

# THE NIVKH PEOPLE OF SAKHALIN AND THEIR MUSIC



## MY NIVKH JOURNEY BY PIA SIIRALA



© Pia Siirala, 2007  
From the original  
*Sahalinin Nivkh-Alkuperäiskansan Musiikki*  
*Matkapäiväkirja*

English translation copyright © 2009 by Lygia O’Riordan

© Ensemble XXI  
ISBN 978-952-5789-01-0

## INTRODUCTION

This is the day-to-day journal of my field trip late last year to Sakhalin, when I worked with the indigenous Nivkh people for a second time, collecting more material, both through notating music on the spot and by making recordings of the Nivkhs singing for me. Since then I have composed two more pieces of music based on this Nivkh material – a *Suite* for Solo Violin and *Ulita's Walk* for chamber orchestra. Both works will be given their world premieres in 2008.

The Nivkhs and their music have been an enormous inspiration to me, to our orchestra Ensemble XXI and to our conductor, Lygia O'Riordan. Before my first field trip in 2004, Lygia O'Riordan, the conductor of Ensemble XXI, initiated the first contact with the Nivkhs on her field trip to meet them in Sakhalin. At that time she met the Ethnomusicologist, Natalia Mamcheva, who introduced her to the legendary Nivkh singer, Tatiana Ulita. During that first encounter, Lygia O'Riordan recorded Tatiana Ulita's singing. These songs provided me with the vital material for my composition, *Nivkh Themes*. On that same trip, Lygia O'Riordan travelled to Nogliki to see Nivkh performances first hand and to meet with the Nivkhs themselves. Armed with ancient recordings of Nivkh singing given to her by Natalia Mamcheva, as well as her own recordings, Lygia introduced me to the Nivkh music. It was then that we both became convinced that the indigenous peoples of Sakhalin and of Russia must play a great role in the life of Ensemble XXI. This diary is the first of many that we plan to publish during our voyages throughout Russia to meet and work with its indigenous peoples. This has also inspired Ensemble XXI's Circum Arctic Expedition to the indigenous peoples.

The idea of my journal is to give a contemporary picture of the indigenous Nivkh people of Sakhalin and to underline the threat that their livelihoods and lives are under today, both because of the oil industry and because of climate change. The indigenous people are on the edge of this climate change, which will sooner or later affect all of us.

The fact that time is of the essence for the preservation of these ancient cultures (a task which can be compared to trying to save materials from an archaeological dig before they are swept away by a landslide) is evident in the fact that two of the sources of this beautiful music, Tatiana Ulita, died as I was beginning to compose "Ulita's walk" and Raisa Nyengun (Baba Efukuk) died before the ink had dried on my work for Solo Violin.

Finally, I should mention that, in regard to the names of the Nivkhs, the reader might find it confusing that their names are often Russian (Tatiana, Lidia etc) and even include Patronymics. This is because of the Russification of the Nivkhs during the Soviet period. Nivkhs do not have Patronymics in their own language. Unless otherwise stated, the persons mentioned in this journal are Nivkh. All the Nivkhs whom I met, the Nivkh terminology used and the names of instruments are all included in glossaries at the end of the journal to help guide the reader.

Pia Siirala

## MOSCOW

4.11. – Saturday

I depart Moscow on a 9-hour flight through 7 time zones to Sakhalin.

## YUZHNO-SAKHALINSK

5.11. - Sunday

I arrived in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk after the nine-hour flight and almost immediately left with my Sakhalin friends for a nature trip to the coast. We bought fresh salmon directly from the fishermen, who were selling it by the side of the coast road.

6.11. - Monday

Although I did not have the complete budget that I needed for this journey, I decided in any case to leave for Sakhalin. The gaps in my budget meant that I was forced to cut costs wherever possible, i.e. by using the cheapest (and therefore slowest) transport wherever possible, travelling alone (without guides) and living frugally.



My entry for that first day was as follows: I am living in the guest room of the hostel of Yuzhno Sakhalinsk's College of Fine Arts hostel. There is a shower, a TV and a fridge, which despite having a thermostat never stops its loud humming. This room is referred to as the "luxury suite". In order to be able to get to sleep tonight I am going to unplug the fridge. The room has been cleaned, but just to be sure I decided to wash the dishes and cutlery (4 cups, 2 plates, 3 knives, a fork and a spoon). The first thing

that I am going to do is to go to the local shop to buy the delicious Sakhalin black bread and to get a local SIM card, which is called THE FAR EAST MEGAPHONE!

Since it was a long weekend, we went to the mountains to pick wild rosehips and gather pine nuts from cedar tree cones. Then we made traditional fish soup (*Ukha*) on a camp fire from the fish that we had bought from the fishermen, but then it began to sleet...'

NATALIA MAMCHEVA

7.11. – Tuesday

Natalia Mamcheva is a Russian Ethnomusicologist who has specialized in the study of the music of the Nivkhs. She has been collecting their music since the 1980's and has published two books as well as numerous articles on the subject.

Natalia (seen here on my left with Lidia Muvchik and Lygia O'Riordan) accompanied me on my 2004 Sakhalin field trip and introduced me to the true masters of authentic traditional singing in the Nogliki region. She also provided me with historical recordings of past masters of both the singing and playing of Nivkh music.

These included a recording made by the Ethnographer Lev Sternberg in 1910, of the singing of a Nivkh called Odrain from the Amur region. I had never before heard such singing, which was so wild and filled with the force of nature. The historical recordings also included those from the village of Chir-Unvd, made in 1969 of Ekaterina Hitkuk singing the "Legend of the Jealous Wife", of Zoya Agnyun singing a Shaman chant and of Olga Njavan beating the Shaman drum. I have used all of these themes in my compositions.

During that same trip to Nogliki in 2004, I had been riveted on the train as Natalia Mamcheva related to me the legends of the Nivkh people, explaining to me the intrinsic role that music plays as a magical power in the Nivkh culture. Interestingly, there is no separate word in the Nivkh language for music, because it is so much part of the spiritual lives of the Nivkhs. She also explained the complexity of Shaman singing and how, through it, one can recognise the various stages of a Shaman's trance and his communication with the spiritual world.

This time, I met Natalia Mamcheva on my first morning when she gave me all the latest news about her work. She told me that about a month ago, an English ethnographer had visited the North of the island, but



was not interested in meeting with any Nivkhs, but rather only in visiting ethnic museums.

Natalia gave me a long list of people with their contact details whom she felt I should meet in the North of the island. She herself immediately contacted the village of Chir-Unvd and organised accommodation for me with Lydia Romanovna Otlonova, the Nivkh curator of the local museum there. I also got the contact details of Alla Viktorovna Siskova, an Ethnomusicologist living in Okha. Unfortunately she was on vacation in Vladivostok, but I did have a lengthy conversation with this friendly and very helpful lady, who also gave me more names and numbers to contact. Needless to say this gobbled up all my credit on the FAR EAST MEGAPHONE connection!

### MARGARITA

I also telephoned Margarita Buldakova's family in Nogliki. I got to know Margarita and her family in 2004 when I lived with them in the former Nivkh Fishing kolkhoz (a collective of Nivkh fishermen). That had been in the summer when we travelled by boat to the Nivkh summer settlements on the narrow peninsula between the Pacific Ocean and the gulf. The vegetation on this windy stretch of heath is made up of grass and shrubs with dark berries called "Siksa" (crowberries).

The low-lying wooden huts were built along the shores of the gulf. The interiors were very simple with only a fireplace and a large bench to sleep on, which comfortably fitted all of us - 5 adults and four children and the two dogs slept outside. As soon as we arrived the men left to check the nets. On that occasion, while Margarita was cooking, Natalia Mamcheva, the children, the dogs and I set off towards the ocean (the Sea of Okhotsk) to collect suitable branches to teach the children the rhythms of the ancient dances of the bear ceremony. We found many beautiful branches whose shape had been formed by the sea. The wind was chasing us along the coast, but soon the rain forced us to turn back; for the rest of the day Natalia and I taught the children in the hut how to drum. When a storm arose from the ocean, we were stranded for several days and then the adults joined us as well.

They recounted how they were treated in the boarding schools where they had been removed to by the authorities. They were not allowed to speak their own Nivkh language and so the "Russification" of the indigenous people was extremely rapid. The Russians referred to the Nivkh people as "Gilyaks", which the Nivkhs insist means "dog" in Russian, despite the fact that I heard them using this term themselves on more than one occasion.

Nowadays, as a result of intermarriage between the Nivkhs and Russians, there are fewer and fewer pureblooded Nivkhs. Nevertheless,

they all consider themselves to be Nivkh. During the Gorbachev era, rights improved for minorities. Nowadays there are over 5000 Nivkhs, of which almost 3000 live in Sakhalin.

But now, to continue with my present journey...

When I rang, Margarita Buldakova wasn't at home in Nogliki, but was in fact travelling by train and heading towards Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. However, the children said that I was most welcome, "our door is never locked and there is always someone at home". Then they asked me did I need to be met. I said that there was no need to meet me because the time of arrival was very early in the morning. By accident, I had bought the ticket in Moscow for an earlier train because I had forgotten that no matter what time zone you are in, in Russia, all departure and arrival times on tickets refer to the time in Moscow, which I suppose is one way to centralize power in a country with 11 time zones!



That day I also went to the Sakhin Centre (the administrative and business centre in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk) for meetings and for access to the Internet. In the evening I met the local chamber orchestra's conductor, Alexander Zrazhaev, who had asked me to listen to their rehearsal. The music was not very interesting and the musicians were struggling with a difficult rhythm. They asked me for advice and I showed them how they should practice it and what kind of bowings they should use. They tried this and were greatly relieved when it worked. So was I, since I was still very jetlagged and wanted to sleep.

## THE OVERNIGHT TRAIN TO NOGLIKI

8.11. – Wednesday

Finally the day of departure to the North! I packed my bag and went to the Sakhalin Government building to meet the Governor's Representative of the Sakhalin Indigenous peoples, Nadezhda Alexandrovna Laigun, who is a Nivkh. She asked me about my plans for the North and promised to telephone one of the places that I wanted to visit, Nekrasovka, so that I would be looked after there.

Sharing my compartment in the train was a Russian lady on the way to Timovsk. We immediately began to discuss life in Sakhalin. She told me that since the collapse of the USSR, life had got worse - a very typical sentiment from a person of her generation in many parts of Russia. However, what she had to say about the oil industry on the island did surprise me, as in Moscow for example, one only hears environmentalists criticizing the oil industry or deforestation. She accused the oil companies of causing pollution and also of robbing the

land's resources and said that they are going to leave havoc behind them. She also lambasted the lack of controls in regard to poaching as well as the insane felling of trees at a time when most people living in rural areas are either out of work or are not paid salaries for the work that they carry out. She was angry at everybody and at everything, which was understandable. Later on a youngish woman joined our company. She was an environmental inspector and on her way to check the areas of the gas pipeline. She announced (with a grin!) that a young man had just raped her in her own compartment and that she was not willing to go back there. At first I was shocked, but then I started to feel that she had also had a hand in it. Certainly she didn't lose any sleep over it and soon a happy snoring duet began between my two fellow travellers, accompanied by the clackity clack of the train.

It was suffocatingly hot in airless the compartment. I decided to brave the possible prowling rapist and go out into the corridor to gaze at the nighttime scenery through the dusty window. My fellow passengers disembarked in the early hours of the morning in Onora and Timovsk. Still sleep did not come to me and I killed the time by reading the fascinating book written by the Ethnographer Yerukhim Abramovich Kreinovich about his expeditions to the Nivkhs in Sakhalin at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the dawn of Soviet Russia.

