 68, 72, 73; Soldatkin 2014: 16; Nahum-Claudel 2016).

American anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake asserts that the tendency to ritualize important events in a person's and community's life "through formalized, rhythmically repeated, exaggerated, and elaborated sound and movement," creating an evocative musical emotion, could have a biological origin (Dissanayake 2006: 12). Ritual sound (music) serves and, at the same time, has the power to display resources, control and channel individual aggression, facilitate courtship, establish and maintain social identity through rites of passage, facilitate anxiety and psychological pain, and promote group cooperation and prosperity (op. cit.: 11–16). She describes interesting and suggestive similarities between the evolutionary (biological) process of "ritualization" in animal communication and the ritual (cultural) uses of musical behavior in humans. The examples described are from selected traditional rites or ceremonies of small-scale societies, in which music appears to be a universal and necessary component, and from animal behaviors, the defining features of what researchers call "ritualized." As she states, "one might say that in general *all* rituals serve to maintain the wellbeing of the society and its individuals as they join individuals in common cause" (op. cit.: 16). Without a doubt, "ritualized" animal behavior is instinctive, and thus animals are not free to change them in any way, whereas among humans, rituals, just like culture, are constantly creatively updated (op. cit.: 6). Dissanayake notes great changes in the relationship between music and community that have taken place in the modernizing Western world. Meanwhile, all other previous functions have disintegrated, shrunk, diminished, and changed, with some disappearing altogether, although today many of them can nevertheless still be recognizable in various forms (op. cit.: 16–17).

CHARACTERISTICS OF LITHUANIAN ROUND-NUMBER BIRTHDAYS

Small children's birthdays are typically celebrated every year, whereas certain dates have more significance as a person matures (when they turn sixteen, eighteen, or twenty-one), because these ages are related to a person gaining an increasingly important role in society. With age (fifty and up), birthday celebrations become events in a longer cycle: special celebrations are held every ten years, and lesser ones every five years, whereas annual birthdays are celebrated simply within the family or with co-workers. Round-number birthdays gain the status of a special event, a distinctive function in consolidating the family, kin, and community. In addition, such anniversaries are often specially marked at one's workplace: celebrants are honored with special awards as being specialists in their fields.

Celebrating birthdays is definitely not an old tradition in Lithuania. They were first celebrated among the urban upper classes around a century ago, and the tradition became more universal much later (Šaknys 2008: 21–22). There is evidence from the nineteenth century that village communities celebrated name days, but these celebrations never covered all of the social strata and age groups. Special rituals and parties were often used to mark only the most popular Christian names (op. cit.: 23). Nevertheless, the celebration of name days is also not seen as an old tradition in Lithuania, because no characteristic customs have formed. The main name-day customs were adapted from older annual and lifecycle celebrations, such as the rye and flax harvest, youth maturity rites, end of home building, and so on. Garlanding the celebrant (mostly with an oak leaf wreath) for name days, tying a special sash on them, lifting them into the air, holding a feast after the well-wishing, and many other customs were later adapted for birthdays (op. cit.: 22).⁵ Both name days and birthdays were mainly youth celebrations (op. cit.: 21–23), and only in the second half of the twentieth century did birthdays become common family celebrations (op. cit.: 24–25); however, seniors' round-number birthdays took the shape of a significant event.

Many elements and accents of round-number birthday celebrations are related to all kinds of birthday celebrations (e.g., a cake, candles or other burning objects, wishes made when blowing out the candles, gift-giving, toasts,⁶ a traditional greeting song⁷), and are (with marks of some special [sub]features⁸) characteristic at a regional scale. Some elements are recognized as being universal when speaking about ritual actions: active, inclusive participation, contrast with everyday life (decorative surroundings, fancy clothes), feasting⁹ and dances (the celebrant dances first, in the middle of a circle of other dancers), symbolic appreciation, and exaltation of the celebrant. The feature characteristic of Lithuanian and their neighbors' birthday celebrations also includes music full of unique local meaning, which accompanies almost non-stop or even covers the celebratory activities, creating the culmination point of the event.

⁵ All of the aforementioned ritual actions are very important elements of senior birthdays in Lithuania today.

⁶ Giving toasts, as a ritual to express respect and exaltation, probably is of very old origin, believed to be related to sacrificial libations in which a sacred liquid was offered to the gods. There is a lot of literature on this topic, and there is research on Lithuanian mythology and traditions as well (Vaitkevičienė 2003, 2004).

