Bath Spa University

Department of Music

Revitalising the musical past of the Nogai through song: a contemporary interpretation of the Epic of Edige through Nine Rhapsodies

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Bath Spa University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2025

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Abstract

The Nogai people are an indigenous Muslim Turkic-speaking ethnic group in Russia, descended from the nomadic horsemen of Central Asia, with a culture that boasts a proud and resilient history. The Nogais – 'moribund tribelets' (Shelemay, 1990, p. 299) – have traditionally inhabited the Great Caspian Depression, an area where the echoes of their ancient melodies still resonate. Their narrative and musical traditions, once central to their identity, now face decline due to inconsistent practice, adaptation, and engagement with contemporary audiences. This research explores the creation of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*, an album that reimagines and revitalizes the traditional Nogai epic song Edige using attributes of contemporary musical production. The epic song recounts the deeds of Edige, (1352–1419), an eminent historical figure often hailed as the 'Nogai Genghis Khan' and the founder of the Nogai Horde, and engaging with it within this context is crucial, given its position as a foundational cultural text that was banned under Soviet rule, an act that severed a vital link in Nogai oral tradition. By synthesizing creative practice, historical texts, ethnographic and autoethnographic methodologies, this project not only documents but actively reinterprets Nogai musical heritage, seeking to reignite intellectual and artistic engagement with it. The new album serves as both a creative intervention and a preservation effort, extracting archetypes, key characters, and recurring themes from surviving fragments of the epic. Given my position as a Nogai insider, the project is inherently autoethnographic, bridging scholarship and artistic practice. By collecting, reimagining, and recontextualizing Nogai music, this research celebrates and sustains an endangered culture for future generations, standing on the shoulders of those who have sought to keep the Nogai legacy alive. As such, the project functions as a catalyst for exploring broader ideas of cultural revival, reclaiming the banned text, and embedding it into context of wider contemporary musical culture(s).

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Matthew Sergeant, whose expertise, thoughtfulness, and unwavering patience have guided me throughout this process. His insightful supervision has been invaluable, and his ability to challenge and refine my thinking has profoundly influenced both my work and approach to research. I am deeply thankful to Professor Amanda Bayley for her exceptional mentorship. Her comments and feedback have not only sharpened my writing style but also enriched my academic understanding. I am particularly appreciative of her attention to detail, especially regarding the nuances of language that have greatly enhanced the clarity and coherence of my thesis.

My sincere thanks also go to my former supervisor, Dr. Davey Ray Moor, whose mentorship has been integral to the development of this project. Dr. Moor stepped into the role of advisor, mentor, and co-producer with remarkable generosity. His encouragement, musical taste, advice, and hands-on involvement in the creative process were essential in pushing this project forward. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my colleagues and friends Dr. Matthew Dicken and Dr. MaryAnn Tedstone, whose support has been nothing short of transformative. Their dedication to helping me understand and record the untempered songs I collected from remote villages in the Russian Federation was a pivotal aspect of this project. Without their expertise and hard work, this album would not have been possible. I am incredibly grateful for the contributions of my collaborators – Tom Cory, Callum Moloney, Alex Goodyear, Clem Saynor, Andy Tween, Arslanbek (Asau) Sultanbekov, Farida Sidakhmetova, Alibek Koylakaev, and the late Alibiy Romanov (1962–2021). Their artistic input and dedication played an essential role in realizing the vision for this project.

Special mention must also go to Ivan Aloyshin (a brilliant Russian musician on the run) and Azhar Erkeblanova for their invaluable contributions to the music, which added depth and authenticity to the work. My thanks also extend to Erzhan Arkabay from Kyzyl Orda, whose hospitality in Istanbul, introduction to limping rhythms, and guidance on the intricacies of Sufi lyrics greatly enriched the cultural and musical context of this album.

I owe a profound debt of gratitude to Islam Satyrov, whose exceptional mixing skills and masterful *dombyra* playing added an extra layer of complexity and beauty to the soundscape of this work. A heartfelt thank you goes to Sir Henry Lawrence for lending me his twelve-string “Guild” guitar and listening to the demos, and to his wife Mrs Sue Blundell for reading and discussing my tales, offering me a place to stay, and providing me with food. A special thanks to Ms Carole Bemant for her unwavering belief in me, her constant support throughout this challenging journey, and for giving me a roof over my head in rainy Britain. Her encouragement has been invaluable.

I want to express my gratitude to the many people who taught me the ‘right frequency’ of wandering songs, leading me to rediscover what I now call the ‘Nogai blues’. Their insights and guidance have been an essential part of this project’s creative journey. I am also grateful to my followers, whose praise of my guitar playing, songwriting, poetry, and voice provided me with the impetus and inspiration to create *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*.

Finally, I would also like to acknowledge the incredible creative environment at BSU and the support of the staff and studios there. The stimulating academic atmosphere, the cutting-edge facilities, and the collaborative spirit fostered within the department have been vital in shaping this project. The opportunity to work alongside such talented and supportive individuals has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my academic experience.

Ethical Approval Statement

This study was approved by the Bath Spa University Ethics Panel on 26.09.2024.

All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrolment in the study and for any associated datasets to be utilised as presented within this thesis. Should you have any concerns regarding ethical matters relating to this study, please contact the Research Support Office at Bath Spa University (researchsupportoffice@bathspa.ac.uk).

Data Availability Statement

This thesis is supported by multiple datasets, which are openly available at the locations cited in the reference section. All datasets have been reviewed to ensure compliance with Bath Spa University's Ethical Approval Process and relevant data protection legislation. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and any unnecessary or sensitive information has been appropriately redacted prior to inclusion.