With the snail's pace of the train, the 700-kilometre trip took 16 hours. The Sakhalin railroad was built during the Japanese occupation and therefore the width of the gauge is narrower than in the rest of Russia. I wondered if that was the reason why the carriage was bouncing from one side to the other, from one side to the other, from one side to the other...

Finally at around 6.00 AM I think I fell asleep for a couple of hours and at 08.15 we arrived in Nogliki.

## NOGLIKI

9.11. – Thursday

The ground was covered in frost and the wind was biting cold. I travelled to the Nivkh kolkhoz in a *Marschrutka*,

a little shuttle bus. The Nivkh kolkhoz on the banks of the river Tim is made up of groups of grey, run down wooden houses with outside toilets. There is neither drainage nor a sewage system. The water is



carried to the houses from wells and the whole area has only one *Banya* (a bathing house). Although almost nobody uses dogsleds anymore, every house keeps six to eight dogs, as was traditionally done. At my destination a friendly Nivkh stranger helped me by carrying my rucksack from the Marschrutka stop to Margarita's door. I noticed that there was a *Remont* (Russian renovation) taking pace in the house. Instead of a door, a blanket had been drawn across the doorway and the barking of the dogs took the place of a doorbell and a lock! The girls were at home and it felt as though we had met only yesterday. Natasha, Margarita's oldest daughter had given birth to a boy and looked thinner; the others, Luba and Sasha looked just the same as the last time. The little girls, Diana and Masha, had of course grown a little taller.

They fed me warm soup with tea. Despite my protests, they emptied the end room for my use alone. In the other two rooms nine people were sleeping.

I unpacked my things, made some telephone calls and visited the local Administration's Nivkh representative, Elena Vovkuk. I also met Galina Deminyanovna Lok, a Nivkh Linguist to ask for her advice. For many years she has collected and recorded the Nivkh language and music and has been instrumental in helping visiting ethnographers and linguists during their field trips. She enthusiastically invited herself to join me on my journey to the North.

VIENA (VIENSKOYE) – LIDIA MUCVHIK

10.11. – Friday

I woke up early in the morning. The ground was covered with snow and the sun was shining. I walked from the kolkhoz past the church to the Administration building where Elena Vovkuk was waiting for me with a car and a driver. We were off to visit Lidia Muvchik in the tiny Vienskoye village, which is about an hour's drive to the North East of Nogliki. I first heard of Lidia Muvchik through Natalia Mamcheva's recordings and vividly remembered her singing. When I first met Natalia Mamcheva, I asked her, 'is the person who sings *in this way* (and I imitated her singing) still alive?' Natalia Mamcheva immediately recognised Muvchik's melody and in the summer of 2004 the two of us visited Lidia together. I still remember what a shock it was for Lidia Muvchik when she heard me play her own melody for the first time on my violin. In fact, it was this melody that became the main theme of my composition, *Nivkh Themes*, which was composed in 2004. During the work's premiere that year at our Pacific Rim Music Festival on Sakhalin, Lidia Muvchik sat in front of us and began the music by singing the main melody. We, the musicians, stood around her in a semicircle and continued playing the music from the point when she

ended. The audience later remarked how moving it had been to watch her as she recognised her melody throughout the piece and nodded with a smile or swayed to the Nivkh rhythms as we played.



During our first meeting in 2004, I had noticed that she always began singing from the note D. That made my task a lot easier because we were able to quite naturally continue on from her singing.

Lidia was clearly delighted to meet again. I knew that since we had last met, she had undergone a very serious operation. She greeted me with the words: 'After my illness a new song was born within me, which is better than all those that I have sung for you before, but I just can't get it out'. I wished her patience in the birth of this new song and taking my violin, we performed her old song together. I also played one of the tunes used during the recitation of Kalevala (the Finnish historical legend). Lidia Muvchik (right) said that it reminded her of a Nivkh lullaby, which she then sang for me. I immediately notated it. She also sang an old legend and I noticed that she was singing motives that I had not heard her using before. However I did not want to question her about this, as I was afraid to interrupt her intuitive singing. What do I mean by this? Herein lies the crux of the matter.



It is very common amongst indigenous cultures that singing or dancing is used as a form of communication, in the way that we use words. Singing and dancing is an intrinsic part of their human expression. A story or even a conversation can suddenly change to singing and asking someone to repeat what he or she have already just sung would be the same as asking someone to repeat word-by-word and with the same inflections, what they have just said. A repetition would most likely result in perhaps more or less the same meaning, but with a different turn of phrase. Therefore, when collecting material from traditional singers, one never asks them to *repeat* a specific song, but rather asks them to tell a certain story by singing. If they repeat exactly what they have already sung once, one immediately knows that modern singing has influenced them.

Before we left, she gave us a bag full of fresh fish called *Navaga* as well as some dried fish. Back at Margarita's the girls suggested that we eat the fresh fish raw, but I didn't realise yet what kind of a delicacy that would have been. So instead they fried it and from the rest we made soup.

In the afternoon I went to meet the *Nivkhinka-Klub*, which is a group of Nivkhs that meets every week to uphold the Nivkh traditions. Unfortunately Zoya Chikhavrun, whom I knew from my last visit, was so ill that she couldn't come. Neither could Vasily Sangi, the only male singer left, who is able to sing in the traditional style. Fortunately I had recorded both of them on my previous trip.

Natalia Deminyanovna (Galina Deminyanovna Lok's older sister) was in the middle of playing the Tinrin (a one stringed instrument, which resonates through a fish skin that is tightly pulled over a round birch frame) for us when suddenly loud Russian pop music started blaring out from nowhere! The tiny elderly Nivkh lady (seen here at the left) reached into her pocket and pulled out layers of cloth from which emerged her Nokia mobile phone! What an advertisement that would have made!



At home the girls are playing another traditional instrument, the Brevno (please see a description of this instrument in the glossary).

'Tomorrow I have a very early start...'

THE JOURNEY BY ROAD TO OKHA  
11.11. – Saturday

An early rise at 6.00 O'clock in the morning. It's cold outside. I have no wish to get up and go to the outside toilet, but I put on a pair of tracksuit trousers over my jeans. In the kitchen the gas flame is burning and it's warm. I have some porridge, a cup of tea and a piece of bread and off I go.

The sun was already up. Galina Deminyanovna Lok (hereafter referred to as G.D. was not at the kolkhoz bus stop where we had agreed to meet, but I guessed that she had already left for the railway station from where the bus to Okha would leave and I was right. There she was, already happily ensconced in the waiting bus without any explanation. Although it was now 7.30am and the bus appeared to be about to leave, a rumour was circulating that it would only leave at 10 am.

More people than could possibly fit into the bus began to queue up and as usual, nobody knew whether there would be a *Marschrutka* (shuttle bus) going as well. In the meantime I was desperately looking for a toilet at the station, because I knew that I had 6 to 8 hours of non-stop travel ahead of me. I had also forgotten to recharge my mobile phone. Fortunately, the railroad officials had imaginatively found a great way of making some extra revenue and were charging for recharging passengers' phones! I was just getting my phone back, when I realised that there was an enormous commotion outside. The long awaited *Marschrutka* had arrived and three times the amount of passengers than could possibly fit inside it were trying to get in. At the same time, everyone in the big bus decided to get off to try to get into the *Marschrutka*, since it would leave two hours earlier than the big bus, where everyone had been shivering and waiting for it to go.

It was at this moment I realised, that despite her great difficulties in walking, G.D. had already long deserted the big bus and had beaten everyone into the shuttle bus! There she was, guarding the last seat – mine!

I grabbed my phone from the railway men and then saw that G.D. had abandoned her luggage and my rucksack in the middle of snow filled pavement. I struggled through the heaving crowd to retrieve them and once inside the *Marschrutka*, the driver pushed and secured them into a corner.

Soon, another *Marschrutka* appeared and in the end after all this chaos, everybody was comfortably seated in some form of transport or other.

We are passing Viena. The road is icy. We are travelling through a desolate landscape with kilometre after kilometre of burnt down forests. The blackened, charred tree trunks are still standing following the forest fires 20 years ago. This sight continues endlessly. Even without the signs of the forest fires, there is some sort of melancholy in

this landscape, just like in the North of Finland before the mountains of Lapland appear. We are heading on the icy roads towards the village of Val, which will be our first stop.

Here we stretch our legs and our travelling companions, two youngish Russian men in the back row, notice that I am carrying a violin case and ask me where I am going. I tell them that I am on my way to meet the Nivkhs and collect their music. When, out of courtesy, I ask them the same question, they answer "We are bandits" to which I reply that I don't believe them. They ask me why not. I reply "*Potomu chto banditi ne yezdyat na marsrutkax*" (*because bandits don't travel in shuttle buses*). After they recovered from the shock of this answer, they replied, "but we are only small bandits".

As we continue our journey, *the bandits* enquire from the other passengers about the fishing opportunities in the North. Later on I found out that in fact they were poachers, which is in itself a profession in Sakhalin.

Another indigenous people, called the Ulchi or the Oroki live in Val. There are only three hundred of them left and their main livelihood is reindeer herding. However the oil companies have almost totally destroyed this livelihood by running a gas pipeline through their herding fields. There is an oilrig nearby in the sea. There are roads and barrack like camps, built for the temporary oil company workers and their contractors all along the gas pipe route. The fingerprints of the oil industry are visible everywhere in the nature. There is a general atmosphere of apathy - almost a stigma because everything is only temporary.

Most of the Nivkhs are unemployed. Their fishing has been restricted, but the poaching is not controlled. The oil industry and the general pollution are also reducing the fish population at an alarming rate.

There is an old thin Russian man sitting in the front of the bus. Something about his appearance reminds me of an army officer. He tells us that he is a native of Okha and recounts the history of the region in detail - the earthquake in Neftegorsk when the buildings collapsed like houses of cards. He also tells us how the "imbecile bureaucrats" (as he refers to them) drained a bog, resulting in the two lakes (the main water supply) drying up completely.

After about a five-hour drive we arrive in Okha. The town is not surrounded by mountains like Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk or by forests like Nogliki. It seems much bigger than many other towns that I have seen on Sakhalin. We get out of the bus stiffly after the long trip and walk to the nearby shop, to wait for G.D.'s youngest sister, Alexandra Hurjun. She is visiting Okha on business from Nekrasovka and when we see her

we agree to meet in the evening to travel together to her home in Nekrasovka.'

#### RAISA NYENGUN

We met Natasha Propka at the market square and she brought us back to her apartment, where we would spend the afternoon before leaving for Nekrassovka in the evening. Her mother, Raisa Yakovlevna Nyengun (right) has come to Okha for the winter from a village called Rybnoe. G.D. was thrilled because she said that Raisa, or as they affectionately call her, "Baba Raija" (Grandmother Raija,



also known as Baba Raija or Efkuk) was a true master of traditional Nivkh singing. I was suspicious of this information because Natalia Mamcheva had never mentioned anything about her to me. Of course it was also possible that she did not know that Baba Raija would be in Okha. Rybnoe is a remote village on the coast, west of Okha. There is no public transport to get there. In the summer one can usually get there by car or helicopter and in the winter by motor sleigh over the ice, but at this slushy time of the year the roads are impassable. Up until this winter Baba Raija had always lived in Rybnoe. She is a tall, thin old lady and has been blind for ten years. She is 77 years old, but looks more like 90. She also calls herself Efkuk, which is her original Nivkh name. Something about the way that she speaks, reminds me of Tatiana Ulita, an old Nivkh lady who is over ninety and lives in Yuzhno Sakhalinsk. It's clear from Baba Raija Efkuk's accented Russian that her mother tongue is Nivkh.