⁷ Video recordings show that all these elements are characteristic to celebrations of birthdays in all the countries that I selected to study.

⁸ I have in mind Latvia, Ukraine, Russia, the Czech Republic, and, in part, Estonia. As an example: in Lithuania and Russia, seniors do not give much meaning to birthday cakes and candles; in some of the videos there are no such elements, so maybe they were not a part of the birthday celebration at all.

⁹ The phenomenon of sharing a feast as a semiotic text imbued with the cultural meanings is examined in a sociocultural anthropological study by Chloe Nahum-Claudel (2016).

SONGS AND MUSIC AT LITHUANIAN ROUND BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Hired musicians play an important role at celebrations. Representatives of this profession need to be knowledgeable of specific local traditions and current musical trends, have the ability to actively interact with the celebration's participants and entertain them, execute a festivities scenario, organize the evening's entertainment, start songs, play music for dances, and so on. The musician's role was also exclusive in traditional village community celebrations, although nowadays it has, of course, changed significantly. Birthday parties do not always have a hired musician or band. Sometimes a relative brings their own instruments and they play for the dances or accompany singing.

Though the music at celebrations consists nearly entirely of songs, instrumental pieces also have their place at such celebrations. These are marches and various German-style fanfares, which can be heard at the beginning of the celebration when greeting the guests, as well as for the background of other ceremonies, demanding the attention of all the guests (while presenting the gifts, tying the sash, garlanding, etc., see "Muzikantas Antanas – Jubiliejus"¹⁰ 02:25:00; "Daivutes Jubiliejus"¹¹ 00:06:55; and "Tevu Jubiliejai"¹² 00:18:30). Rarely does a celebration take place without a traditional dance called "Polka su ragučiais" (Horned Polka). It is danced by slowly bringing in more and more participants of the celebration (see "Tevu Jubiliejai" 00:41:50; "Kazio 55 m jubiliejus. Groja Vyga"¹³ 02:24:00; and "Muzikantas Antanas"¹⁴, from the beginning). However, songs are one of the main tools to create the celebration's symbolic meaning. Music does not enter the celebration accidentally; it is always something significant and plays an important role because it: a) traditionally has the special place in the celebration, b) is well known to everyone gathered, c) was popular in the celebrant's youth, d) is associated with exceptionable, memorable events, and e) it emotionally connects people (peers, former classmates, travel friends, etc.). It is also obvious that the most recent, fashionable, youth-approved music plays no key role in seniors' birthdays. However, one can quickly take note that some songs are slowly changing their meaning and are rising higher in the music hierarchy. In particular, contemporary popular songs, which in the modern-day birthdays of seventy-year old people are included as a soundtrack to the video recording (since their grandchildren or others usually make the videos), take a central place in the celebration of thirtieth or fortieth birthdays.

¹⁰ "Muzikantas Antanas – Jubiliejus," YouTube video, 7:27, posted by Antanas Žukauskas, May 21, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6So_aBXq0U.

¹¹ "Daivutes Jubiliejus," YouTube video, 49:55, posted by Lina Benetis, August 26, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0GxOBJH-E8>.

¹² "Tevu Jubiliejai," YouTube video, 1:07:16, posted by Zeta V, July 21, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78IDwX789Uk>.

¹³ "Kazio 55 m jubiliejus. Groja Vyga," YouTube video, 6:15, posted by Stasys Navickas, November 09, 2015; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1z6Tf3XBCI&t=3162s>.

¹⁴ "Muzikantas Antanas," YouTube video, 6:01, posted by Antanas Žukauskas, August 24, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ScqiMqW33c>.

The first group of celebration songs appears at the prime moments of the celebration and is the most important part of it. To date, I have not found any birthday celebrations where one does not hear special greeting songs, which could be called shout-outs, musical charms, or imperatives. Those songs do not have a coherent text; therefore, they do not work as a way to express emotional content. They repetitively wish the celebrant a long life, happiness, health, God’s blessing, and other positive things. Recently, and increasingly more often, one can hear the translated Lithuanian or even English version of “Happy Birthday to you,”¹⁵ although the most popular song is still the Lithuanian “Ilgiausių metų” (May you live a very long life), which has been thriving for nearly two centuries. It is widespread with two different melodies:¹⁶

Allegretto

Il- giau- sių me- tą lin- kim mes, il- giau- sių me- tą lin- kim mes,
il- giau- sių me- tą, il- giau- sių me- tą lin- kim mes!