Copyright Statement

Video and Audio Links

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Figure 1.1. The Great Caspian Depression.[1] A satellite shot. NASA, 2024. Retrieved from: https://ar.pinterest.com/pin/384846730655881613/

[1] These marginal areas, often characterized by harsh climates and poor soil, became the last refuges for the nomads, where they could continue their traditional way of life amidst the encroaching agricultural and industrial expansion. This gradual confinement to less arable lands not only restricted their movement and economic activities but also significantly altered their social structures and cultural practices.

INTRODUCTION

Seven years ago, I found myself standing in the Nogai Steppe, guitar in hand, unsure of what to play. The vastness of the land stretched before me, echoing a silence that felt profound and ancient. I had been drawn back to my birthplace by an instinctive need. It was a call to 'revitalize the barren brain' (Bartók, 1976, p. 345) and reconnect with something deep within me. It was a search for the roots and essence of Nogai wandering songs. The melodies of my ancestors had always whispered at the edge of my consciousness, but I felt an overwhelming sense of inadequacy. I could play the guitar, but it felt foreign in this landscape, out of sync with the rhythms of the steppe. It was during this time that I encountered the *dombyra*, a two-stringed instrument (akin to the *saz* and *baglama* in Turkey), that seemed so simple yet carried the weight of centuries of tradition. I watched as a local musician played it effortlessly, his fingers dancing over the strings, producing sounds that felt like they belonged to the earth itself. The music was raw and untempered, filled with an energy that spoke of the nomadic spirit of the Nogai people. I held the *dombyra* in my hands, but it felt unfamiliar, awkward. I didn't know where to place my fingers or how to coax the sounds I was hearing from it. I was a stranger to my own heritage, disconnected from the very traditions I had come here to explore. The frustration of that moment stayed with me, but it also ignited a determination. I had come to the steppe with a responsibility – a duty to honour my people and preserve our culture. The *dombyra* became a symbol of that responsibility. Learning to play it meant more than just mastering an instrument; it meant reconnecting with the Nogai soul, reawakening the songs that had been passed down through generations but were in danger of being forgotten.

For months, I practised with the *dombyra*, struggling at first, but gradually learning its language. I immersed myself in the ancient songs, the wandering melodies that had once filled the air of these vast plains. The more I played, the more I began to understand that this music was not just about notes and rhythms – it was a form of storytelling, a way of keeping history alive. The songs spoke of journeys, of heroes like Edige - /ɛˈdiːgɐ/ (see Appendix VI for pronunciation guide of all Nogai terms), and of the hardships and triumphs of a nomadic people who had survived against all odds

(see Appendix I for the synopsis of *Edige*). As I delved deeper into Nogai music, I began to compose my own pieces, blending traditional sounds with my own experiences. I was no longer just a musician; I was becoming a conduit for the voices of my ancestors, reimagining their stories for a new generation. Each composition became a way of paying homage to the past while also pushing the boundaries of what Nogai music could be. Now, seven years later, I am submitting an album of seventeen compositions in Nogai, and the last one in Russian played on Nogai and Western instruments. The album is a culmination of my journey – an effort to recontextualize, repackage, and augment the Nogai musical tradition. Every note carries with it the weight of history, but also a sense of renewal. The guitar that once felt out of place in the steppe has found its harmony with the *dombyra*, creating a dialogue between the old and the new, between my personal experiences and the collective memory of my people.

Recorded online across three continents, the album features new compositions that reimagine and reconstruct traditional Nogai melodies, drawing directly from ethnographic recordings, transcriptions, and oral fragments of the *Epic of Edige*. The album draws from a range of traditional nomadic musical styles, echoing ancient forms such as *tolgaw - /tolga:u/*, a reflective and contemplative style; *boslaw - /boslau/*, a lament expressing sorrow; and *küi - /ku:i/* (see Appendix VI for pronunciation guide of all Nogai terms), an instrumental composition that showcases the virtuosity of the performer.

The pastoralists Nogai people reside in settlements (*aul*) and towns (*sheir*) spread across the Great Caspian Depression, an area rich in nomadic history and cultural significance, where the echoes of their ancient melodies still resonate today. *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* uncovers challenges and fills the gaps in the preservation and transmission of Nogai people's disappearing narrative *(dastan)*[2] and musical (*yiraw*) traditions. A traditional community, described as 'the last free descendants of the armies of Genghis Khan in Europe' (Bullough, 2010, p. 4) the Nogai are one of the

[2] *Dastan* is a form of oral epic narrative that uses both prose and poetry to tell dramatic stories.

Turkic-speaking minority ethnic groups (root people) of the Russian Federation. According to historical records, over the past three centuries, Russian rule has dominated the Nogai people, driving most of them out of the Nogai steppe (*Nogai Šhöl)* – 'the gateway to a mountain range' (Bullough, 2010, pp. 1–17) of the Northern Caucasus where the dry steppe meets fertile pastures of their ancestral 'kingdoms' along both banks of the river Kuban (*Köp-an* – many voices). Indeed, what privations and hardships they endured in their eventful and troublesome history can never be comprehended.

However, over time, the Nogai people transitioned from fearless 'mavericks' on horseback who 'could create powerful new movements but could not maintain them once they settled' (Sattin, 2022, pp. 214, 222) to the settled inhabitants absorbed in monotonous life cycles predominantly living in multi-ethnic villages (*aul*) in the nebulously defined Dagestan, mountainous Karachay-Cherkessia, and the rural areas of the arid Astrakhan region. An *émigré* diaspora of the Turkish Nogais lives in Ankara and in remote villages near the town called Eskisehir (Old Town). The Nogais possess a tradition of concise, ancient, and ego-free melodic narratives (prioritizing collective memory over individual authorship) set to a rhythm of one, two, or three-beats.