They all laughed when I tried to imitate the Nivkh language. I have noticed on several occasions that when I ask how to say something in Nivkh the answer is always unclear. It turns out that many of our words and concepts simply don't exist in Nivkh. For example, the concept of weekdays or indeed a week does not exist for them; a month is counted from the first moon. This is actually logical because a week has nothing to do with nature's concept of time. For us it has come from the fact that God created the world in 6 days and on the seventh he rested.

We were well fed at Natasha Propka's with wonderful food that included fish in various forms. Nivkhs eat fish raw (*stroganino*), salted, cooked, baked, fried and prepared in the middle of a fire. Smoking has only been introduced in modern times as a result of the Russian

influence. In fact I never ate anything smoked when I was with the Nivkhs. With the fish they eat fresh berries, i.e. blueberries, cloudberry, red whortleberries, cranberries, Kamchatka bilberries and crowberries. Nowadays many Nivkhs have become allergic to fish and they say that it is because the fish have become "sick".

Naturally we discussed fish and fishing. Baba Raija indignantly sniffed as she told me how the waters have been polluted with rotten fish. "In my day", she said, "we used every part of the fish, even the skin. Now the poachers just remove the caviar from the fish and throw the rest of the fish back in the water or onto the beaches to rot."

Although Baba Raija had only been in Okha for a short time, she doesn't want to stay there and wants to return to her village where, despite being blind, she had managed for many years. She felt that there wasn't enough air in the apartment, although despite it being November, the window was open.

The conversations with Baba Raija mainly took place in Nivkh; I didn't find it appropriate to ask her to sing immediately and decided to wait until our return when we would stay overnight with her and her daughter, Natasha Propka. (right)



## NEKRASOVKA

That night I travelled with G.D. and her sister, Alexandra Hurjun, to Nekrasovka. The *Marschrutka* picked us up at Natasha Propka's place. There were lots of other Nivkhs travelling from there too and the journey was a merry one with the Nivkh driver Vitya, joining in all the conversations, giving it an air of a private ride more than a bus ride. It seemed that the Nivkhs had all agreed amongst themselves what time they would all set off back for Nekrasovka after the day in Okha. Nekrasovka is so small that everyone knows each other and they all know Vitya. It was already dark when we arrived in the so-called "New Nekrasovka", which is made up of low lying two story blocks of flats. Here at the home of Alexandra Hurjun, a shabby dog greeted us. It had just come from the forest and was soaking everything and everyone with its wet through waving tail. The flat was full of people and things were scattered everywhere. The dark corridor had a musty smell. In the middle of all this chaos stood a snazzy TV that was blasting out a Russian entertainment programme, which the head of the family, Alexandra's husband, was watching. He had just come back from the forest and didn't seem to be in a mood to talk. Everywhere in Russia

the TV is like a member of the family, that is always audible, regardless of whether anyone is listening or not.

Alexandra Hurjun is a journalist at the only Nivkh language newspaper. It is published in Nekrasovka. She studied in Leningrad where she had been a member of the famous Severnayoe Siyaniye Ensemble. Unlike most of her generation, I am told that she speaks excellent Nivkh. If anybody is an example of a modern and confident Nivkh, it is Alexandra Hurjun, but this is not surprising as her foster mother, the late Olga Anatolievna Njavan was one off the most famous masters of the Nivkh traditions. Njavan had heard authentic Shamans in her childhood and had memorised the beats of the Shaman drum. She was one of the few masters of the Tinrin and also played the Vargan.

Alexandra Hurjun kept her flock in control. Apart from her children, grandchildren and some relatives, the two orphaned children of her late friend were also living with her. Before we left to spend the night in her late friend's empty flat, she fed us with seal meat and other delicacies, which she was very surprised that I ate. We watched the "Stars on Ice" show on TV, but I thought that I would have preferred to watch the stars in the sky or even more than that - to go to bed. Before leaving Alexandra, we made arrangements for the next day. I was a bit worried because Alexandra Laigun of the Sakhalin Administration in Yuzhno Sakhalinsk had organised for me to stay with her friend, Zoya Lyutova, but I couldn't be impolite to my hosts either. However, I asked permission to telephone Zoya Lyutova. 'What do you want?' she asked me bluntly when I rang her. I decided to be equally blunt back and said that I was calling at the recommendation of Laigun and I would like to meet, but I hadn't been able to call her from Nogliki. Obviously, I couldn't explain to her why I couldn't stay with her, but we agreed to meet the next day.

Finally we left for the flat where we would spend the night. It was in a two-storey block of flats and had recently been renovated. For the first time since leaving Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk I was able to have a shower.

12.11. - Sunday

In the morning I met with Alexandra Hurjun again and we went by foot through the forest to Old Nekrasovka. G.D. in the meantime had decided to spend the day visiting all her friends in New Nekrassovka. Spruces lined the steep and icy path and Alexandra started to have second thoughts about taking this route.

Staraya Nekrasovka (Old Nekrasovka) is an old *kolkhoz* from Soviet times. It is a grey and run down village with wooden houses, which are built on a hilly landscape overlooking the gulf.

Since ancient times and until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the Nivkhs lived in covered dugouts or in Ambars. During the Soviet period the settlements were transformed into combined villages, which then became fishing *kolkhozes* (fishing collectives). These included, amongst others, Rybnoe, Rybnovsk, Tengi and Novaya Nekrasovka.



When these were abolished, the villages became deserted and the people from the Northern villages mainly moved to Nekrasovka, which was then expanded with apartment blocks and became known as Novaya Nekrasovka (New Nekrasovka).

We were on our way to meet Zoya Lyutova, who lives in the last house of Novaya Nekrasovka, which is on the very edge of the Gulf. En route we went to a shop to buy her some gifts. A Nivkh never goes to visit another Nivkh without bringing something. Fortunately Alexandra had no inhibitions about advising me what to buy – tea, chocolate and biscuits.

We walked through the small corridor into Zoya Lyutova's cosy and neat kitchen. Upon seeing it I so wished that I had stayed there overnight. On the telephone I had had a completely different impression of our hostess, who in fact was all smiles and extremely hospitable. We were immediately invited to the breakfast table, which was filled with fried fish and crowberries mixed in mashed potatoes amongst other goodies.



Zoya Ivanovna Lyutova is the former choreographer and coach of a local folk ensemble. She dressed up for us in her beautiful national costume, which I photographed. In order to show my gratitude I played the violin for her – first something classical and then part of my composition on Nivkh themes. I was struck by their immediate appreciation. Music changed the atmosphere immediately and all barriers came down. Zoya (left) took out Natalia Mamcheva's book on Nivkh music and asked me to play some of the melodies notated there. They eagerly kept asking me to play one melody after another, sometimes asking me to play a little slower and nodding their heads in approval.

Then we left together for the school where the Pila Ken Folk (below) Ensemble was already waiting for us. They didn't perform at our 2004 Pacific Rim Music Festival in Nogliki because the museum in Nekrasovka had just burnt down and all their instruments and costumes were destroyed. Alexandra Hurjun's colleague, Larissa Lukinichna Ivanova came instead to sing at the festival as the representative of the northern Nivkhs. The children were ready and waiting for us in their national costumes. The announcement of each piece to be played was blasted through a microphone in the very small schoolroom. After this the leader sang a song and all the children ran on to the stage, beating their sticks in a monotonous manner. However, the boys' pieces with rope jumping were very skilful and a joy to watch. Alexandra asked me to play for the children and I began with some Vivaldi, which they listened to completely motionless. Then when I played excerpts of their own music, they suddenly had the bright idea that if they sang songs to me, I could play them on tape for them so that they could use them in the future, which I did happily.



One little girl sang a very modern version of an old Nivkh song into the microphone. That made me reflect on how quickly they are losing their old traditions even though they live quite far from the mainstream culture. Yet how could it be otherwise when TV and radio are blaring out the same things for them as they are for us, making our aural world identical?

Later when we drank tea together, I tried to encourage them to listen to the recorded material, which is included with Natalia Mamcheva's book of notations, in order to find more interesting rhythms.

Meanwhile outside, the wind had gathered force. Alexandra and I said good-bye to Zoya Lyutova and once again went via the shop before our next visit. The name of the shop was *Ulibka* (Smile). "Open from 10 AM to 6.00 PM" was written in red on a white plate. The shop is on the top of a hill and once upon a time its walls must have been painted green. Inside it was cosy, but the selection was the same as everywhere- bread, biscuits and chocolate.



The next person we visited was another Zoya, Zoya Vasilievna Laigun, who originally comes from the Smidt Peninsula, the most northern part of Sakhalin. She showed us old pictures and told us how they lived there in the 50's and how the children were moved to schools in dog sleighs in the winter, only seeing their parents during the holidays. Nowadays people only travel to the Smidt Peninsula for fishing or berry picking and hardly anyone lives there all the year round any more.

Zoya Vasilievna Laigun fed us with fish, tea, berries and biscuits. Whilst sitting on her sofa, I started to feel terribly itchy, but didn't think much of it and once again played my violin in gratitude, which was received very warmly.

The wind outside had developed into a snowstorm. Alexandra was very hesitant about walking back on the icy path that was so full of

snow, but there was no transportation between these two parts of the village. I was actually quite happy to walk after all the sitting, eating and tea drinking. During our visit to Old Nekrasovka I had not seen a single car, but suddenly, one appeared in the middle of the snow. To my astonishment it was Vitya (the Marschrutka driver who had brought us from Okha) with apparently the only car in Old Nekrasovka! He took us back to New Nekrasovka via a longer route. I thanked him and went home to practice a little and to write down my experiences.

Whilst I practised and rested, my travelling companion from Nogliki, G.D. had been going from one visit to another and was now having a rest with her sister, so I had a chance to be by myself for awhile. In the evening I waded through the snow for dinner at Alexandra Hurjun's (via the shop). I joined the whole family in making *varyeniki* (minced meat in dough in boiling water), which we ate with salted fish. By now the itch in my arm had grown worse and a row of red dots had appeared. Everybody was sure that I had some kind of allergic reaction to fish and the doctor in the neighbouring flat gave me tablets to take. I personally did not believe that it was an allergy and was convinced that fleas, which had smelt an exotic foreign skin on Zoya Vasilevna's sofa, had decided to take a nip at me. I didn't take any of the tablets that were given to me and sure enough, no further "allergic reactions" occurred and in a few days the bites stopped itching.

Now it's nighttime. There's a snowstorm outside and the snow is beating on the windowpane. There is more than a metre of it. There is no mobile connection here unless I hang my mobile on the window handle. Then a line might appear. I am trying to send text messages to Moscow and to Finland to say that I am alive. Suddenly I receive a text message from our musician, Dima in Moscow, to inform me that a typhoon has hit the Japanese coast and that it's on its way to Sakhalin and Kamchatka. I'm wondering if the storm outside is the tail end of it.

13.11. – Monday

By morning the wind had subsided and the snowstorm had turned into rain. As I looked out the window I remembered that during our first visit to Yuzhno Sakhalinsk, one of our musicians remarked to me that it reminded him of his hometown of Grozny before the war. I reflected on the fact that so often the depressing scenes, which we see from Chechnya, are considered to be as a result of the war. Of course the most of the damage is because of the war. However, looking out at the sight of these run down houses and slushy roads with their potholes, symbolises the depressing scenes that one finds throughout post Soviet Russia - from Karelia to the Far East, from the Arctic Circle to Chechnya.