The most popular song is the Lithuanian “Ilgiausių metų” (May you live a very long life). First version of melody:

Ilgiausių metų linkim mes,
Ilgiausių metų linkim mes,
Ilgiausių metų, ilgiausių metų
Linkim mes!

We wish you a very long life,
We wish you a very long life,
We wish you, we wish you
A very long life!

Second version of melody:

Ilgiausių metų, ilgiausių,
Ilgiausių metų, ilgiausių,
Ilgiausių metų linkime!

May you live a very long life,
May you live a very long life,
We wish you a very long life!

Valio! Valio! Valio! Valio!
Valio! Valio! Valio! Valio!
Valio! Valio!

Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!
Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!
Hooray! Hooray!

¹⁵ This song began to spread in Lithuania after 1990.

¹⁶ One melody (Fig. 1) likely came to Lithuania from Poland, where it is used even to this day (in Latin) to greet priests on the occasion of their name days. The other melody’s (Fig. 2) origins are unclear. It can be surmised (although cautiously) that the melody may have come from the Lithuanian part of eastern Prussia.

Allegretto

Il- giau- sių me- tų, il- giau- sių, il- giau- sių me- tų, il- giau- sių,
 il- giau- sių me- tų lin- ki- me! Va-
 lio! Va- lio! Va- lio! Va- lio! Va- lio! Va- lio! Va- lio! Va- lio! Va-
 lio! Va- lio!

“Ilgiausių metų” (see “Kazio 55 m jubiliejus. Groja Vyga”¹⁷ 02:35:00; “Irutės 50 Jubiliejus HD”¹⁸ 00:16:00; “Daivutes Jubiliejus” 00:08:45) can always be heard at the point of the major ritual action. It is sung during the key culmination of the celebration, when people stand up in front of the celebrant and sing out the imperative well-wishes, usually symbolically raising or “sacrificing” a glass of some festive drink at the same time. Often, other, no less significant actions are performed: prior to the singing the celebrant is garlanded with the wreath or tied with a sash (as was mentioned before, this could be done at an instrumental signal), and after singing he or she is lifted up into the air. Sometimes “Ilgiausių metų” is sung when performing entirely different actions. Blowing out candles, cutting and sharing the cake, drinking champagne, and watching fireworks in honor of the celebrant are all also clearly moments of the celebration’s culmination. In some cases, there are two or rarely three culminations in the celebration: one culmination is marked with toasts, singing “Ilgiausių metų” while standing up, garlanding the celebrant with a wreath, lifting him or her into the air, the second¹⁹ involves lighting and blowing out the cake candles, sometimes singing “Ilgiausių metų” one more time, making a wish, drinking champagne, or lighting fireworks (see “Audriaus Davidonio 70m jubiliejus”²⁰ 00:18:24).

¹⁷ “Kazio 55 m jubiliejus. Groja Vyga,” YouTube video, 6:15, posted by Stasys Navickas, November 9, 2015; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1z6Tf3XBCI&t=3162s>.

¹⁸ “Irutės 50 Jubiliejus HD,” YouTube video, 17:18, posted by Dainius Vinclovas, September 14, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uzsq6tzMthY>.

¹⁹ It usually takes place during the second part of the celebration, or even before the end.

²⁰ “Audriaus Davidonio 70m jubiliejus,” YouTube video, 20:32, posted by Arvydas Dimša, April 1, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vDo9G0Zu9A.

The second group of celebration songs is the one with an impact and meaning that have an effect at the emotional level. These are songs specially created by professionals or amateurs to commemorate birthdays or honor the celebrants, or other popular songs (like from TV shows or radio hits) that simply became part of these celebrations' repertoire. All these songs often become folklorized: the authors are forgotten, new variations of the pieces appear, or entirely new songs are created using them as a basis or by compiling their melodies and text motifs, poetic figures, and images. A newly written song has usually a simple melody and is easy to learn. Such songs usually occupy key points in celebrations: they highlight the celebration and are "minor" culminations of the celebration. For example, while musicians are singing such a song, the celebrant is given gifts, he is invited to dance (the first dance of the evening), the rest of the guests dance in a circle around him, or the guests sing a song as a gift to the celebrant.