Never performed in uniform ways, these rhymed chronicles 'of an epic character' (the term epic – *epikos* – used here refers not only to the length of the text or the age of this poem as such but to the grand heroic history of the Nogais), 'conceived, as a rule, from a masculine point of view', are believed to trace back to the 'fourteenth to sixteenth centuries', that evoke a sense of antiquity (Valikhanov *et al.*, 2015, pp. 90–105; Bates, 2010, p. 20). Their narrative and musical traditions are a rare cultural phenomenon that now show signs of decline, as they have not been consistently practised, refreshed, or adapted to engage contemporary audiences and maintain intellectual interest in them. Thus, the goal of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* is to fill this intriguing gap, seeking to retell the Nogai past through song and initiate a broader academic discourse.

This new album with a 'soul and mind of its own' (Barrett & Bolt, 2006) pays homage to the authenticity of Nogai music while honouring the grandeur of the *Epic of Edige*

(hereinafter *Edige*), a prosimetric narrative – *dastan* or *destan* – which is long and complex. *Edige* was blacklisted during the Soviet era, along with the famous literary works of authors like George Orwell, Vladimir Nabokov, Joseph Brodsky, and others. Evidence of the armchair fieldwork and 'spade' suggest that, akin to heroic epics like those of Greece, the Finnish *Kalevala*, and the Kyrgyz *Manas*, *Edige* – attributed to Shalkeez Tilenshy Ulu, a medieval Sufi poet, and other poets, who were, as Bates puts it 'leaning on a staff about whom all genuine information is lost', contains, 'reshaped, reordered, and variously transformed nuggets of historical fact' (2010, pp. 16–17).

Indeed, *Edige* is composed of reshaped, reordered, and variously transformed fragments of historical facts. Drawing on the insights and 'the eyewitness report, the foundation upon which all results will rest' (Myers, 1990, p. 21) from ethnographic research, with incorporated elements from world music and American blues, *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* fuses obsolete poetry with instruments such as the twangy *dombyra,* the *qyl-qobuz- /kil-kobuz/* (akin to the *morin huur* in Mongolia), the jaw harp, overtone chanting, and traditional drums, alongside the resonance of alternatively tuned acoustic and electric guitars. The inclusion of the latter serves as a bridge between the musical realms of modernity and nomadic antiquity – a core part of this project's inception. Alternatively tuned (open-tunings that approximate the resonant intervals of the *dombyra* and *qyl-qobuz*) acoustic and electric guitars (see Chapter 3), excitingly emerge as the ideal choice for establishing a tonal foundation that complements the *dombyra* and *qyl-qobuz*. When tuned to alternative configurations, these guitars offer the versatility and richness needed to harmonize the unique timbres of the traditional Nogai instruments. The tuning flexibility of both acoustic and electric guitars and of the *dombyra* allows for precise adjustments, ensuring that the resulting tonal landscape provides a supportive backdrop for the delicate nuances of the *dombyra* and *qyl-qobuz*. As such, *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* builds upon the legacy of musicians and poets who diligently preserved their traditional music. In echoing Bartók's conviction that 'folk music will become a source of inspiration for a country's music only if the transplantation of its motives is the work of a great creative talent' (Suchoff, 1976, p. 347), the album stands as a testament to the vitality and innovation within the Nogais' musical tradition and seeks to furnish a dynamic musical

platform for the tradition's enduring resonance and significance. In part, the album draws from an Italian composer, Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643), who emphasized the importance of considering the local sound and meaning of words in performance (François-Bernard-Mache, 1992, p. 67). Additionally, it draws inspiration from Leoš Janáček (1864–1928), a Czech composer, music theorist, and folklorist, who advocated for 'extracting music from words with imaginative freedom, rather than strictly adhering to the general context where the words regulate the musical emotion' (François-Bernard-Mache, 1992, p. 67). In this project — the words of *Edige* regulate musical emotion, akin to Monteverdi's word -painting but filtered through melodic archetypes, balancing performance this with Nogai oral tradition's stricter textual governance.

In establishing the theoretical foundations of this practice-based research, inherently devoted to the retelling of people's past through song, the album presents a compelling argument that challenges the prevalent narrative propagated by the Russian elite, who often distorted the stories told by the Nogai people. By highlighting this issue, the album seeks to counteract the deleterious impact of narratives that have been co-opted by the Russian victors, who assert their dominance over what is essentially 'stolen land' (Stone and Baratta, 2013, p. xi).

Chapter 1 explores the musical identity of the Nogais in the twenty-first century, focusing on traditional elements such as epic storytelling and unique musical structures. These elements, despite the lack of a written history and musical theory among the nomadic Nogais, have long defined their heritage and continue to play a vital role in modern interpretations. Nogai music and poetry, with its Eastern roots and historical connections, as noted by Shoqan Valikhanov (1835-1865), in rhythm and rhyme reflect the experience of their ancestors – relating 'to the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries' (2015, p. 99.) The chapter discusses key figures and opinion-makers, as well as the locations and factors that shaped their stylistic directions. It also examines how their opinions and contributions later influenced the arrangement strategies of this project, including the selection of instruments, the approach to text,

and the interpretation of the text. Additionally, it addresses the relevance of this interpretation in the contemporary world.

Chapter 2 focuses on the significance of shared knowledge in the process of creating a music album and emphasizes its role in successful collaboration. Nogai narrative and musical traditions, rooted in 'their own world', are passed down orally and preserved by heterogeneous communities living in remote villages in Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Astrakhan Oblast. Despite their remoteness, as noted by Thiago de Oliveira Pinto, these villages are 'globally connected hamlets' of the Russian steppes (2018, p. 15). The chapter delves into the evolution of the project from its initial phase of language acquisition and cultural immersion to the intricate process of musical and intellectual collaboration. Facing the challenge of not being fluent in Turkic languages, in 2017 the journey began with a meticulous study of *Edige*, which revealed a profound reservoir of knowledge and artistic inspiration.