Today we visited a former primary school teacher of the Nivkh language, Svetlana Filimonovna Vidain. She vividly described her childhood in the village of Tengji and related how the Nivkhs lived in great harmony in their settlements, i.e. if someone hauled in a great catch of fish, he automatically distributed it amongst all the clans. She also told me a very funny story about her meeting with the legendary ethnographer, Yerukhim Kreinovich, when she young and was studying in Leningrad. He had come to visit one of her fellow Nivkh students in order to hear the Northern Nivkh dialect. However he didn't identify himself to the young Svetlana in case she would be shy in front of him. Svetlana, who had no idea who he was, asked her friend in the Nivkh language, 'So who's this old greybeard?' Her eyes nearly popped out of her head when Kreinovich with a twinkle in his eye and in fluent Nivkh introduced himself!

Svetlana started to teach the Nivkh language at the beginning of the 80's. In her childhood the children were not allowed to speak Nivkh in school, although she told me that some of the children actually succeeded in teaching their Russian teachers some Nivkh. In those days everybody spoke Nivkh at home. When I asked her, she told me that she had never seen Shamans in her childhood. This confirmed what I already knew - that the children who were born in the Soviet period had never seen Shamans because Shamanism was forbidden in the USSR.

It was surprising for me how the Nivkhs discussed environmental problems; Svetlana told me how the temperatures had definitely risen and that the periods of the so called "weather breaks" (a term used throughout the north for the period when the ice begins to crack and the snow crust softens, making the roads or any territory impassable) had become shorter. She said that formerly winter had always arrived by this time of year. There was also a great difference in the way the Nivkhs had lived in earlier times. They never left any waste behind, as everything was used completely. There was also a great respect nature. For example, when her father cut down a tree, he made an offering to the earth for forgiveness and an appeal that the wood might be good and strong for the building of a boat or a house.

Once again we ate like kings with whortleberries, crowberries and mashed potato mixed with raw and cooked fish. I was told that in the "old days" the fresh berries were mixed with the fish and that sugar was never added to preserve the berries.

I thanked Svetlana Filimonovna Vidain for the wonderful meal and took the chance to walk home before it began to rain. By now the snow had melted and outside the entrance to the apartment building there was a huge pool of water. Had the door to the entrance been open I could perhaps have jumped over the pool, but since it wasn't, I found

two bricks nearby and put them into the pool of water on top of each other, to use as stepping-stones in order to reach the door handle. Once at home I practiced for awhile and then went out again...

I am now skidding over the slush of mud and ice on the potholed road to Old Nekrasovka, where I want to take some photographs. Along the road some Nivkh children on their way home from school greet me. I ask them what the best way to get to the sea is and in a very friendly manner they tell me which way to go. Since I am passing my favourite shop "Smile". I pop in to buy a bar of chocolate. Inside two drunken Russians are having a fight.



Such incidents occur completely by chance, yet they create an impression of a country and of its people. The shorter a visit to a country the more quickly one's conclusions are formed from such incidents.

Now it's raining and I am starting to get wet through and it's difficult to walk in this slush. I look across the road and spot a hilarious sight. In the middle of the grey and run down courtyard opposite, there is a new, shiny bright blue Toyota, looking for all the world as though it's been put there to decorate the dull landscape!

After completing my photographic excursion, I go home and dry my clothes before going to Alexandra's for dinner. My shoes are dripping with water. Suddenly there is a ring on the door. Alexandra, realising what the weather was like, had sent her daughter's friend (who was also living with her child at Alexandra's) with a huge pair of galoshes for me. In order for my feet to stay in the boots, I put on layers of socks.

That evening, Alexandra interviewed me for the Nivkh language newspaper and also gave me a recording of Larissa Lukinichna to listen to. I notated some of the melodies, but they already represented the modern way of singing. In the old style, the melody either finishes when the words stop, or simply comes to an abrupt end. However in this new style, the singers make a *ritardando* (slowing down) at the end. In earlier times the singers were not “performers” and actually the Nivkh language has no word for “performer”. Stories were told through singing, work was accompanied with singing and children were put to sleep by singing. Sometimes people gathered together in the evenings to compete with each other by singing.

Before each song on Larissa Lukinichna’s recording, Alexandra Hurjun had recorded descriptions of the old Nivkh traditions, whilst the ancient instruments played in the background. Suddenly, during her final explanation of ancient Nivkh costumes, Pachelbel’s Canon rang out in the instantly recognisable recording by the *Jean Pierre Paillard* Chamber Orchestra. “What on earth is Pachelbel’s Canon doing here?!” I cried. I got an equally astonished exclamation back: “PACHEL CHIVO??” (PACHEL WHAT??)

That night I reflected on my experiences in Nekrasovka. I had known before hand that I would not hear traditional singing here since all of the old generation had died, but I had wanted to experience the atmosphere and to see the conditions of Nekrasovka where, apart from Nogliki, most of the Sakhalin Nivkhs live.

## BACK TO OKHA

14.11. – Tuesday

It is an early start back to Okha.

During the night the weather had gradually started to get colder. By the time G.D. and I arrive in Okha, the pools of water on the roads have all turned to ice. Everywhere along the road we saw fully operational oil-drilling sites. We arrived at Baba Raija’s (Baba Efukuk’s) where we were going to stay that night. We leave our luggage and have a morning cup of tea. Alexandra Hurjun (left) was with also us. Afterwards she told me that Baba Raija reminded her of her foster mother, Olga Njavan, whom she had nursed at home until she died. She also gave me a piece of advice. If I



wanted to get Baba Raija to sing, it would be advisable to buy a small bottle of vodka!

Alexandra and I went to visit the Russian head of the Department of Culture, Lena Alexandrovna Koryeva. She received us very warmly and was very eager to organise concerts by Ensemble XXI in Okha. We were shown the "House of Culture" concert hall, which was acoustically far superior to anything in Yuzhno Sakhalinsk.

We also visited the music school where we met the Rector and some of the music teachers. One of the violin teachers was delighted to meet me because she had heard so much about our orchestra. Some of her colleagues had even travelled all the way to Yuzhno Sakhalinsk to observe our master classes there. Since then they had been hoping that we would come to Okha to give a concert too. Had I not had so many meetings, I would have loved to stay longer to chat with them. We briefly visited the Okha Regional Museum and had tea with the Russian curator who is a colleague of Alla Siskova's, the Ethnomusicologist whom I had originally rung for contacts when she was in Vladivostok. However, I knew that the most important purpose of my visit was yet to come.

During my stay in Nekrasovka, I had studied Natalia Mamcheva's book and discovered several examples of Baba Raija's singing. They had all been recorded between 1981 and 1990 when Baba Raija was still living in her home village of Rybnoe. Natalia Mamcheva had clearly not expected me to meet Baba Raija (Efkuk).

#### ZOYA AGNYUN VERSUS JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Before this though, the son of the late Zoya Agnyun had invited us to his home. Zoya Ivanovna Agnyun was an Amur Nivkh who had been one of the most important masters of the Nivkh traditional heritage. Her Shaman singing had captured my attention from Natalia Mamcheva's books and recordings. Lidia Muvchik believed that Zoya Agnyun had Shamanic powers because when she performed in concerts as a Shaman, she actually went into a trance and could not be stopped and had to be taken off the stage.

I had heard her on tape, but when I saw her on a video I felt that her singing was coming from far far away - from ancient times. During her lengthy Shaman performance, she stopped only once to have a sip of water. The same themes that I had used in my composition in 2004 were recognisable with variations when she sang them. The Nivkhs have a saying: "what comes into my head, I sing". This is a typical phrase, but only a few can do it in practice. In Zoya Agnyun's case this phrase became a reality.

Zoya Agnyun's son is an engineering specialist in the oil industry. The wealth was evident when I entered his apartment. The table was

groaning with the usual Nivkh hospitality, but he already represented a new generation of Nivkhs. Such Nivkhs can only be found in business and administrative circles.

I am playing part of Zoya Agnyun's song to her son on my violin. He reacts as though I am desecrating a relic. It hurts me deeply. I ask myself, why am I doing this work? Am I doing the right thing? Am I destroying the original music, although what I want is to instil it in people's conscience? Suddenly his rejection clarifies my thoughts and I address these to him directly. I tell him that my relationship with the Nivkh music is completely subjective. I tell him that I am not trying to *arrange* it or pretending that this is the way it was originally played, because that is impossible. I am reacting to this ancient music, with its roots in the Stone Age and this is my natural response, which I express through my violin. I use the Nivkh melodies as building blocks and by their very nature they influence the whole structure that will evolve. It doesn't need to please anyone –not even the Nivkhs. The only thing that I need to do is to be honest to myself and that for me is enough. After this I play the Andante of the Bach A Minor solo sonata. I am still under the influence of Zoya Agnyun's Shaman singing and of her son's reaction to my playing; it can be heard in my playing – almost as if I were answering Zoya Agnyun on the other side. The son becomes silent and I see that his eyes are tearful. The music has affected him. "What was that music?" he asked. I told him that it was music composed over 300 years ago by Johann Sebastian Bach. The name seems to be familiar to him. "Of course I know of Bach", he answers. I love his Moonlight Sonata" I try to discreetly correct this mistake, mentioning that actually it was Beethoven who wrote this piece, but he does not believe me. I give up. Does it really matter, whether it was Bach, Beethoven or the Nivkh master Zoya Agnyun? When music effects - that is the miracle.

#### BABA EFKUK SINGS

'Finally it's evening. I have already asked Natasha Propka if it was all right to bring her mother, Baba Raija, some vodka. She laughed and said that she would join us too. Baba Raija is the same as Tatiana Ulita – they both need to quaff



some Arak (vodka) to “loosen” their vocal chords. Baba Raija becomes somewhat giddy at the prospect of being able to whet her whistle and has been waiting for this moment for somewhat different reasons from me!

After our first shots have been drunk and before I get the tape recorder started, Baba Raija has already begun singing! I immediately recognised the Northern (Amur Nivkh) style of singing, which is rhythmically clearer and sharper than that of the Southern Nivkhs. Unlike the Southern Nivkhs there is clear structure of verses, which varies each time. She then stopped singing and so to encourage her I took up her song on the violin, whereupon she immediately began singing again enthusiastically. After this G.D. asks Baba Raija to sing a particular song, but her daughter, Natasha reacts with irritation in her voice saying ‘let mother sing as she wants’. Baba Raija reacts to all this with an indignant exclamation, ‘are we not getting another shot of vodka?!’ We all burst into laughter and pour another round, but Baba Raija is silent. I am terribly disappointed and decide to use another tactic. I take my violin again and tell her that I will play for her. When she hears me plucking the strings of the violin she wants to touch it. The blind Baba Raija gently caresses the curved outline of the violin and then touches the strings. I play her the Kalevala theme. Everyone listens in silence. Then I imitate the sound of the Tinrin for her. This is already familiar to her and she answers me with a long song – a song that is more complicated than the ones that she has sung for me before.

Instead of being in 4, it contains 3 or 5 beats. The Minor and Major thirds interchange. Her voice is low and strong and she is in full flight. She also begins to sing about me and how I have come from far, far away and made a long journey to hear her sing. She sings that I am half a century too late. Everyone becomes tearful and silence descends on the room. Even G.D. is fighting back tears. I think to myself that the whole journey was worthwhile for this alone.

We are all fifty years too late; we are a hundred years too late. The continuation of this unique tradition of singing is dependant on only a handful of old masters. They know themselves how valuable their heritage is, but they have rarely been listened to. The younger generations have not learned the same way as their parents did from the older generations, because they were sent away from home to the boarding schools, thus breaking the oral tradition.