The gifting of special songs to the celebrant is a certain widespread gesture of ritual favor. A particularly widespread tradition is gifting songs to the celebrants via radio or TV shows, or through a special video recording posted online. This tradition can be considered as a part of the birthday celebration's musical complex, but this topic is too broad to be included here and should be developed in another publication.

Returning to addressing songs that are performed at birthday celebrations to create "minor" culminations, it is necessary to note that the repertoire repeats from celebration to celebration, whereas the music, seen from the musicological point of view, can be defined as varying between the folk, pop, and folk-disco²¹ styles. Those songs have one clear common feature. Melodies often have a plain, non-syncopated rhythm;²² the regular waltz (triple) meter is favored, and the typical melodic contour contains intervals from an inverted triad. Duple (quadruple) meter songs are often rearranged in the folk-disco style.

²¹ The disco style in Lithuania probably came from Poland and Russia and acquired some unique features. This style's modification in Lithuania is still not noted by contemporary musicology scholars as a phenomenon, even though it has been popular for nearly two decades already. Meanwhile, in Poland, it already has a common name—*Disco polo*—and is the subject of encyclopedia articles (e.g., Karolczuk-Kędzierska et al. 2009; Disco Polo 2019) or Wikipedia explanations (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disco_polo). This is how it is described: "*Disco polo* is a genre of popular dance music, created in Poland in the late 1980s, initially known as "sidewalk music" (Polish: *muzyka chodnikowa*) or "backyard music" (Polish: *muzyka podwórkowa*). It is an urban folk music, popular in the mid-late 1990s, with its popularity peaking around 1995–1997. Language Dictionary Polish Publishing PWN defines the genre as a Polish variant of disco music, with simple melodies, and often ripe lyrics. "The genre is derived from the music played at weddings with a repertoire of Polish folk music and wedding songs, with electronic alternatives to the traditional acoustic instruments, electronic keyboards instead of the traditional acoustic keyboard instrument, for example. The most common influential themes were melodramatic texts about unrequited love. In addition to these traditional foundations, a large influence on the occurrence of this genre was other popular music from within Europe, including Italo disco" (Disco polo 2019).

²² People born after 1955 usually like to listen to (and create) songs that do not use syncopated rhythm, so they also transform the syncopated rhythm of some existing songs into non-syncopated ones (as is typical of the older song style). Syncopated tunes are more popular among the younger generation, and songs preferred among older generations are associated with retro style or "old-fashioned" style.

The lyrics of songs are in a typical simple and naive style. Encouragements to sing, calls to raise glasses, greetings to health and happiness are employed; the following keywords are often used: *birthday, your day, celebration, hooray, dearest, passing years, grey hair, blooming roses, dreams, young heart, champagne glass, feast table, melody*, and so on. Songs and singing, “precious melodies” are mentioned often, and texts incorporate stylized fragments of “Ilgiausių metų;” all this shows that singing is one of the most important attributes of celebrations. See some fragments of such songs below:

Let us celebrate this birthday,
Sing songs together,
Smile to each other
With so much joy.

It's summer already, ice has melted in my heart
And I think no longer what was, what will be,
Let us sing today. Time is so helpless,
When you see at the table your true friends.

Happiness will sing for you
In the name of your birthday:
“Hooray hooray hooray” –
We will count the years.

Where we were born, where we were raised, where the earth is sacred,
Stand up, dear brothers and sisters,
Let us sing a song that once was sung
By our forefathers.

The content of the last quoted stanza requires further comment. In this verse one can see the very typical motifs of nostalgic love for one's country, their birthplace, always projected to the past, as well as the projection of close relationships with family and relatives in the present (see “Danutes jubiliejus”²³ 00:43:40). In such a way, this and other such songs contribute to the construction of the aforementioned crucial points (full of different meanings and saturated with symbolical power) of the celebration and seemingly illustrate the essence of the anniversary, described by Yevtushenko as a representation of collective memory.

One of the most popular birthday celebration songs is written by the semi-professional musician and very popular performer Vytautas Šiškauskas. The song is not only sung at birthday celebrations (see “Audriaus Davidonio 70m jubiliejus” 00:09:40; “Daivutes Jubiliejus” 00:05:28), it can be heard as the musical background to the different ceremonies, and is sung by the various musicians at concerts, it is covered by other artists and also widely available as a sound or video recording online:

²³ “Danutės jubiliejus,” YouTube video, 02:31, posted by Antanas Žukauskas, July 20, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xbx-KC3kn-E>.