As my proficiency in the Nogai language grew, a language I spoke rarely after childhood but relearned through archival recordings and *aqsaqal* (white-bearded elders) - */aksakal/* consultations post-2017, so did the project's depth, uncovering a rich medley of cultural and musical elements that would shape the work.

The chapter explores how the collaboration with key figures such as Alibiy Romanov, a contemporary Nogai musician and cultural activist from Dagestan, known for modernizing traditional Nogai epic singing (*yiir*) and *dombyra* performance, and Arslanbek Sultanbekov (Asau), revered Nogai *yiraw* (epic singer), alongside interactions with sound producers and esteemed musicians, facilitated the blending of traditional Nogai melodies with contemporary influences. Through a series of studio sessions, technical adaptations, and expert contributions, the project sought to honour the epic's heritage and push the boundaries of its musical expression. This phase, which spanned until August 2021 when I pressed the 'record' button to begin capturing original music; involved a series of studio sessions; technical adaptations, and expert contributions, ultimately bringing my version of the Nogai epic into the contemporary cultural landscape.

The last chapter highlights the exploration of the text of *Edige* as a multidimensional entity – musical, textual, and symbolic. It focuses on its significance within the framework of cultural heritage and musical innovation. The intricate processes involved in transforming the text of *Edige* from its original form are examined, emphasizing the cultural context, instrumentation, and the inherent challenges of working with traditional texts and indigenous instruments. Special attention is paid to issues such as pitch variability, manual tuning, and the integration of musical motifs. The text of *Edige* is reimagined within a studio environment, which serves as a transformative space where traditions are preserved, extended, and recontextualized.

Adapting *Edige's* monophonic epic tradition into polyphony required balancing innovation with authenticity. While historically *Edige* is performed solo with drone accompaniment (Bazarov, 1996), this project introduces harmony only where it enhances textual meaning — like *Kenes* (Blessing - timecode 41:04) choral fifths amplifying the lament - *boslaw*. Melodies retain pentatonic cores with selective chromaticism for dramatic effect. This mirrors Turkic revitalization models (e.g., Tuvan ensemble singing; Suzükei, 2005) while rejecting Soviet-era forced harmonization. The table below details these adaptive choices.

Additionally, the chapter analyses key aspects of the instrumentation and arrangement strategies, with a focus on making *Edige* a resonate cultural artefact fitting the modern context.

Rationale for the Research

The core of this research is rooted in the *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*, an album that revives the ancient Nogai epic centred on Edige. The *Epic of Edige*, hereafter referred to as *Edige*, encapsulates the rich narrative and cultural essence of the Nogai people. My initial engagement with Nogai heritage was limited to superficial auditory experiences, shaped by my upbringing in a communist society. This research, however, marks a significant departure from that superficial understanding. By immersing myself in the study of *Edige*, I aim to uncover and articulate a profound and often overlooked narrative that challenges dominant historical interpretations.

The significance of this research lies in two principal objectives:

1. Preservation and Revitalization: The first objective is to preserve the cultural heritage embedded in Nogai epic songs. This effort is crucial in the context of post-Soviet cultural studies, where minority cultures face substantial risk of erosion. By reinvigorating the Nogai language through musical expression, the research revitalizes linguistic and cultural practices of these traditions and ensures their continued relevance.
2. Cultural Relevance and Innovation: The second objective is to enhance the relevance of Nogai traditions within the modern musical landscape. This involves a delicate balance between maintaining the integrity of traditional forms and incorporating innovative adaptations that appeal to contemporary audiences.

The research methodology combines oral history, ethnography, and musicology with personal insights gained from years of engagement with epic-song restoration. This interdisciplinary approach is vital for navigating the challenges posed by the current socio-political climate in Russia, which increasingly restricts independent thought and expression. The album *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* confronts the dominant Russian historical narrative that marginalizes Nogai contributions and culture. This prevailing narrative, which often imposes a sense of inferiority on the Nogai people, overlooks the intricate complexities of their heritage. For instance, Russian historiography often

reduces the Nogai Horde to a 'barbaric' footnote or frames Edige as a minor warlord, erasing his role as a statesman and the Nogai's influence on Eurasian diplomacy, as evidenced in works like Khodarkovsky's Russia's *Steppe Frontier* (2002). This account focuses on Russia's conquest of the Eurasian steppe but frames nomadic polities like the Nogai Horde as 'obstacles' to imperial progress rather than sovereign actors. It also briefly mentions Edige as a Mangyt leader but overlooks his cultural/political legacy in Nogai tradition.

In contrast, *dastan Edige* presents an alternative historical perspective, suggesting that Edige and his descendants played a crucial role in the collapse of the Golden Horde, thus protecting Muscovy from potential destruction. By reframing this historical narrative, my research engages with critical discussions on nationalism, historical memory, and cultural identity. *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* challenges Russian archival depictions of the Nogai as 'stateless raiders' by using the epic song *Šantemir (Tamerlane) kyzgan kumusga* to sonically reconstruct Edige's marital alliance and military cooperation with Tamerlane's dynasty — a significant reciprocity that has been marginalized in imperial histories and underrecognized in Nogai tradition itself.

In summary, this research is driven by a dual focus on preserving and revitalizing Nogai musical traditions while addressing their place in the contemporary cultural landscape. The integration of ethnographic, musicological, and personal insights aims to contribute significantly to the fields of ethnomusicology and cultural studies, providing a richer understanding of the Nogai heritage and its ongoing relevance.