Baba Efkuk (Raija) rises from her chair in a dignified manner because she is already tired. That night she sleeps a long, good and deep sleep. Even in the morning when we wake up she is still sleeping. I start to get worried. Was yesterday too much for this old lady? However, Natasha laughs and says that she hasn’t seen her mother

sleep so soundly and for so long in many years. Luckily though, Baba Raija (Efkuk) wakes up before I leave. I am able to say good-bye to her and she wishes me a very safe trip.

## BACK TO NOGLIKI

15.11. – Wednesday

We bounced towards Nogliki in an *Ensas*, which the locals refer to as a “tank”. It is a type of lorry, which is supposedly “safe” on icy roads. The sun was shining directly in my eyes. A towering and enormous Russian woman sat beside me and greeted me with a wide smile full of gold teeth under framed by moustache. Sandwiched between the freezing edge of my window seat and her gigantic bottom, I struggled to get some sleep during the 6-hour trip and partly succeeded. Another obstacle was the thundering noise that the “tank” made and the fact that it was totally separated from the driver’s cabin. As a result the driver happily turned the heating up or down as it pleased him whilst the “cargo department” (us) alternated between being in a deep freeze or a furnace.

As the sun shone through the filthy windows so that one couldn’t even see the scenery, I pulled the curtain across. The “tank” made regular stops, but I only got out once in Val.

Finally when we arrived at our destination, the Nogliki train station, I decided to find out about the train timetables to Chir-Unvd. I travelled “home” to Margarita’s from the station in a *Marschrutka* and found her in the middle of a big clothes-washing day. I was so tired that I didn’t go anywhere that night, but went straight to bed.

G.D. (centre) flanked by local supporters before boarding the *Ensas*!



16.11. – Thursday

I once more went to see G.D. to thank her for travelling with me to Okha and Nekrasovka. She seemed to be satisfied with the trip and promised to send me some salty fish when her sister travelled to Yuzhno Sakhalinsk in some days.

The rest of the day I spent chatting with Margarita and her family. She seemed to have lost some of her old enthusiasm. On my previous trip to Sakhalin she had been full of ideas and had managed to find funding for them. For example she had founded her own organisation for the rehabilitation of alcoholics and had funded their treatment. One of these alcoholics, a young woman, was still living with her and Margarita was trying to find work for her. She had also sought funding for the reconstruction of an authentic Nivkh village and had got that too. All her children were weaving and sewing traditional Nivkh handicrafts. She had also founded a folk ensemble, Plaiuf, which had given one of the most successful performances in Ensemble XXI's 2004 Pacific Rim Music Festival. At that time they had moved away from Russian pop music and had instead started to use their own national rhythms making great progress in a very short time. That is actually an extraordinary list of achievements for one person who, apart from all of this, feeds her whole family and accommodates anyone who needs help in her home. Is she too successful? Too capable? There are many envious people around her and that tires her out. She wants a change. A new start somewhere else. (former page: Margarita's family)

17.11. – Friday

In the morning I went out to photograph the kolkhoz area. Lyuba, Margarita's daughter came with me as my guide. I told her that I wanted to photograph old houses. When she realised what I was photographing, she started to look for even more run down huts, enquiring from me 'is this dilapidated enough for you?' By the afternoon the snow was falling heavily and I insisted that Margarita and her children would not come to see me off. Instead I left for the railway station by taxi wondering all the while if we were going to be trapped in the snow.

CHIR-UNVD

I am comfortably sitting in the train on my way to Ada-Timova where I will be met. My mood is somewhat sombre because of Margarita and I am wondering how I could help her, but now the train jolts into motion and begins to move out of the station and I start to feel excited. Outside the snow is falling even more heavily and the train crawls along. It is interesting to travel in a seating carriage and observe the

other passengers. Many of them either can't afford to pay for a sleeper or, like me, are travelling only a short distance.

I arrived at the Ada-Timova station in the early evening in the middle of a heavy snowstorm. The conductor (in Russian trains every carriage has a conductor who looks after the passengers, providing bed linen, cups of tea and wakeup calls) told me to be careful getting off as one can sink into the snow.

I sank into the snow right up to my hips. The train stopped for only one minute and I was the only passenger getting off; the snow was swirling around me and I cursed my heavy rucksack. Why on earth had I taken all my violin music and my camera weighing at least a kilo? Somewhere in the midst of the snowstorm I saw the lights of the car that I had been told would be waiting to drive me to the village of Chir-Unvd. I waded towards it and spotting an SUV, made a mental note of the life style of Chir-Unvd inhabitants. I did not yet know that there is a total of three SUVs in Chir-Unvd – all of them owned by the man meeting me! He turned out to be the "Head of Chir-Unvd village" and the brother of Nadezhda Laigun, the Sakhalin Governor's Representative of Sakhalin's Indigenous peoples.

As I approached the car, an automatic window slid down. I greeted the driver and asked him if he was meeting me. "Are you Pia?" "Yes". He nodded brusquely. I opened the rear door and struggled to haul my rucksack up on to the backseat and then "mounted" the backseat of the SUV myself. The brother of the Governor's Representative of Sakhalin's Indigenous peoples and "Head of Chir-Unvd village" remained seated.

We set off on the winding road where the ice had not yet set on the potholes in the road; it was only a journey of 20 kilometres, but we had to travel very slowly because of the potholes, which were covered with snow. Finally I saw the Nivkh village of Chir-Unvd dozing in the midst of the pure white snow. I saw two story wooden houses in front of me; we stopped in front of one of them. Further down the village road, the snow-covered gables of little houses were faintly visible.

Lydia Romanovna Otlonova (left), a sweet elderly Nivkh lady and the curator of the Chir-Unvd museum, with whom I would stay, welcomed me



downstairs. We climbed the stairs of the wooden house to her second floor flat and were greeted enthusiastically by two dogs. Lydia Romanovna's flat was neat, cosy and warm. In the kitchen the fire was crackling. The fire also served to warm the water pipes throughout the apartment – a kind of independent central heating system. A cupboard in the corner of the apartment had been turned into a little bathroom. The water system consisted of a receptacle above the sink with two stems. When one jolted one of the stems upwards, water poured out of the other stem into the sink and through it into a bucket under the sink. The kitchen had the same system. The used water was then brought outside and poured away. Outside, beside the woodshed, there was a common toilet used by all the inhabitants of all eight apartments in the house. Clean water was drawn from one of three wells in the



village and carried home in buckets. (Above: The Chir-Unvd Town Hall!) At this time of the year Lydia Romanovna heats her apartment twice a day. Her cooking range, which was made of bricks and covered with plaster, was cracked in several places and as a result part of the heat escaped. Although some warmth passed through into the other rooms, they were still much colder. She had recently renovated the whole flat herself and the difference between her flat and the neighbours' flat was like night and day. The people next door invited us in to look at some handicrafts and every corner of the flat was dirty and the whole place was run down, shabby and smelly.

That night Lydia Romanovna gave me a delicious supper in the warm kitchen. Apart from the normal gifts, I had brought her fresh bread from Nogliki because I had heard that it was seldom available in Chir-Unvd. I noticed how she divided it and carefully put it aside to be shared with others the next day.

18.11. – Saturday

In the morning Lydia Romanovna and I walked to the museum, which is located in the school building. In the middle of the village there was a wooden one-story house painted a cheerful bright green. This was the Town Hall, the village shop and the library. On the way we met

Galina Dmitrievna Vogzibina (right) who was the librarian; she was a reserved, quiet-spoken lady who had an old fashioned air about her. Later on we visited her library, which consisted of only a few shelves with some dog-eared volumes. Two little girls were sitting in the corner reading aloud to each other.



#### THE CALL OF THE KALNI

Antonina Vasilievna Shkaligina entered the museum and immediately hugged me as if we already knew each other (hugging is not very typical amongst the Nivkhs). In 2004 we had waited for her at Ensemble XXI's Pacific Rim Music Festival to play the Kalni - an instrument, which is made from the stem of Giant Hogweed. Unfortunately she was unable to come at that time. This time I had especially asked my host, Lydia Romanovna, to organise a meeting with Antonina Shkaligina (right) who is the former leader of the Kekh (Seagull) Folk Music and Dance Ensemble. There she performed alongside the famous and skilful *Brevno* soloist, Ulyana Sergeevna Bagrina as well as the beautiful low voiced folk singer Anna Stepanovna Khadzigan, both of whom have unfortunately since died. Antonina herself possesses a beautiful low voice, but at first was too shy to sing to me. She said that a bear had stepped on her ear (a Russian saying, which means that a person doesn't have a musical ear). She was full of praise for her former colleagues with whom she had travelled to Japan

and even to New York. She recalled Manhattan, 'When we walked and looked up at those buildings, our heads were spinning'.

It was hard to believe that this slightly bent over old lady who was standing in front of me had seen the world so widely. Maybe her almost childlike openness came from the fact that she had performed a lot. It took a great deal of persuasion on my part for her to agree to sing for me, but finally she did. The style of her singing was clearly related to the way in which Tatiana Ulita or Lidia Muvchik sing. The recitative like singing and the gentle, constantly changing rhythms with the large tremolo at the end of phrases is characteristic for all singers from Chir-Unvd. This demonstrates the music's ancient origins. For centuries these Nivkhs have been more isolated than those who live in the North and therefore their music has been less effected by outside influences.

After this Antonina (below) also took the Kalni (the Nivkh trumpet) and sang into it. Her voice strengthened remarkably. The range of her tremolos was made up of major seconds and major sixths. When she had played together with Anna Khadzigan in former times, Antonina



always started from a higher note in the range of about an octave, changing the intervals in a slower tempo. Khadzigan started from a lower note and stayed "inside" Antonina's range, which reached an augmented fourth as she changed her intervals more frequently in order to take regular breaths, since singing through the tube is very strenuous. It created a most interesting and melodically rich structure. In Nogliki I had also heard a Kalni duet. The intervals and rhythms, both individually and between the players are random, depending on each person's voice range and breathing technique. The final result however, was always harmonious and reminiscent of the honking sounds made by flocks of swans or cranes. I have experienced the same sensation in Orthodox Churches, when the choir sings in one

tonality and tempo and the Priest responds in another tempo and in random intervals, regardless of what the choir is singing.

## CHIR-UNVD STORIES AND PRESENT TIMES



Julia Ivanovna Miglut (left) who makes handicrafts joined our company in the library. Together they began to tell me about old Nivkh traditions and what life was like in the old days in Chir-Unvd. Unlike the other *kolkhozes* where Nivkhs lived and worked, the Chir-Unvd *kolkhoz* was a farming, as opposed to a fishing *kolkhoz*. During the Soviet period many Mordovans (a Finno-Ugric people in Central Russia) moved to this area, which resulted in mixed marriages between Russians, Nivkhs and the Mordovans. Chir-Unvd is located inland on the rich plains of the Timovsk region. Vegetables and corn were grown and cattle were bred here. Now everything has stopped and there is no work available; however unemployment is not the only problem. Poaching is the main problem in the coastal areas, but in Chir-Unvd (which is inland) the forests are being cut down to such an extent, that when the rivers flood, the soil is washed away by the water. This is because the trees are no longer there to keep the earth together. In a place like Sakhalin, with its great rains and snowfalls, this is disastrous.