“Su gimtadieniu” (Happy birthday)

Eternal time shall look into your eyes,
The birthday celebration has arrived.
Here champagne will flow and toasts are said,
Glasses ring together like bells.

Chorus:

Happy birthday
Happy birthday
We wish you, we wish you
A home with no worries

We wish you both health and happiness
Your hand will shake ours.
Holding each other we shall stand in a circle
And melodies so dear to you shall sound.

Chorus: . . .

Hooray hooray hooray hooray hoo,
Hooray hooray hooray hooray hoo,
Hooray hooray hooray hooray hooray!

Another example is a song by self-taught musician Antanas Žukauskas, which he always performs at celebrations that he hosts. The song is already being disseminated as an anonymous piece and can be heard as an additional soundtrack to video recordings (see “Danutės jubiliejus”, from the beginning):

“Jubiliejinis vakaras” (Birthday evening)

This occasion so dear and sweet to you.
Only once per long long year
We wish you all the joy we can
For it's your birthday, my dear.

The years go by, like wind are gone
Carrying away the autumn leaves.
All is torn away by time
Even the best years of youth.

Chorus:

The blooming roses wish you joy,
The morning dew shall wish you joy.
Let us too wish you all the best
For today is your birthday, my dear.

We shall take our wishes, like a bouquet,
 As pure as petals from a rose,
 And may they bring color to your every day
 And remain forever so long.

In your arms the flowers bloom
 And the champagne glass is full,
 Your celebration is today—
 Be forever happy.

Chorus: ...

Most of the greeting songs play a significant role at birthday celebrations. They are related to the text and music style of love songs (romances) that became firmly established in the early twentieth century. However, they are slightly extended and its main characteristics modified. For example, the plain, non-syncopated rhythm, regular triple meter, and typical melodic intervals of sixth or inverted thirds favored in modern-day birthday songs are elements related to the melodies of traditional romances. It is very interesting to observe birthday celebrations where one can hear both the “traditional” folk romances still very much appreciated by the older generation and the newest romance-style songs. The latter also express and awaken strong emotions, but they excite the people at the celebration and bring the celebrant to tears as part of a symbolic ritual, thus creating exalted moments of the celebration. Meanwhile, the traditional folk romances do not create the culminations—they are sung during the celebrations lower, slower points, when people take a breath and spend time interacting (see “Alfredos jubiliejus”²⁴ 01:00:50; “Danutės jubiliejus” 00:24:23). These songs can be attributed to **the third group of celebration songs**.

Some further transformations of romance-style music (its musical characteristics as well as themes of love, passion, and death) could also be included in this group. The newest hit of round-number birthday (as well as wedding) celebrations is the song “Juoda orchidėja” (Black Orchid). It was written in 2010 (by the semi-professional music group MG International), and today there is probably no hired musician that does not know the song. The music is in the pop genre, which most people like, and it is not reminiscent of the folk romances. The song lyrics are about unrequited love among bikers. Speed, the wind in one’s hair, unbridled freedom, the night, and death: all this is a continuation of the intentions of a traditional romance text and provides some additional, “renewed” emotionality.

Fantastic modern myths have been born in relation to this song. People on the Internet share various rumors, talk about how the authors of the song are actually its protagonists, that one or both of them actually died in a motorcycle accident, and that the song itself

²⁴ “Alfredos jubiliejus,” YouTube video, 01:09:35, posted by Ricardas Tolisius, November 22, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUNTRWaPNKo&t=1162s>.

predicted this sad ending. The title of the song has already become a fully-fledged cultural text and commonly used source. The name is used by various businesses (such as beauty salons, flower shops), entertainment parties, brooches created by jewelers, bijouterie pieces, many girls in creating their online nicknames, and so on. “Juoda orchidėja” is probably featured in most birthday celebrations, but this song’s popularity still does not give it the right to become a symbolic part of the ritual; it is not played at the culmination points of birthday celebrations. Such a right is gained, as mentioned above, only by time-tested or really traditional-themed birthday songs in a familiar musical form, not by fashionable songs. “Juoda orchidėja” is usually played when the guests become slightly tired and need to be brought into action again. This is a song that people always dance to, and younger people at the celebration often sing the chorus together with the musicians (see “Kazio 55 m jubiliejus. Groja Vyga” 02:15:00). This song illustrates a gradual change: the younger generation’s music becomes part of the celebration and ties together different generations.