Context of the Research

We know that ancient narrative and musical traditions possess a timeless quality that transcends temporal boundaries, helping us connect past and present and they reflect the intricate interconnectedness of cultures. The *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* is situated within a broader global discourse on safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), as outlined by UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Following Rachel Harris's framing of music as 'heritage-in-motion' (2012), this album redefines UNESCO's 'safeguarding' by using *Edige* to disrupt state

historiography and mobilize cultural memory and aims to revitalize it through contemporary musical forms, addressing key themes of identity, collective memory, and cultural preservation.

Historical Significance and Modern Relevance

Edige is crucial for understanding Nogai heritage, which has faced significant erosion due to Soviet and post-Soviet policies — paralleling Valentina Süzukei's and Theodore Levin's documentation of Tuvan epic revival (e.g., *Where Rivers and Mountains Sing*, 2006) as decolonial sound practice. This research seeks to restore and revitalize the cultural roots of the Nogai people by bridging historical traditions with contemporary contexts.

Objectives and Methodology

The primary objective is to preserve and innovate Nogai cultural traditions. This involves a nuanced balance between maintaining traditional forms and integrating modern adaptations. The project employs methodologies from oral history, ethnography, and musicology, supported by insights from the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) and similar global initiatives. The AKTC's efforts to protect cultural heritage through community engagement offer a model for this project, which similarly aims to safeguard Nogai epic traditions.

Global Parallels and Inspirations

This work draws from global examples of cultural preservation. UNESCO's recognition of Mongolian and Tuvan throat singing, Paul Pena's (1950–2005) engagement with Tuvan music in *Genghis Blues* (1999), and *Akala's Odyssey* (2017) provide models for integrating traditional forms with contemporary practices. Luka Lesson's reinterpretation of ancient themes in his song 'Bones', as shown in Video 1.1. below, and Tina Kuznetsova's fusion of folk and modern music further illustrate the dynamic interplays between tradition and innovation.

Video 1.1. Luka Lesson, 'Bones'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfW5ndBwYes.

Accessed on 10 August 2024

Challenges and Future Directions

Despite its innovative approach, the *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* is constrained by modern socio-political realities and technological limitations. The project remains in the studio phase, with ongoing efforts to balance tradition and modernity. Future directions may include expanding the project's reach and impact, exploring additional cultural and historical dimensions, and contributing to the broader discourse on ICH preservation. In summary, *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* represents a critical effort to preserve and adapt Nogai musical traditions within a global context. By engaging with both historical and contemporary frameworks, this research contributes to the ongoing effort to safeguard cultural diversity and heritage.

Research Questions

1. How can *Edige* be both reimagined and preserved through its entwinement of contemporary production techniques, collaboration with traditional musicians, Western instruments and contemporary styles, and authentic cultural contexts?

Within the interwoven threads of narrative and musical tradition, Nogai epics — symbolic forms of musical expression traditionally transmitted without written notation — celebrate epic journeys in extended verse narratives, or *dastan yiir*. These works serve as 'a reminder that things were so much simpler in those days, when people knew what they believed, and believed what they knew' (Cook & Everist, 1999, p. viii). There is a marked scarcity of detailed critical studies on Nogai epics. Research into the history and significance of Nogai music faces ongoing challenges, including limited access to balanced expertise and a lack of systematic classification. Although state-sponsored grants and Russian governmental awards offer temporary support to artists, the long-term sustainability of these initiatives — particularly in fostering creativity and innovation — remains uncertain. Therefore,

the assumption that traditional Nogai music will endure with undiminished vitality and relevance deserves critical examination. No scholar has arguably come closer to grasping the essence and message of this music than the steppe storytellers themselves. Traditionally performed in a monotonous tone — either a cappella or accompanied by instruments such as the *dombyra* and *qyl-qobyz* — *Edige* is marked by melancholic melodies that evoke the sombreness of nature and the spirit of nomadic life.

Among the Nogai, the art of epic storytelling and *dombyra* playing was once considered the pinnacle of artistic mastery. Authority over this esoteric symbolic tradition rests with the *aqsaqals,* who, despite lapses in memory, perform musical forms distinct from any European style. When evaluating music, *aqsaqals* use metaphorical terms such as ‘steepness’ or spatial concepts like ‘roundness’ (Levin *et al*., 2015). Their disinterest in Western notation reflects a strong connection to indigenous scales, contrasting sharply with Russian ethnographers’ attempts to transcribe Nogai music using systems as foreign as the Latin and Cyrillic scripts were to Turkic languages. This transcription process led to the loss of subtle nuances through simplified phonology and imposition of the Western twelve-tone system.

The challenge of creating a twenty-first-century interpretation of Nogai songs — as exemplified in *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* — hinges not only on linguistic comprehension, which structures the text’s inner meaning, but also on a modern engagement with rhythm, dynamics, and intonation. Language opens the door to the ancient magic of the text, passed down from so-called ‘primitive’ times (Valikhanov *et al.,* 1864, reprinted in 2015, pp. 90–105). This immersion presents a profound challenge to any contemporary adaptation.

Figure 1.2. An *aqsaqal* playing the *dombyra*.

While the challenge of creating a twenty-first-century interpretation of Nogai songs — as exemplified in *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* — fundamentally hinges on understanding the language (which structures the text's inner meaning. This linguistic focus is only one dimension of the process. The language facilitates immersion into the magic of the ancient text, its rhythm, dynamics, and intonational variations, passed down from 'primitive' times (Valikhanov *et al*., 1864, reprinted in 2015, pp. 90–105.) This engagement with the text presents a challenge.

2. What is the broader cultural impact of revitalizing *Edige* through modern music production, both for Nogai identity and for global discourses on Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) preservation?

Advances in audio recording and production technologies have opened opportunities to experiment with soundscapes, instruments, and textures. Working closely with traditional musicians – individuals who understand the essence of *Edige* and possess knowledge of epic songs – has allowed me to incorporate traditional techniques, repertoire, and performance practices into my work. These collaborations have helped imbued my compositions with authenticity and a deep respect for tradition. This

question explores how these collaborations and the nuanced understanding of the Nogai language contribute to preserving and revitalizing the epic in a way that respects its traditional roots.