Nivkh tea drinking sessions can last all day as one story follows another and in the old days they sometimes lasted several days! I got a lot of interesting information about the various Nivkh clans. Nivkhs often refer to other Nivkhs as their sisters and brothers. This in a way is true, since in earlier times the daughters of one clan were given to another clan, but the sons of the clan, where the daughters had come from, took their wives from yet another clan. As a result there was no intermarriage. The code of behaviour in regard to faithfulness was also interesting. Whilst it was acceptable for the younger brothers to have intercourse with the oldest brother's wife, the oldest brother was not allowed to touch the younger brothers' wives, as they were deemed to be the same as his sisters. It was not unusual for women to marry several times, as they generally outlived the men. During our conversation, they talked a lot about Russification. This was clearly a very sore point for Antonina Shkaligina, who on more than one occasion broke into the conversation and repeated the same phrase 'When we were children, Russians derided us when we spoke Nivkh and sneeringly cried, 'aren't you able to speak Russian or what?' Anything that was part of the Nivkh culture was considered laughable and shameful. On the other hand, as the Nivkhs themselves pointed

out, when the kolkhoz was still functioning, everybody at least had an income.

That same day we bumped into Raisa (I only know her first name) a writer of fairy tales. I had last met her a couple of years previously, during our Pacific Rim Music Festival in Nogliki. She was now in Chir-Unvd collecting material and "searching for inspiration". "Searching for inspiration my foot!" cried the Nivkhs indignantly later. 'She doesn't speak any Nivkh and just writes down our legends in Russian!' However, she was quite kind to me and gave me a tape of the rich and expressive singing of a real Nivkh-Shaman, called Nakamura (recorded in the 1950's in Japan), which I used as material in my composition *Nivkh Themes*. At the end of the Soviet - Japanese War of 1945, Nakamura was taken to Japan along with the entire indigenous Ainu population of Sakhalin.

It is certainly not difficult to find inspiration in Chir-Unvd. The entire village uses wood heating and all the water is drawn from wells and there is neither drainage nor a sewage system. Along the main village road one can see lovely log houses, but they are all run down. The air is clean as there is no transport. The public transport between Chir-Unvd and Timovsk is almost non-existent. One sees no cars, yet the "Head of the Village" owns three newly renovated log houses in the middle of the village. He uses them as garages for his three SUVs. He also has a registered *Rodovoe Hazyiastvo* - a kind of "Huntin' Shootin' and Fishin' " business. This means having the legal right to make a livelihood from hunting, fishing or private farming. Recently there has been a proliferation of such organisations. Some say that they are fronts for poaching, but there are some that are genuine and trying to recreate the old Nivkh lifestyle. The fact of the matter is that fishing, hunting or berry picking, either legal or illegal, are the only means for most Nivkhs to survive.

Finally as the day ended, I walked around the older part of the village before going "home" to Lydia Romanovna's. Before it got dark, firewood and water had to be brought in for the evening. She was somewhat surprised when I offered to help, but I assured her that I was no stranger to this and had often done it in Finland. That evening we were invited to her son's place where there was a private Banya (A bath house). He lives in the newer part of Chir-Unvd, which was built in the 1980's. The houses are not privately owned, but rather were built for the workers of the *kolkhoz*. The Banya had no dressing room area, so I tried to dress in the Banya itself and got wet through; I stepped out into the adjoining corridor, which was freezing and dressed there and not surprisingly I caught a cold. The son's wife was a friendly Russian lady who had just baked delicious pies. According to Lydia Romanovna this lady has "green fingers" and grows all her own

vegetables in the garden. I got the impression that the Nivkhs, unlike the Russians, are not very enthusiastic gardeners. They prefer to go into the forest to pick berries or to go fishing and hunting. However, it is a fact that with all the tumultuous changes over the last decade in Russia, had it not been for Russians growing their own produce and preserving it for winter from Moscow to Sakhalin, many would not have survived.

Today Sakhalin is one of the richest oil producing regions in the world. All the international oil companies are competing for the profits from oil and gas. Yet at the same time many Russian and Nivkh families in the villages and the towns depend on the pensions of their babushkas. In order to survive, the Nivkhs make their living from the nature, but the condition of the nature is rapidly deteriorating. The fish are disappearing at an alarming rate and it's difficult to catch even the quotas that are allowed. Poaching has not been contained and the forests that haven't been destroyed by fires are either being razed to the ground for senseless logging or brutally levelled to make way for the gas pipelines. The berry harvests are also seriously deteriorating. Both the nature and the lives of the indigenous peoples are being destroyed apace.

Later in the evening Lydia Romanovna told me how she had been part of expeditions organised by some Sakhalin and international environmentalists. They had gone on foot, along what should be pristine beaches, to collect all the rubbish that had been dumped in the sea by industry and by individuals and then throw on to the beaches by the tide. Yet they refuse to lose hope and continue to soldier on...

19.11. – Sunday

Yesterday I telephoned the leader of the local children's folk ensemble, Tatiana Alexandrovna Shkaligina (I think that she may be related through her husband to Antonina Shkaligina) to arrange a meeting with her. She asked very haughtily what I wanted and I was tempted to reply, 'Nothing, I was just ringing you out of politeness.' However we met at the museum, so that the children could perform for me. At first Tatiana Shkaligina was somewhat distant, but gradually she seemed to relax. The children of the ensemble performed a dance for me and she declared, that the way in which her ensemble uses rhythms, is much more diverse than the other ensembles. Personally I couldn't hear any difference and in fact, Antonina and I showed them more about how the Brevno could be used.

Everywhere I have been amazed at how little the leaders of the various ensembles ask advice from the older people, i.e. how to play rhythms and how to dance. They just use the "grannies" as an extra exotic flavour in the performances of individual pieces, but they don't

take advantage of their skills or knowledge. All the Brevno performers of the younger generation play the instrument in a monotonous and dull fashion. They dance in synchronisation, which is the complete antithesis of the authentic bear dance, where every individual dancer's continuous and gentle movements imitate the bear. The dancer is supposed to dance on one spot only, until her feet have made a hollow in the ground (this of course takes place outside). Whenever I have visit these ensembles, I always advice them to consult with the old people, who have heard the authentic Brevno playing and seen a real bear dance.

Julia Miglut, who had joined us in the library for tea, now came to the museum with some bark from a birch tree as well as roots, which she had cooked in water. She wanted to show me how to make a basket and how to bind the sides together with the softened roots; under her watchful eye I practised this new skill and she gave me the result of my labour as a present. In return I paid for my lesson by buying some of the baskets that she had made and so both of us were very satisfied!

#### ANTONINA SHKALIGINA



I had wanted to visit other people's places to see how they were living, but no one invited me to. I hadn't had this problem in Nogliki, Ohka or Nekrasovka. I wondered if perhaps people were ashamed at how they were living or if they were too poor to have guests. I found out later that Julia Miglut was too ashamed to invite anyone to her home because her husband was constantly drunk. The librarian was too

shy to invite me and I couldn't summon up the courage to ask her. Also, Lidia Romanovna wasn't as decisive as either Alexandra Hurjun in Nekrasovka or as Galina Deminyanovna, who had helped me in Okha. So, I summoned up my courage and invited myself to Antonina Vasilievna Shkaligina when I next saw her at the school. Her house was one of the oldest in the village. Russians had built the front part of the tiny house, but the rear part had been brought from the Old Chir-Unvd village. There was a huge stove in the kitchen and the brown floor had been freshly painted. The rear part of the house was slightly lopsided.

It was more than likely that one of the corners of the wooden house had rotted, caused it to tilt. Antonina's youngest daughter and her husband were living there with her. I was immediately offered rice with liver, followed by tea and biscuits. I was a bad guest as I had come empty handed straight from the school, but their hospitality knew no bounds. The guest simply was not allowed to leave without eating and drinking.

Antonina told me how they had had an *Ambar* by the side of the river and how she very much regretted that, in their ignorance, they had destroyed it. The former summer cottages, known as *Ambars*, were beautiful log huts standing on legs of high tree stumps and were no longer used. They were extremely practical since it didn't matter how much snow fell, it was impossible to bury them. When the ladder was drawn up, the wild beasts couldn't get in to eat the fish and berries. The *Ambars* were used to dry the fish, known as *Yukola* for consumption during the winter as well as to store berries, which gradually either dried or froze. This was the traditional storage method, which required neither sugar nor salt. *Ambars* were also used to store food during the winter when the Nivkhs would travel to them in their dog sleighs, to take out the food.

Antonina pulled out a box of faded photographs. As she showed them to me, she told me her life story. Needless to say, and once again in the background, there was the inevitable and unavoidable family member vying for attention – the TV was playing Russian entertainment.

It seems that half of Chir - Unvd's inhabitants are Antonina Vasilevna's relatives. She had been married twice. Her first husband, a Mordovan, had been killed in one of the villagers' feuds. Her second husband had been of Korean descent. Altogether Antonina had eight children as well as numerous grandchildren. Her daughter, who was there when I arrived, seemed quite distant and left fairly soon. After awhile she returned with her husband and an older sister who had a child. Somehow we all fitted into that small room. I was about to leave when Antonina asked me to play something. When I began to play, the ice immediately broke between Antonina's children and me. Once again the violin turned out to be the best form of communication and I ended up staying for an intense discussion about subjects such as unemployment and the loss of the Nivkh culture. It was hard to believe that the owner of this poor little tilted hut would have been the Ambassador of her Nivkh culture in New York and Japan. It was already dark when I returned back to Lydia Romanovna's. The bark of the village dogs accompanied me on my walk under the stars. Otherwise everything was silent.

## THE CONCERT FOR THE VILLAGE CHILDREN

20.11. – Monday

All the children from the school and from the kindergarten had been invited to the "concert", which I held that morning in the school. I looked at all those eager little faces – Nivkh, Russian, Mordovan and Korean. To my great surprise when I asked if they had heard of Stradivarius, everybody cried 'DA!' Mozart or Bach didn't enjoy such wide recognition! I played them the last movement of Vivaldi's *Summer* from the *Four Seasons*, explaining that it describes a thunderstorm and lightening. Then I played them the slow movement of *Winter* describing how the water is dripping on the roof (pizzicato accompaniment). They immediately wanted to know 'how does the violin play wind or a snowstorm or the crackling of a fire?' I told them honestly that I had never tried. I was astonished how receptive they were. The Nivkh



children in the school knew hardly anything about their own music and listened to the imitations of Tinrin and Brevno on the violin, with the same curiosity as the Mordovan, Russian and Korean children. Satisfaction spread over their faces and even a certain pride could be felt amongst them.

After the concert, Lidia Romanovna (right), Galina Dmitrievna Vogzibina, Antonina Shkaligina (left), Julia Miglut and one of the schoolteachers and I sat down in the room where the concert had taken place to eat salt fish and potatoes, washed down with the ever available tea. Galina, the librarian, suddenly handed me a big plastic bag full of salted fish – four big *kita*

(a type of salmon) one of which I was to bring to Natalia Mamcheva.

After the meal I decided to go for a walk and Antonina joined me. We went down to the banks of the River Tim, which peacefully flows through the snow from Chir- Unvd to Nogliki and then all the way to the sea. Although it was a freezing minus 15C, the sun was shining. On the horizon behind the river, was the mountain range. The scenery was so different from the south of the island. The mountains were further away and it was hard to say whether they were higher or lower than those around Yuzhno - Sakhalinsk. The scenery around Chir-Unvd, with its pine forests was just like in Finland and wasn't as barren as that found in Sakhalin's North. On the other hand I was told that are not as many berries or as great a variety of fish around Chir-Unvd because it is inland. I asked Antonina, who still remembers the old way of life and speaks her own language, which of her descendants can speak Nivkh and I urged her to teach it to them. She was surprised and sad when she heard that I was already leaving that night.