In the night, with motorcycles into the highway’s mist,
With high beams turned on, we both escaped.
God forbid I would wake up without any moderation,
There isn’t any stronger medicine than love and acceleration...

Chorus:

Black Orchid, oh how I loved!
Once we both caught up to the wind.
Black Orchid, oh how I ached!
My heart got burned once by the Black Orchid...

That we are different, at that time didn’t matter,
I was some roadside grass, and you were an Orchid.
I know I’ll remember, after a thousand years,
That intoxicating fragrance of that long black hair...

Chorus: ...

Dusty garage, a motorcycle in the corner,
Butterfly’s colored wings, lying broken on the glass...

*Chorus: ...*²⁵

The fourth group of songs includes many traditional and popular songs which are performed at many celebrations, sung as people are seated at the feast table, while playing various games, or used as a soundtrack to video recordings. These soundtracks deserve separate attention, particularly in cases when the older celebrant’s birthday’s recorded material is edited and published by someone from the younger generation. Usually the soundtrack

²⁵ <https://lyricstranslate.com/en/juoda-orchid%C4%97ja-black-orchid.html>.

to the video reveals which songs are relevant to this generation, and so the repertoire is slightly different from the one at the celebrations. Nevertheless, in this article the goal was to reveal how birthday celebrations take place, not how they become visual stories.

When the party is in full swing, hits from the Soviet pop repertoire are played for the people to relax, enjoy, sing, or dance along. These are songs from the celebrant's youth and thus evoke positive emotions. Also, popular Western pop songs from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s are played. Sometimes, songs for the younger generation are played as well, always at points of the celebration that are not so important, usually when the celebration is coming to an end. This repertoire belongs to a group of flexible and less significant songs. Nevertheless, it seems likely that some of these songs will change their role and relevance and become part of the other song groups mentioned.

THE STUDY FINDINGS

This analysis exposes the main structural elements of birthday celebrations in relation to the music that emerges in the context of these celebrations. The structural elements are marked with numbers according to the role and importance of the music playing in the context of the ritual: 0—no music; 1—music at major culminations (the same two melodies are always repeated); 2—music at minor culminations (a particular number of songs is repeated at various celebrations), instrumental signals; 3—romances, folk songs, Soviet-era and Western pop songs, sung poetry (bard songs); 4—background music of low significance, incidental music, and video-accompanying soundtracks of various styles.

Structural elements of Lithuanian round-number birthday celebrations for seniors		Musical groups
1.	GIVING GIFTS by the guests to the celebrant, birthday greetings	0, 2
2.	SINGING THE BIRTHDAY SONG "Ilgiausią metų" (May you live a very long life) by the guests (standing up and often raising their glasses)	1
3.	GARLANDING the celebrant	2
4.	TYING a special sash on the celebrant	2–3
5.	LIFTING the celebrant into the air	2–3
6.	FEASTING (ongoing activity that proceeds in different phases with pauses and includes, in various orders of priority and ways of performance, other elements in question, although not necessarily all of them)	0–4
7.	TOASTS	0
8.	SPECIAL POEMS, greetings in verse form	0
9.	THANK-YOU SPEECH by the celebrant	0
10.	FIRST DANCE OF THE EVENING, a circle dance with the celebrant in the middle	2

11.	GAMES played sitting at the feast table or during meal breaks	3–4
12.	VARIOUS SIGNS OF SYMBOLIC APPRECIATION of the celebrant (e.g., slide show or video about the celebrant’s life, various performances from children and grandchildren, etc.).	3–4
13.	CAKE CEREMONY (lighting and blowing out candles, cutting the cake, etc.)	1–2
14.	OPENING CHAMPAGNE	1–2
15.	WATCHING FIREWORKS	1–2
16.	SINGING together, listening to music, special game when guests order songs from hired musicians	2–4
17.	DANCING	3–4
18.	SOFT COMMUNICATION	2–4 (background music)
19.	UPLOADING VIDEO TO THE INTERNET	2–4 (accompanying soundtracks)

The elements numbered 2 to 5, 10, and 13 to 15 often form the culmination points of a round-number birthday celebration, but not necessarily all of them and not in the same order. Particularly dense, powerful points of meanings and significance, emphasized by songs and music, are established around them.

CONCLUSION

In Lithuania, the tendency to ritualize seniors’ round-number birthday celebrations is particularly evident and reflected in video recordings uploaded publicly online. The repetitive structures, actions, symbols, musical behavior, and giving the song repertoire meaning in contemporary birthday celebrations make it possible to consider them as a culturally important contemporary ritual complex.