This reinterpretation of *Edige* impacts the cultural identity of the Nogai people directly but also contributes to global discussions on ICH preservation. This question seeks to assess broader implications of modern adaptations on cultural continuity and identity, evaluating how these efforts align with international preservation goals and contribute to the cultural landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nine Rhapsodies about Edige is not only an autoethnographic practice but also a metaphorical evocation of the nine muses from ancient Greek mythology, each muse traditionally inspiring a different form of artistic or intellectual expression. Here, they serve as a Homeric epithet, drawing a parallel between these muses and the creative forces that animate this variant Nogai music and storytelling. The title references *Edige* which offers an epic portrayal of a monumental period from the 'golden age' of the Nogai people, when they dominated the territories of modern-day Russia (see Trepavlov, 2002). *Edige* is composed in oral form by generations of both renowned and anonymous bards, standing as the pinnacle of Nogai oral creativity and embodying the summit of their spiritual and artistic world. However, some scholars suggest that the medieval singer of tales, Shalkeez Tilenshy Ulu (the son of Tilenshy – a literate man), may have been one of the first to compose an epic song about his contemporary and fellow tribesman, the brave, green/blue-eyed[3] Edige.

This epithet, rarely emphasized in modern interpretations, serves as a Homeric device, much like the 'swift-footed Achilles', symbolizing Edige as an extraordinary hero with unique qualities – an image of a Turkic hero with rare green/blue eyes, reflecting both the mystique and strength associated with his character. By drawing inspiration from this monumental tradition, *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* seeks to reinvigorate this oral legacy and adapt it for the twenty-first century.

The origins of *Edige* are traced back to traditional funeral laments (*boslaw*) that celebrate(d) the lives and deeds of heroic figures. These ancient lamentations formed the foundational layers of the epic, transforming over time into a more structured narrative. This hero's life and accomplishments became the core of what evolved into

[3] It is highly unusual in Turkic-speaking domains to describe a person with blue eyes using the term *kök köz* (blue eyes), despite *kök* commonly meaning "blue" or "sky-coloured." Traditionally, *kök* is reserved for other natural elements (such as the sky or vegetation) rather than human features. Instead, *kara köz* ("black eyes") is the customary expression for dark-eyed individuals. When referring to blue eyes, speakers often use *yaşıl köz* (green-ish eyes), reflecting a broader, culturally nuanced colour categorization where *yaşıl* may encompass shades ranging from green to bluish hues.

the epic, eventually developing into a cycle that was passed down through various epic singers and oral poets.

One of the unique features of *Edige* is its flexibility in performance. While the main plot remains constant, singers are encouraged to contribute their own poetic verses, adding personal flourishes without altering the fundamental storyline. This allows the epic to remain both a timeless and a living tradition, continuously reshaped by each new generation of performers. This review draws from empirical research, ethnographic material collection, comparative analysis, and the study of epic songs. These songs serve as ‘containers’ of collective memory, are condensed in meter, employ irregular rhythms, and revolve around small groups of tones and intervals (discussed in Chapter 3).

These songs have intrigued and haunted intellectuals and musicians of Nogai origin worldwide since the fall of the USSR. Having lost their Soviet identity, we now grapple with redefining ourselves within a post-communist society that is resistant to embracing global values and integration. *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*, created during fieldwork trips and composed into a homogenous work in the studio between 2020 and 2023, ‘argues’ that the Nogai people, referred to as Noghay, Nagay, Mangyt, or Tartar [4] in Western and Turkic chronicles, have been misunderstood and misrepresented over time. The album undertakes the challenging task of doing justice to the undiscovered excellence of Nogai epic songs, paving new paths by incorporating globalized music, and honouring the work of predecessors who urgently sought to rescue disappearing Nogai epics.

However, the creation of this album sparked tension between the traditional preservation and modern reinterpretation of *Edige*. The hypothesis to ‘recontextualize’, ‘repackage’, and ‘augment’ *Edige* in a contemporary interpretation faced resistance from traditionalists, who view these efforts as a form of cultural

[4] As Peter Frankopan (2016, p. 163) notes, the term Tartars alludes to Tartarus, the abyss of torment in classical mythology, yet these names refer to similar nomadic people.

decadence. While lifestyles in Nogai settlements (*aul*)[5] are increasingly taking on the characteristics of urban living, with people driving to shops in air-conditioned cars, the application of such modernizing processes to their musical heritage remains a point of contention (see Appendix III for an autoethnographic tale, *Decadent Trip to +007 Zone*).

Despite these superficial changes, the reality of village life persists – where roads become nearly impassable after rain or during the thaw, turning to thick mud that makes even short walks difficult. The tension between modern conveniences and the enduring harshness of rural life underscores a significant cultural dichotomy, similar to what Bruno Nettl describes as a '*cliché* about musical scholarship that once separated historical musicologists, who view music as evolving, from ethnomusicologists, who emphasize what remains constant' (2015, p. 274).