#### BACK TO YUZHNO-SAKHALINSK

The temperature dropped as evening approached. Laigun's brother, the "Head of the Village" was taking me to the station – in one of his three SUVs - this time driven by his "learner driver" son. An enormous amount of snow had fallen and to my horror, when we arrived at the station in Ada-Timova, I had to wade 200 meters to get to the platform whilst the "Driving Duo" roared off without a word. On the platform another SUV was stuck in the snow. The driver was revving up the car and trying to get it out of the snow. Whilst I waited in the freezing snow for the train, I noticed that my mobile phone finally had a signal. With frozen fingers I wrote a couple of text messages and for the first time in four days I was able to report that I was still alive. The Russian man who had got out of the trapped SUV with his wife and child had little interest in helping the unfortunate driver. Instead he turned to me on the platform and said, 'there's no point in waiting – there's not going to be a train today'. 'Stop that', reprimanded his wife and turning to me she said, 'he's only joking'. I was far from reassured however, until the train arrived at the appointed time, stopping once again for only one minute. Only one door of the train was opened up for us and that was at the other end of the train. We struggled through the snow towards it. Fortunately there were four of us. After that I had to walk through most of the train to get to my own carriage. There were three men in my compartment when I got there. I immediately remembered the story of the rape on my way up and asked the female conductor to put me in another compartment. Fortunately I was able to travel the whole way by myself.

21.11. – Tuesday

This time I was able to sleep right through until morning and when I woke up the train was travelling through the narrowest part of Sakhalin Island, where the railway line runs just beside the sea. I could see the familiar mountains again. I felt empty, although I had so much to digest.

Back in Yuzhno- Sakhalinsk I went to the shop and bought a pair of scissors, loo paper, black bread, carrots, apples and Chinese cabbage. I had a shower and then threw all my dirty clothes and washing powder into a bath full of hot water. Later that day Natalia Mamcheva came to visit me. She listened attentively and asked many questions in detail as I gave her a full account of all my meetings. She was amazed when I told her that I had met Raisa Nyengun (*Baba Raija Efku*)! As I had guessed, she had met Baba Raija the last time in 1990 in Rybnoe and thought that she was already dead. I also told Natalia that I had met Antonina and Tatiana Shkaligina in Chir-Unvd and that the latter had said she was coming to Yuzhno- Sakhalinsk to stay at her aunt's place, which is where her grandmother, Tatiana Ulita lives. Although Tatiana Ulita had been in hospital, Tatiana Shkaligina had told me that she thought her grandmother would love to see Natalia Mamcheva and me. She had promised to let me know me how Tatiana Ulita was and Natalia and I decided that we would try to plan a visit to her the following day.

22.11. – Wednesday

Finally I had a chance to practice the violin in the morning. In the afternoon Natalia Mamcheva and I visited the Folk Arts Society where I met many people who nostalgically remembered Ensemble XXI's visit to Yuzhno Sakhalinsk. They told me that they had been in every single one of our concerts and wanted to know when we were coming back. I felt like a VIP. Later on that day, Natalia Deminyanovna from Nogliki came to visit me in the College of the Arts, with a plastic bag full of fish. I invited her to the college café downstairs and introduced her proudly to the Rector of the College.

Now, however one of the highlights of my journey to Sakhalin was about to occur – the meeting with Tatiana Ulita herself.

#### THE VISIT TO TATIANA ULITA

Tatiana Ulita is the legendary "Grand Old Lady" of the Nivkhs. She was born before the Russian Revolution of 1917 and is well over ninety. Although the official records state that she was born in 1916, no one knows her exact age. It is impossible to know when Nivkhs were born at that time because they were not included in any official records before the revolution. Tatiana Ulita is now the only survivor of that

generation. In those days Nivkhs didn't count years because it wasn't important. For example people's birth dates were often remembered by the year of a particularly good fish catch.

Tatiana Ulita had had a difficult life and was seriously ill as a child. However a Shaman cured her and predicted that she would live a long life and indeed outlive the rest of her generation. This prediction has already been proved to be true. She was born in the small fishing settlement of Potovo and remembers the Ainu and Japanese periods. She had followed her husband to the mainland when he was in a prison camp in Khabarovsk. Her memory is like an endless treasure chest - full of legends, fairytales, stories and oral traditions. She remembers old ritual rhythms and the words that they were created from and how people mumbled them to themselves. Tatiana Ulita can give a first hand account of what it was really like to be at a bear ceremony (when the bear was killed with one arrow straight to the heart) and how the ritual dances were actually performed. She is a living example of how the oral tradition develops at every retelling. I remember the first time that I visited her and she told me a mystical and somewhat frightening legend of the mountain people, *Gorni Chelovek* - about a woman who was transformed into a bear and gave birth to twins from a bear. They were considered to be bears that could sometimes take on the human form, the opposite of werewolves.

She was very critical about her own singing. She complained about her own voice, which she did not consider beautiful because she did not have a wide tremolo. It was very difficult to get her to sing. Like Baba Raija Efukuk there was no singing if there was no Arak (vodka)! She would cough and clear her throat and then complain that it was so dry. A gulp of vodka immediately cured her larynx and she would start singing until the vocal chords dried up again... After each gulp, the singing became more powerful and she was able to sing for longer periods at a time. When she finally stopped she used to cry out, "what are you thinking of - you are making an old woman drunk and then you expect her to sing?!"

Her melodies were rhythmically very varied, but one could always feel the pulse. When she was telling a story she might keep repeating a note, depending on how many syllables were in the word; if several words were leading to the main point in a sentence, she would repeat one note for the unimportant words and only change the note with the main word. One could give her an idea of a story and she would make a song of it straight away. I had witnessed a hilarious episode when I was in Chir-Unvd, which demonstrated how mischievous Tatiana Ulita could be. The day that I was having tea in the museum with Antonina Shkaligina and Julia Miglut, Tatiana Shkaligina (the granddaughter of Tatiana Ulita) arrived with a recording made of Tatiana Ulita by some

people who didn't speak any Nivkh and wanted to know what she was singing about. They started to listen to the recording and suddenly to my amazement they began falling about with laughter. Tatiana Ulita's singing was flowing along as merrily as a stream in spring and I could not imagine what they could be laughing about. It turned out that Tatiana Ulita was merrily singing, "Here I am singing total rubbish - but what difference does it make because they don't understand a word!"

Ulita was a real artist like her contemporary, Zoya Agnyun but unlike the latter, Ulita had never sung in a folk ensemble and her singing had not been effected by being performed on the stage and therefore had kept its originality.

Natalia Mamcheva and I arrived at Tatiana Ulita's (below). She lay in her bed, small and frail. The bones in her arms were poking through



her skin. We realised immediately that this time there was no question of *Arak* (vodka). We greeted her and she said that she remembered us, but I doubted that. I decided straight away to open my violin case and I told her that I wanted to play for her to thank her for all the songs that she had sung for me. Without telling her what I was going to play, I imitated the playing of the *Tinrin*. She raised herself up slightly in the bed and said, '*Tinrin* - that is the *Tinrin*.' She said this in Nivkh, but her

daughter translated it into Russian for us. Then I asked Natalia Mamcheva to take Ulita's hand and hold it above my left hand as I played a tremolo so that she could feel it and understand how I was doing it. This was because of Ulita's blindness. On the Tinrin, the tremolo is produced with the tongue vibrating the string. Ulita nodded with approval and after I had played some of the bear dance rhythms, she started to mumble the words, almost as if she were casting a spell. It was Ulita herself who had told us that while drumming the player always repeats the ritual words in her mind, because the rhythms are based on those very words.

Ulita took my hands and held them and said both in Russian and in Nivkh 'Good girl'. It felt as though the music had given her more life. She raised herself up even more and started to speak rapidly in Nivkh. She started to repeat the rhythms and accompanied them with the movements of the bear dance using her arms and her hands. Then she insisted that I was her relative from the other side of the river. When I told her that I came from far away - from the mainland over the sea, she replied 'That's right, that's right' and gestured towards the right with her arm as if she was clearly seeing the other side of the water. This was not a matter of old age; it was part of her reality, of her world. Suddenly she got right up in to a sitting position in her bed and started to sing. We all held our breath. She had got her strength back. Her voice was weak, but there was no need to persuade her now, because this time the music had intoxicated her. We were lucky that her daughter was present to translate Ulita's rapid speech from Nivkh into Russian. Without her we would only have understood what Ulita said in Russian. Then I played to her again, this time the Sarabande from Bach's D minor Partita. She listened attentively and when I had finished she again took my hands and held them repeating, 'good girl, good girl - your mother and I were sisters.' I would have loved to know who she thought I was.

It was heartbreaking to leave her. Her daughter told us that sometimes in the morning Ulita would wave her hands from side to side in the air. When she asked her mother what she was doing, Ulita answered that she was chasing away the spirits and that she had seen them when she had visited the upper world. Ulita explained to her daughter that the good spirits come from the sea where the fresh air is blowing, but the bad spirits rise up from the pools of the deep forest where the water stands still.

All of this was as real to Tatiana Ulita as our visit had been that day. Whilst we were saying good by to her, she started to complain that she hadn't a kopeck and that this visit called for a drink!"

Thus ended my historical journey to the Nivkhs.

## EPILOGUE

On return from this visit to the Nivkhs, I began to compose my work for string orchestra, *Ulita's Walk*, which I have dedicated to Tatiana Ulita. The main theme is the singing motive of Tatiana Ulita - "the walking theme" (after the idea used by Mussorgsky in his *Pictures at an Exhibition*).

The composition depicts Ulita's life during which she pays visits to other Nivkhs' lives. The names in brackets are those of the Nivkhs whose themes I have used.

- Ulita (Ulita's theme) becomes very sick as a child and the Shaman cures her (Olga Njavan, Ulyana Bagrina).
- Ulita meets a jealous wife (Ekaterina Hitkuk, Olga Njavan, Ulyana Bagrina, Ulita)
- Ulita visits the four-layered underworld, which is described by a 4-part fugue (Ulita's moaning theme, Antonina Shkaligina, Anna Khadzigan, Ulyana Bagrina, Ulita)
- In the Underworld she meets a long dead Nivkh who tells her a heroic legend (Odrain, Olga Njavan, Ulita)
- Ulita arises to the upper world amongst the birds, wind and the spirits of the sea (Raisa Nyengun [Baba Raija Efukuk] Olga Njavan, Ulita)

I began to compose this work in February 2007 and finished it in May 2007. Later I learned that Tatiana Ulita had passed away in February 2007 and Raisa Nyengun (Baba Raija Efukuk) in May 2007.

## INDEX

NT = Nivkh Themes

UW= Ulita's walk

List of traditional singers whom I met and whose melodies and drum playing I have used in my compositions (the year refers to the year of the composition where the music of the person mentioned was used)

Chikhavrun Zoya – Chir-Unvd (Чихаирун Зоя – Чир-Унвд) – melody (NT)

Muvchik Lidia b.1944 – Chir-Unvd (Мувчик Лидия – Чир-Унвд) – melody (NT) 5, 9, 10, 24, 32

Nyengun Raisa Yakovlevna, Baba Efkuq b.1929 – Kef nomadic encampment (Нёнгун Раиса Яковлевна, Ваба Эфкук – ст. Кеф.) – melody (UW) 3, 14, 23-26, 40, 41, 44

Sangi Vasily – Чайво (Санги Васили – Чаево) – melody (NT) 11

Shkaligina Antonina Vasilievna b.1935 – Chir-Unvd (Шкалигина Антонина Васильевна – с.Чир-Унвд) – Kalni playing (UW) – rhythm, melody 31-41, 44

Ulita Tatiana, Baba Tanya b.1916? – Potovo (Улита Татьяна – ст. Потово) – melody, rhythm (NT, UW) 3, 14, 25, 32, 40-44

List (in alphabetical order) of the deceased masters of ancient singing whose recordings I have used in my compositions.

