

The Georgian people, inhabiting a land the size of West Virginia wedged between Russia and Turkey, speak a group of languages related to no other outside the Caucasus Mountain region. Georgia is an island musically as well, exceptional in having an ancient, deep-rooted tradition of polyphony (music in several independent voices), while all the cultures that surround it, and all the cultures that have occupied or passed through it, are firmly monophonic. Georgian polyphony appears to be truly autonomous and original, and its rules of counterpoint and tuning derive from nowhere else. Three-part singing in Georgia was probably in full flower by the ninth century, substantially preceding the modern development of polyphony in Europe. The density and complexity of the polyphony you hear tonight is traditional - none of these songs is a setting of old material in a modern idiom.

KAVKASIA (meaning "Caucasus") are three Americans who together have more than forty years of experience singing the traditional music of Georgia. In 1994 we formed a professional vocal trio dedicated to studying and performing that music. In the years since then, we have performed everywhere from Lincoln Center to the Tbilisi Opera House. Kavkasia recently recorded their third compact disc, scheduled for release later this year on the Traditional Crossroads label. Their first recording, *Songs of the Caucasus*, is available from Well-Tempered Productions. Their second album, *O Morning Breeze*, is available from Naxos World.

We sing concerts and lead workshops in North America, and we have made several extended visits to Georgia to study with singers there, both in professional ensembles and in remote villages. In 1997 each of us was made a State Prize Laureate and was awarded the Silver Medal of the Georgian Ministry of Culture "for profound knowledge of the folk music of Georgia and his role in its popularization around the world."

Kavkasia would like to thank everyone at Bennington College who helped make our concert possible. Special thanks to Tom Bogdan, Suzanne Jones, Silvio Eberhardt, the Bennington music faculty, and the Campus Activities Board. Kudos also to Bennington's *He-i-wan-di-la All-Stars*.

For more information on Kavkasia, please visit our website:

<http://www.kavkasia.com>

Kavkasia:

Alan Gasser, tenor

Stuart Gelzer, bass & chunir

Carl Linich, tenor, chonguri & panduri *

* Carl Linich is an MFA fellow in the music department at Bennington College and will receive his degree in June. This performance reflects much of his work in Georgia last year, and in America working with his partners in Kavkasia.

Music at Bennington Presents



Trio

KAVKASIA

Tuesday, April 13, 2004, 8pm
Deane Carriage Barn

Trio KAVKASIA

Traditional folk and sacred music from Georgia

Selections will include the following

1. *Benias Mravalzhamieri* – A toasting song accredited to the late Benia Mikadze, a famous singer and choir director.

Long life to you!

2. *Aghdgomasa Shensa* – An Easter hymn from the Georgian orthodox tradition, this is commonly sung on Easter morning after the all-night vigil.

3. *Jgrägish* – This hymn to St. George (in Svan, *Jgräg*) is one of the most popular and well-preserved ancient hymns from Svaneti, and exists in many variants. St. George is so greatly respected in Svaneti that at the traditional Svan *supra* the third toast is always to St. George, traditionally followed by this hymn.

Help us, help us, glory to you, St. George, help us.

4. *Gogo Shavtvala* – A love song from eastern Georgia.

O black-eyed girl, why must you kill my heart?

5. *Lazhghvash* – A march from Svaneti in the northwest mountains. This song features the *chunir*, a bowed viol unique to the province.

6. *Naduri* – A work song traditionally sung by a large group of people as they completed a demanding farm task together. Such songs may originally have lasted an hour or more.

7. *Me Rustveli* – The text for this song is drawn from Shota Rustaveli's epic 12th century poem, *The Knight in the Panther's Skin*, a work dedicated to Georgia's famous Queen Tamar.

8. *Utsinares Mas Vadidebt* – Another song inspired by a famous poem, *Tamariani*, written in the 19th century. This song features the *chonguri*, a fretless lute from western Georgia.

9. *Alilo* – The Georgian word *alilo* is a cognate for "alleluia," and this Christmas song from Lechkhumi is like many other *alilos* found throughout Georgia.

10. *Okro Mchedelo* – A comic song from Meskheti. The very idea is absurd that a bird would have an iron shoe – or that it would supply enough material to make even one of the tools, to say nothing of "what's left." Endless verses are possible.

Goldsmith, I've found a bird's iron shoe. Make a spade for me.

With what's left from that make a hoe for me. With what's left make an axe.

With what's left make a knife.

11. *Dala Kojas Khelghvalzhale* – Dali is the mythological goddess of hunting in Svaneti. It is believed that when a hunter has a vision of Dali his hunt will be successful. This song is quite popular in Svaneti and is sung either with the *chunir* or as a round dance.

Dali is giving birth on the cliffs, on the white cliffs.

Ravens are watching from above, wolves are watching from below.

Her first-born will fall down.

(A wolf snatched the child up in its mouth. A hunter saw this and fired his gun.

The wolf dropped the child and the hunter picked it up, returning it to its mother.)

12. *Jvarsia Shensa* – A hymn from the Georgian Orthodox liturgy.
We venerate Your cross, O King, And Your holy resurrection.

13. *Tsmindao Ghmerto* – In 2001, Carl went on a field expedition to Lentekhi, the capital of Lower Svaneti, and met with a men's choir called *Lileh* who sang this variant of *Tsmindao Ghmerto*. We found this especially interesting since Kavkasia had already learned a different setting of the same text from Upper Svaneti.

Holy God have mercy on us, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal have mercy on us.

14. *Sadghegrdzelo-Madlobeli* – In Guria the toasting ritual of the *supra* is very strong and the host is often thanked with a song. Here are two such songs which are often sung together.

A toast for whomever it may be, long life! We are thankful.

15. *Shairebi* – A comic song from Kartli-Kakheti sung to the accompaniment of the *panduri*, the fretted lute from eastern Georgia. The text always gets Georgians laughing at the endlessly inspiring comedy derived from courting and in-law themes. The young man sings of his prospective bride:

I put the girl on my horse and she broke its back.

I took her home and threw her down like a bear cub.

She beat up my three sisters-in-law and my mother,

And after thrashing my mother she came at me.

She threw me out the window and I got stuck,

She slapped me hard three times on my back and dust flew up.

16. *Urmuli* – A cart-driver's song from Kakheti.

My darling black water buffalo, mother of a fine young calf,

Your young calves have gone off to get salt for me.

O my water buffalo, you are from Mukhrani, you should know how to pull.

I am not from Mukhrani, and my yoke is unbearable.

17. *Ali-Pasha* – This song is based on historical events that took place during the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878) when Ali-Pasha, leader of Turkish troops at a strategic fortress, betrayed his people to the Russians in exchange for gold. In the end he was caught and punished by his people – they poured molten gold into his mouth, bound him with ropes and threw him into a ship's flue. The song features *krimanchuli*, the Georgian yodel which Igor Stravinsky described as the best kind of singing he ever heard.

18. *Gandagana* – A popular dance from Achara on the Black Sea.

The river carried along a chip of poplar wood.

Be still, water, and show my beloved's reflection.

19. *Harira* – Noko Khurtsia was a famous Georgian singer and choir director who made a remarkable recording of this song in the 1930s. We are inspired by his charismatic performance of this dance song from Samegrelo and try to follow his example, while keeping a few things our own.

20. *Tsangala Da Gogona* – Yet another dance, this song tells the story of a young fellow who seems to be doing everything wrong – for us! But he's okay.

Tsangala went to town, he brought back grapes.

He ate them himself! He digs our graves!

This boy dances so well on his tiptoes, if he falters, he'll blame the girl.