Historical Overview

The historical references used in this research come from both published works and unpublished manuscripts that explore the fragmented history of the Nogai people. These sources provide insights into their culture, myths, instruments, and performance contexts, and are crucial for creating a musical piece that not only tells their story but also helps preserve their cultural memory. Key sources include works by Shoqan Valikhanov (1865), John Ramstedt (1904), Nikolai Alexandrov (1909), Muhammed Safargaliev (1936), Victor Zhirmunskiy (1964), Bella Kardanova (1991), Ashim Sikaliev (1994), Vadim Trepavlov (2002, 2010), Ramazan Kereytov (2002), Karl Reichl (2007), Henryk Janowski (2010), Oliver Bullough (2010), David Hunt (2010), Ahmed Yarlykapov (2014), Aina Cherkessova (2015), and Damir Yakubov (2020). Also weighty are Albert Lord's *The Singer of Tales* (1981) and Theodor Levin's *The Music of Central Asia* (2016), which offer valuable perspectives on oral traditions and musical practices. Yuri Aravin's *From Küi to Symphony* (2017) provides further context by describing Kazakh musical culture and introducing the unique musical trilogy of

[5] An *aul*, denoting a nomadic village, typically consists of clay brick houses or dwellings constructed with lime brick walls and covered by asbestos tiles.

Sairash Zaxembi[6], *Kazakh Eli* (Kazakh Fatherland). These sources collectively highlight that during the eighteenth century, the Empire pillaged their livelihood, renamed indigenous rivers, villages (*aul*), and towns, redrew maps, and erased memories of past events. The privations and hardships endured by the Nogai people in their eventful history can never be fully comprehended.

The historical aspect of this review draws from studies of historical accounts and a compilation of self-published works available in ordinary print at home libraries and shops. These accounts narrate the story of the Nogai people from various perspectives, encompassing eras of conquest, alliances, and tragic decline. From the rise of 'formidable khans' (Sikaliev, 1994, p.11) to the turbulent centuries of Russian colonization, the saga of the Nogai people is marked by both glory and despair. In his travelogue *Russians in Central Asia* (1865), Valikhanov, the first world-renowned traveller and ethnographer of the nineteenth century, educated in Saint Petersburg, introduces the Kyrgyz, distant ancestors of the Nogai people, who lead a life at the heart of the Turkestan steppes. A Kyrgyz khan by birth, Valikhanov describes the vast expanse of the steppes and the anti-military sentiments of indigenous leaders opposing Russia's advance, which posed significant challenges to the Russian army's progress through the sparsely populated steppes of Central Asia (then known as Turkestan). Valikhanov also recounts his brief encounter with *Edige*, which he learned and recorded in the Kyrgyz steppes, as shown in Figure 1.3. below:

[6] Although Sairash's early contributions were significant, his involvement did not continue past initial stages. Following the traumatic events of January 2022 in Almaty, he appeared emotionally affected and disillusioned with his musical path (based on my impressions). He withdrew from the project, and his previously active website is now defunct.

Figure 1.3. In the Kyrgyz steppes at the end of the nineteenth century

In this account it was the first time the name Nogai (Noghay, Nogay, Nagay), *Edige* and *Manas* appeared on the shelves of the Western academic press. This primary source communicates in the language of the ethnographer-explorer, conveying intimate information from the *yurt* – a mobile nomadic dwelling.

The broader research on steppe civilizations began long before Valikhanov's book was published and finds its roots in European knowledge of the steppes, dating back to ancient times with the study of Greek descriptions of the Scythians as documented in Herodotus' *Histories*. During the Middle Ages, historians such as 'Carpini, Rubruquis, and Marco Polo' (Phillips, 1965, p. 15) provided further insights into the legacy of the Tartars and Kipchaks, forefathers of the Nogai people. Accounts provided by travellers from the West like Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo (died 1412), Henry III's ambassador, and Antony Jenkinson (1529–1610/1611), the first Englishman in Samarkand and Bukhara en route to explore Muscovy, present a prosperous portrait of Golden Horde (1230–1500) – the realm of Genghis Khan (1162–1227), the Augustus King of the Mongol-Tartars. n *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (2015), Peter Frankopan describes this region as crossroads where the repercussions of cultural clashes reverberated across vast distances. Colin Thubron in *The Lost*

Heart of Asia (1994) depicts this region, 'yet even on maps ill-defined, and in history vaguely named: Desht-I-Kipchak, Turan, Turkestan, Central Asia' (p.1), as a central entity surrounded by peripheral territories stretching from the Black Sea to the Hindu Kush and the Sea of Japan. Once inhabited by nomadic hordes and feared Scythians, over time this land became a corridor for nomadic nations, remaining largely unknown until their sudden emergence to challenge surrounding empires. Thubron writes:

> For centuries it would remain silent and the movements of its peoples unknown, then it would unleash its wild cavalry west and east – Scythians, Huns, Turks, Mongols – to unwrap the soften empires round them. It was the hinterland of God's vengeance (1994, p. 1-2)

As chronicled by historians like Ötemish Hajji, Trepavlov, and Alexandrov, the legend of the Nogai people traces back to ancient migrations from Bukhara to the Astrakhan province along the Volga River. Alexandrov wrote (1900) that in the thirteenth century, amidst the tumult of Mongol-Tatar conquests, Khan Nogai (died in 1299) started carving out his realm, the Nogai Horde, spread between the Volga and Ural rivers. With ambitions akin to the great Mongol sovereign Genghis Khan before him, Khan Nogai embarked on campaigns of conquest, venturing as far as Poland, where his forces plundered and pillaged, leaving a wake of devastation in their path. Over the centuries, the Nogai Horde's presence loomed large, disrupting the territories of Lithuania, Russia, Poland, and Bulgaria, often aligning with regional powers like the Crimean khans or Russia itself.

