

## Foreword

*Living the culture and creating it is a different task. The requirements to promote cultural values apply to everyone. All people have a duty to participate in the cultural life of the community.*

Juozas Girnius

The national Song and Dance Celebration is not a lost time space. Dating back in the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Lithuania the celebration has become the priority of national culture, the moral mobilizing power, the source of modernity, the demonstration of communal unity in our culture as well as in other Baltic States – Latvia and Estonia. The rituals of political identity, specific to each culture, are now gaining increased research attention within interdisciplinary studies as the cultural phenomena that have overcome historical obstacles.

National liberation movements that at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries encouraged song and dance celebrations are related to the attempt to get out of colonialism, to develop national states and cultures, to shape national identity, as well as to the establishment of choral societies, the promotion of choral singing as culturally unifying event. Today fostering the identity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, gains in importance the spread of the new forms of awareness and creative continuation of traditions that are an integral part of our heritage.

The volume begins with the paper “Song Celebration for the Maintenance and Strengthening of Lithuanianness” written by Vytautas Rubavičius, who examines an important, but little researched, theme of the significance of the Lithuanian song celebration, like any powerful cultural tool, for strengthening and spreading Lithuanianness. For him, “an initial goal of culture is to maintain and foster community identity, rooting in a particular living place”, thus the rituals of celebration and festivity are important factors preserving communal relations, the sense of place and belonging. He also deals with the challenges celebrations faces today, when the processes of the commodification and festivalization of culture take place, connected to the rise of the growing global tourism industry. Likewise, he critically evaluates the European Union policy towards national cultures, identifying important research fields.

A unique role of the Song and Dance Celebration in shaping and preserving the Lithuanian national identity is described in Stanislovas Juknevičius’ article “The Longing for Identity: Song Celebrations and Collective Unconsciousness of Lithuanians”. The author emphasizes that the repertoire of song celebrations consists

mostly of folk music and art, which respectively reveals the contents of collective unconsciousness. Large parts of the nation participate, or at least observe, traditional festivals and cultural events, which take place periodically. According to him, the song celebration has become „an integral part of our history; thus its loss would not only mean cultural, but also existential loss“. Further, Rein Veidemann, professor at the Tallinn University, discusses the significance of the General Estonian Song Celebration within the theoretical framework of the Tartu–Moscow School of semiotics (especially, the works of Yuri Lotman). When describing a historic context of song celebrations he identifies the following research areas: the formation of the initial meaning under the influence of various sources; the repertoire as a text; the song festival as a ritual; a dichotomy between internal and external forms of celebrations. Veidemann reminds us that the Estonian song celebration originated in the tradition of choir singing of Southern Germany (*Liedertafel*) and being transferred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from the centre to the periphery has become the specificity of the Baltic provinces. After discussing the ideological pattern which appears in the Estonian national movement (“national awakening”), and the song celebration (“singing community”), he analyses the song festival as a text, raising questions about the authenticity and the essential transitivity of Estonian culture. On one hand, the celebrations represent this Estonian border-consciousness and struggling against oppression. On the other hand, the General Song Celebration performs the religious function and can be interpreted as a text. Metaphorically speaking, Estonians believe in the holiness of the celebration.

In researching “The Modern-Day Quests”, Rita Repšienė delves into the questions of cultural values, priorities and new challenges posed by the global processes, infinite opportunities, and media effects, in order to reveal the bigger picture of the Song and Dance Celebration. We live in the world of cultural interactions, devaluated identities, increasing migration, global transformations and infinite changes, therefore traditions are the mental constants, embodying continuity and integrating current experiences. In fact, the tradition of song festivals, inspired by protestant cultures, has become an integral part of the Baltic lands identity. The cultural practice, passed down from generation to another, testifies to a country’s cultural diversity and national history, making the efforts to integrate and unite communities. Fostering national identity and creativity the Song and Dance Celebration of the Baltic countries has reflected patriotic and historical barriers, ideological conformism, cultural maturity, and conditional challenges. The official vision of program, large numbers of participants and the new ideological rhetoric try to convince those who doubt: “Lithuanian Song festivals became incontrovertible tradition. It exalts man’s creative self-expression, vitality of national culture, love to the native land and solidarity. It rallies different generations, prolongs always renewing cultural process and helps to form moral qualities. Song festivals formed the most valuable features

during many years such as peculiarity of genre expression, esthetical criterion of artistic programs, the regulation of the whole cultural process and the emotional affinity of participants and spectators. Lithuanian Song festival is national overall nature phenomenon spiritually equal to the ancient Greek Olympic games”, – declares organizers on the official website of Lithuanian Folk Culture Center. But what causes dilemmas in present-day celebrations? What does our celebration look like in the Baltic context? How do we uphold traditions, don't we become hostages to them? Should we give them relevance in today's society? Can we still live in the celebration that would never end?