Music is one of the most important elements in creating the celebration’s culmination points. Songs are often repeated from celebration to celebration and could be classified into the following groups:

Group 1: The song “Ilgiausią metų” (May you live a very long life) as the most important song at round-number birthday celebrations. It is used in creating the main culminations of the celebrations.

Group 2: The minor culminations (the elevated points of the celebration) are accompanied by a repertoire of other songs that have settled as very significant in the celebration. These songs bring forth emotions, are notable for a certain local lyrical and musical style

and are directly related to the song tradition from the first half of the twentieth century. They are used very often as soundtracks for video recordings.

Group 3: A certain repertoire of songs, which can be heard during less important moments of the celebration, is also repeated at various celebrations: romances, folk songs, various Soviet-era and Western pop songs, sung poetry (bard songs), etc.

Group 4: Various songs and music, incidental pieces and songs, sounding in the background, or used as video soundtracks.

The repertoire of songs for round-number birthday celebrations is very varied and stylistically distant: one can find songs from many different periods and genres, from traditional village songs to popular music styles of the twentieth century. In contemporary celebrations, folk, pop, and folk-disco music styles are most popular. Newer pop music styles (favored by forty-year-olds and younger), and some other particular songs can be heard in the celebration videos (also as soundtrack music), though they are an exception rather than a norm. Such video recordings show the connection between generations: the mechanism of the continuity of tradition.

Songs do not appear in the musical complex by accident; they all go through the “filter” of local culture, and influence of the previous song tradition from nearly a century ago is still easily traceable.

The study findings show that music not only accompanies or illustrates the ritual actions of birthday celebrations. Music is always a component of the culminations and crucial points of celebrations. An analysis of the musical repertoire and properties confirms, illustrates, and supplements many researchers’ conclusions regarding birthday celebrations: that music is a consolidating tool, a way of creating and supporting social relationships, and a ritual symbolically connecting the past, present, and future and constantly upholding and updating the cultural code.

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GLASBENE ZAKONITOSTI PRAZNOVANJ OKROGLIH OBLETNIC STAREJŠIH V LITVI

Avtorica na podlagi videoposnetkov, dostopnih na spletu v zadnjem desetletju, obravnava praznovanja okroglih rojstnodnevni obletnic v Litvi. V središču raziskave so praznovanja starih 50 let in več. S strukturnim in semantičnim pristopom raziskovalka v pesemskem repertoarju razkriva kulturne in družbene pomene praznovanj. Posebno pozornost namenja štirim skupinam pesmi, ki ustvarjajo tako »glavne« kot »manjše« vrhunce praznovanja in spremljajo ali pokrivajo manj pomembne aktivnosti praznovanja rojstnega dne.

Repertoar pesmi za praznovanje okroglih obletnic rojstnih dni je zelo pisan in slogovno raznovrsten: v njem so pesmi iz različnih obdobj in žanrov, od lokalnih tradicionalnih do pesmi priljubljenih glasbenih stilov 20. stoletja.

Pri sodobnih praznovanjih so najbolj priljubljeni glasbeni stili folk, pop in folk-disko. Videoposnetki praznovanj vključujejo tudi novejše popularne glasbene stile (priljubljene predvsem pri štiridesetletnikih in mlajših) in nekatere druge določene pesmi (tudi kot zvočno podlago posnetkom), vendar so ti prej izjema kot norma. Ti videoposnetki prikazujejo povezavo med generacijami oz. pričajo o mehanizmu kontinuitete tradicije.

Pesmi v glasbeni kontekst praznovanja niso vključene naključno. Vse gredo skozi »filter« lokalne kulture; lahko pa še vedno zasledimo vpliv starejše, skoraj stoletne pesemske tradicije.

Raziskava pokaže, da glasba ni le spremljava praznovanj rojstnega dne, temveč je zelo pomemben, sestavni del glavnih točk rituala. Analiza glasbenega repertoarja in glasbenih značilnosti potrjuje ali dopolnjuje številne dosedanje ugotovitve raziskovalcev o praznovanjih rojstnih dni: glasba je orodje, ki postavlja in utemeljuje družbene odnose, je del obreda, ki simbolično povezuje preteklost, sedanjost in prihodnost ter nenehno podpira in hkrati posodablja kulturne zakonitosti.

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