Agnyun Zoya Ivanovna b.1918 Novie Langri (Агнюн Зоя Ивановна – ст. Новие Лангры) – Shaman melody, Shaman drum (NT), Vargan

Vagrina Ulyana Sergeevna b.1926 – Tlava (Багрина Ульяна Сергеевна ст. Тлава) – rhythm (NT, UW) 5, 25, 42

Hitkuk Ekaterina b.1904 – Lunjvo (Хыткук Екатерина – ст. Луньво) – melody (UW), Tinrin

Khadzigan Anna Stepanovna b.1931 (Хаджиган Анна – Чир-Унвд) – kalni (UW) melody, rhythm 32, 44

Lishkit Ekaterina b.1912 – Vyskvo (Лишкит Екатерина – ст. Выскво) – Tinrin (NT)

Nakamura Nivkh-Shaman from Japan – melody (NT) 34

Njavan Olga Anatolievna b.1915 – Tengi (Няван Ольга Анатольевна – ст. Теньги) – Shaman melody, Shaman drum (NT, UW), Vargan (UW), Tinrin 16, 23, 44

Odrain – Amur region (Одрайн) – (NT, UW) 5, 44

Nivkhs whom I met and had conversations with:

Buldakova Margarita – Traditional handicraft leader of the Plaiuf Folklore Ensemble, Nogliki 6, 7, 9, 11, 27, 28

Buldakova Natasha, Sasha, Lyuba – Margarita's children, members of the Plaiuf Ensemble, Makers of traditional handicrafts, Nogliki 28

Hitkuk Stanislav – Margarita's husband, who took us for fishing, Nogliki

Hurjun Alexandra, – Journalist of the only newspaper in the Nivkh language, Nekrasovka 13, 15- 20, 23, 36

Ivanova Larissa – Editor of the only newspaper in the Nivkh language, Folk singer, Nekrasovka 18, 22, 23

Laigun Nadezhda Alexandrovna – the Governor’s Representative of the Sakhalin Indigenous Peoples, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk 7,16, 19, 29, 39

Laigun Zoya Vasilievna – She told me about the traditions in the Schmidt Peninsula, Nekrasovka 19

Lok Galina Deminyanovna (G.D.) – Specialist on the Nivkh language, Translator, Folklore collector and my travel companion during my field trip throughout the North of Sakhalin, Nogliki 11, 12-16, 20, 23, 26-28

Lyutova Zoya Ivanovna – former choreographer of the Pila Ken Folklore Ensemble, Nekrasovka 16-18

Miglut Julia Ivanovna – Maker of traditional handicrafts, Chir-Unvd 33, 36, 38, 41

Otlonova Lydia Romanovna – Curator of the Chir-Unvd Museum, Collector of folklore, Chir-Unvd 6, 29-31, 34-37, 39

Propka Natalia – Raisa Nyengun’s daughter, Okha 14, 15, 25

Shkaligina Tatiana Alexandrovna – Leader of the Kekh Folklore Ensemble, Granddaughter of Tatiana Ulita, Chir-Unvd 35, 40, 41

Vidain Svetlana Filimonovna – former primary school teacher, Nekrasovka 20, 21

Vogzibina Galina Dmitrievna – Librarian, Chir-Unvd 31,38

Vovkuk Elena – Ethnic Representative on the Nogliki Town Council, Nogliki 9

#### Ethnographers and Ethnomusicologists:

Kreinovich Yerukhim Abramovich (1906-1985) (Крейнович Ерухим Абрамович) Russian Ethnographer who at the end of 1920’s lived for several years in Sakhalin amongst the Nivkhs studying their culture in detail. 8, 21, 47

Mamcheva Natalia (Мамчева Наталья Александровна) Russian Ethnomusicologist who has studied and collected the music of the Sakhalin Indigenous people for over 25 years. 3, 5, 6, 9, 14, 18, 24, 38, 40, 42, 43, 47

Sheikin Juri (Шейкин, Юрий Ильич) Russian Ethnomusicologist who has widely studied indigenous music in the Russian northern territories. 47

Siskova Alla Viktorovna – Ethnomusicologist, Okha 6, 24

Sternberg Lev Yakovlevitch (1861-1927) (Штернберг Лев Яковлевич) Russian Ethnographer who was sent in exile to Sakhalin for political reasons. During his stay he studied the Nivkh language and traditions. 5 In 1910 he recorded the singling of a Nivkh man in the Amur region, named Odrain. It is the oldest existing recording of Nivkh singing.

## Other people

Psyagina Svetlana Nikolaevna, the Governor's Representative for the Culture of the Sakhalin Indigenous Peoples, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk  
O'Riordan Lygia Conductor and Artistic Director of Ensemble XXI 2, 3, 5  
Zrazhaev Alexander – Director and Conductor of the chamber orchestra, Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk 7

## Folklore Ensembles

Kekh, Chir-Unvd 31,46

Koryeva Lena Alexandrovna, Head of the local cultural division, Okha 23  
Pila Ken, Nekrasovka 18, 46

Plaiuf, Ari La Mif, Lar, Nogliki 28, 45

## Literature

Kodály Zoltán: A Magyar Népzene –Hungarian folk music (Budapest 1981)

Kreinovich Yerukhim Abramovich: Нивхгы – Nivkh (Nayka – Publishing House of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow 1973)

Mamcheva Natalia: Нивхская музыка как образец раннефолклорной монодии – Nivkh Music as an example of Early Folkloric Monody (Sakhalin 1996), Обрядовые музыкальные инструменты аборигенов Сахалина – The ritual instruments of the indigenous people of Sakhalin (Sakhalin 2003), Aspects of the Music of the Nivkhs (article Sakhalin 2004)

Sheikin Yuri: Музыкальная культура народов Северной Азии – The musical traditions of the nations of North Asia (Yakutia 1996)

## Nivkh Vocabulary:

*Ambar* – The former summer cottages or *ambars* were beautiful log huts standing on legs made of high tree stumps, but are no longer used. They were very practical as no matter how much snow fell it was impossible to bury them. If the ladder was pulled up, it was impossible for the wild beasts to get in and steal the fish and berries. The ambars were used to store dry fish (*Yukola*) for the winter and store the berries, which gradually either dried or froze. This was the traditional method of storing without sugar or salt. Ambars were used as places of storage in winter and the Nivkhs travelled in their dog sleds to take out food. 16,37

*Arak* – Vodka 21,41,42

*Gorni Chelovek* (Russian) – A human being from a parallel world. In this world he or she appeared in the form of a bear. 41

*K'as* (in Russian: *Buben* – Бубен) The Shamanic drum. The resonating cover is made from stretched skin and it is beaten by a stick made of bone or wood and covered by fur.

*Kalni* – Nivkh “Trumpet”, which is made from the *Giant Hogweed* stem 31, 32, 45

*Kanga, Zakanga, Kongon, Koka Chir* (in Russian *Vargan - Варган*) – an instrument made of steel, brass, wood or reeds. Typical for all indigenous nations of the North. It is played in the same way as the “Jew’s harp” 16, 45

*Ma* – (in Russian *Jukola - Юкола*) - Nivkh dried fish fillet

*Tikht* – The Bear dance at the Bear Ceremony, which imitates the movements of the bear. 6, 36, 41, 43

*Tinrin* – A one stringed instrument. The sound box is made from the bark of a birch tree over which fish skin is stretched. A skilful player could create many different tones at the same time by using his or her tongue on the string and in so doing overtones were created. 11, 16, 26, 38, 42, 43, 45

*Tyatya Chxach* (in Russian *Brevno - Бревно*) – A log, which was used as a rhythmical instrument during the Bear Ceremony. Only women played the *Brevno*. One woman played the solo and she used thinner sticks. She hit the logs in different places, but in order to create different sounds she also hit the long sticks that were fixed in the ground to hold the log up. Some times hanging above the main log there were was another thinner log, which created a higher tone. On one of the ends of the main log a bear’s head was carved. 11, 31, 35, 36, 38

### The Nivkh Outlook On Life and Their Beliefs

The Nivkh world has three levels. The earth’s is the middle one and the one with the shortest time span. After death people (and animals) go to the underworld that is under the earth. The life there lasts longer and everything is in reverse, i.e. day becomes night and vice versa, summer becomes winter etc. There are legends that describe how people sometimes got lost and entered the under world before their death and how the dead people gave them no food or drink because they could not see or hear them. For men the Underworld has three levels. However for women there is a fourth level to which they go (Nivkhs bury their men in three layers of clothes and the women in four layers of clothes). From the Underworld one is raised up to the Upper World where the spirits and birds are; then when one’s time there ends when one comes back to the earth.

Unlike many other indigenous nations in Russia, the Nivkhs did not convert to Christianity and their names did not become Christianised until Soviet (!) times when their names were Russified (most Russian names are of Christian origin). The Nivkh language does not have a first name and a surname, but rather uses only one name. This means

that Nivkhs who were born at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century did not have Patronymics, i.e. in Tatiana Ulita's case, Ulita is her Nivkh name and Tatiana was added only in Soviet times; now Ulita is considered to be her surname. In the case of Raisa Yakovlevna Nyengun, there was no father with the name Yakov. It was completely artificially created. Nyengun was her husband's name and Efuk, which she liked to use, was her own name. The names of Nivkhs who were born later are sometimes completely Russified.



The Finnish violinist Pia Siirala is concertmaster of Ensemble XXI Moscow, of which she was a co-founder. She received her diploma in violin from the Sibelius Academy and also studied at the Liszt Academy in Budapest with Professor Vermes Mária, before studying in the postgraduate class of Professor Zoria Shickmurzaeva at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory.

Pia Siirala has performed widely throughout Russia, Europe, Australasia and America.

During her studies at the Liszt Academy, she studied with the ethnomusicologist Professor Vikár László, a former student of Bartók and Kodály, who were also renowned for their collecting of folk music. Recently Pia Siirala has used this knowledge to dedicate herself to the study of the music of Russia's indigenous peoples. She has composed three works based on the music of the Nivkh people, *Nivkh Themes* for String quartet, a *Suite* for Violin and *Ulita's Walk* for chamber orchestra.

Pia Siirala has received recognition for her tireless work with the Nivkh people of Sakhalin from the Wihuri Foundation for the second year running.

<http://polarvoices.org>

Ensemble XXI website: <http://ensemblxxi.org>

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Moscow	4
Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk	4
Natalia Mamcheva	5
Margarita	6
The overnight train to Nogliki	7
Nogliki	8
Viena (Vienskoye) – Lidia Mucvhik	9
The journey by road to Okha	11
Raisa Nyengun	14
Nekrasovka	15
Back to Okha	23
Zoya Agnyun versus Johann Sebastian Bach	24
Baba Efkuk sings	25
Back to Nogliki	27
Chir-Unvd	28
The call of the Kalni	31
Chir-Unvd stories and present times	33
Antonina Shkaligina	36
The concert for the village children	38
Back to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk	39
The visit to Tatiana Ulita	40
Epilogue	44
Index	45
Nivkh Vocabulary	47
The Nivkh Outlook On Life and Their Beliefs	48
Pia Siirala CV	49