Aida Savicka presents the results of a pilot study in her article “Lithuanian Song and Dance Celebration: Public Activity, Perception and Evaluation of the Celebration”. While describing that the Song and Dance Celebration is one of the largest cultural events in Lithuania, the importance of which is recognized both at local and global level, the author admits that scientists have paid far too little attention to its role in society. Thus, shortly after the last celebration, the public opinion survey has been carried out aiming at the evaluation of the festival's potential for the socio-cultural integration, as well exploring the prevailing concept of celebration, the public involvement, evaluations. These data allow us to assess the present situation, to examine the possible continuity of the Lithuanian song and dance celebration, to understand festival's viability and the relationships between the various socio-demographic groups of participants.

The chapter “Heritage and Europe” includes the paper “Song Celebration as an Action of Cultural Memory” prepared by Odeta Žukauskienė. She considers the tradition of the Lithuanian song celebration as a multifaceted phenomenon, analysing it through the prism of contemporary cultural discourse. Following the French philosopher Michel de Certeau, the author examines the celebration as a modern cultural phenomenon, which has been shaping collective representations, integrating traditional cultural heritage into a living city. She also defines the song celebration as a site of memory (*lieux de mémoire*), significance of which has been outlined by the French historian Pierre Nora; its particular objective – to strengthen national authority and promote patriotism. In effect, she also examines the celebration as a practice of cultural memory (*kulturelles Gedächtnis*), which helps to reconstruct cultural identity and foster self-reflexive processes, as the German researchers Jan and Aleida Assmann claim. However, as she observes, global memory tend to unite similar practices around the world, integrating them in transnational networks. Besides, the context of a very intense visual culture, multitude of festivals and spectacles prompt the need of the revision of celebration concept, stimulating to discuss about the interpretations of traditional culture and folklore that would not turn it into the object of consumption and would find original ways to open up deeper contents of ethnic culture.

In their paper, Latvia's researchers Valdis Muktupāvels and Rūta Muktupāvela discuss the statement that Latvians are "singing nation", exploring the various sources of the stereotype. They develop a practical and symbolic analysis of song collections edited during the important periods of Latvia's history. Analyzing the origin of song collections, repertoire and songs context, they consider the very concept of Latvian national identity – the image of *singing nation*. The Baltic Song and Dance Celebration has been included into the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage in 2003, and a special law of Song and Dance Celebration has been adopted in Latvia in 2005, thus considering a tradition, that is more than a century old, both nationally and internationally. However, the celebration process is related not only to the formal program of the event, but also to informal and spontaneous singing after the concerts that constitutes not less important part of the festival. These singing rituals remain of high actuality: by uniting feelings, emotional reactions and the awareness of participants they represent *singing nation*.

A chapter of the book "The Nation and National Loyalty", written by Lithuanian philosopher Juozas Girnius, is reprinted in the section "From the Cultural History". The book was published in 1961 in Chicago, by the American Foundation of Lithuanian Research. It has received a strong response in exile and remains remarkably relevant to us. Discussing the relationships between individual and nation, as well as the relationships between nation and state, it exalts national identity. Although the objective of the book is not an analysis of the loss of nationality, it throws a moral light questioning, what moral obligations and tasks concern national loyalty.

The author points out that all nations have a right to create their own nation-state. Without its own state, nation cannot be free; the state gives power to community both to determine its political destiny and to develop national culture. According Girnius, the recognition of nations' equality presupposes the independent existence of each nation. The nation-state allows its members to live any way they want and to cherish important values. For him, nation is an innate and a spontaneous community, united by aims and values. The self-conscious nation not only imagines itself as a unity, but also constantly undergoes change. A human community is above the state. It is the state serves to nation, not the nation to state. On the other hand, Girnius places person above nation: nationality should develop together with the natural relatedness of its members, and this substantial unity is more important than ethnic differences. Nationality, which is based upon the respect of all nations, promotes its own nation's integration into global society. The nation is the source of creativity and the process of continual improvement. An idea that the main task of the nation is to fulfill its potential underpinning creative achievements has been stressed in the chapter "Nation and National Fidelity".

Defining patriotism as the nation's moral and spiritual tie, Juozas Girnius attempts to describe love for the homeland and the nation: "We treasure our nation as

a paternal-maternal source of our being, and as our own existence. Engendered by nation (in the sense of our spiritual maturation), we love it and we should love it so as we love and should love our parents. In some cases, when the threat to the freedom of homeland emerges, the nation should be raised even above parents, according to the words of St. Augustine, father and mother are the most important, but let the homeland be even above parents (*primum tibi sunt pater et mater, maior sit patria et ipsis parentibus tuis*), giving us an opportunity to think about our priorities and choices, as well as the dilemmas of unity and patriotism.