In *History of the Nogai Horde* (2002), Trepavlov writes that the fourteenth century witnessed the ebb and flow of Nogai fortunes, culminating in the enigmatic figure of Edige challenging the authority of Khan Tokhtamysh and embarking on a quest for supremacy. With the support of Tamerlane and a coalition of disaffected tribes, Edige carved out a domain in the Volga plains, challenging all who dared to oppose him. His victory over Lithuanian forces in 1399 by the River Vorskla, immortalized in Russian chronicles, and his defiance of Russian encroachment solidified his status as a folk hero, revered for his courage and resilience. This fundamental work by Trepavlov has, over the past twenty years, become a subject of discussion and debate, as well as a

primary source relied upon by specialists in the social sciences[7]. However, from Sikaliev's account *The Nogai Heroic Epos* (1994), we learn that the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ushered in a period of turmoil and decline for the Nogai Horde. Confronted with Dzhungar's (Kalmyk) revolt resulting in the plundering of Nogai realms and further Russian expansionism, the Nogais grappled with existential threats that decimated their population and fractured their society. Sikaliev's work, particularly his rendition of *Edige*, serves as a unique and authentic source that was translated into English by Hunt in 2010.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Nogais entered their final conflict with the armies of the Russian Empire. In the 1770s, 'an imperial mind-set Russia' reigned by Catherine the Great (1762–1796) was growing rapidly. Fearing defection to the Ottomans, the Russian Empress 'left the valley choked with their dead' (Bullough, 2010, p. 4.) Count Grigory Potemkin, the most senior military commander, statesman, and master of political cunning in Catherine's court, was ordered to colonize the newly conquered area. Grigory Potemkin personally oversaw 'a sign of transformation of this land from a barren steppe to an ample garden, and from the wilderness of animals to welcoming people from all lands' (Figes, 2010, pp.15-17). It was the time when Russia, accountable for the destruction of indigenous people in the Caucasus, opened its path to the south, to the land of mountains, gaining access 'to the warm waters of the Black Sea and beyond' and 'could march onwards to the lands of wine and feasting', and after that, they might have marched 'to India itself – the greatest prize of all' (Bullough, 2010, p. 4). Gradually, fertile steppes became repeopled by Cossacks, Russians, Ukrainians from Malorossia, and other ethnic groups settling (squatting) ever since in undistinguished *Potemkinskie derevni* – a legacy bequeathed to this sacred land.

[7] The epic suggests that its protagonist was Muslim, performing *namaz* and observing Islamic codes of purity. However, there is little concrete archival or ethnographic evidence of consistent or "orthodox" Islamisation among the Nogai during this period. As with many steppe societies, religious identity was likely syncretic and shaped by a blend of Islamic practice, tribal custom, and political pragmatism. Additionally, official Islam was suppressed during the Soviet era, complicating both transmission and documentation of religious practices. Persianate influence in Central Asia — particularly in courts, arts, and literature — may have shaped elite or regional cultures, but direct influence on Nogai oral epic traditions remains difficult to substantiate.

We know that beyond the twentieth century, which the Nogais entered devastated, the historical record becomes increasingly sparce; there are long blank periods to which we can assign nothing, and it makes it difficult to trace out the history of the Nogai people. However, Nikolai Alexandrov, as shown in Figure 1.1, an imperial Russian art critic, publisher, and editor who had observed the Nogai people, provided the most plausible ethnographic portrait of the Nogai people in the 1900s, 'after the exodus of the majority of the nomadic population' (Sikaliev, 1994, p. 12). Reflecting on the encounter in his book Nogais, Alexandrov concluded:

> Once powerful, courageous, and pugnacious Mongols, now they are good for nothing. They don't know any craft, they are unable to trade, plant crops or trees or grapes. They make their living by breeding cattle, but they neglect even that. They don't protect their livestock from blizzards in winter, they do not try to advance cattle breed or even take good care of the animals, ultimately impoverishing themselves. So, now they have lost all their power, and can no longer be called the Great Mongols as in the days long gone. (1900, p. 2)

Alexandrov's account, though crude, offers a vivid and detailed description of the Nogais' way of life at the turn of the twentieth century. He paints a complex picture of a people caught between their proud nomadic heritage and the harsh realities of their present existence. Through his observations, we gain insight into the Nogais' physical appearance, their superstitions, and their cultural practices, from their unique marriage and funeral customs to their deep-rooted beliefs. Alexandrov captures the stark and often harsh environment of the Nogai Steppe, emphasizing both the physical and cultural landscape that shaped their daily lives. In contrast, this truthful, if prejudiced, portrayal contrasts sharply with the narrative constructed by Soviet social scientists. In the Soviet era, the nuanced and multifaceted depiction of the Nogais gave way to a more homogenized and ideologically driven narrative. The complexity of their lives, including their struggles and the remnants of their once-great culture, was overshadowed by a simplistic portrayal that aligned with Soviet ideals.

Figure 1.4. The Nogais at the turn of the twentieth century

Embracing Soviet Ideals: The Nogai in the Twentieth Century

The Soviet era (1917–1992) brought a ‘Marxist-Leninist ideology’ to the forefront, with a focus on class struggle, the supremacy of the state, and the promotion of a collective identity over individualism. This era also witnessed the suppression of dissent and the use of propaganda to shape public perception and national identity, where individuals were tethered to an overarching and unseen purpose. Therefore, it would be misleading to view the Nogais solely as a distinct culture that resisted Soviet influence. No tradition was left untouched. Traditional clothing and instruments were deemed not only obsolete but also harmful. They were seen as ‘backward and primitive’, and detrimental to individuals (Stites, 1992). Consequently, modernization campaigns targeted not only tangible objects but also children’s fairy tales, which had to reflect communist worldviews and morals. Popular fairy-tale plots fell out of favour. The belief was clear: the sooner people forget the old village, the more quickly and successfully the new village will be built. Spiritual verses, as a specialized area of folklore, were also banned for providing answers to profound questions about life, death, and ideals. However, these efforts did not achieve the desired results, and by the late 1920s, cultural policy began to shift. Authorities started to show renewed interest in folk culture and creativity. Folklore became a particular focus. Specialists were sent to villages to collect texts about Soviet power and its achievements. As such ‘texts’ were

rare, the idea emerged to train folk storytellers to produce them. For instance, the Kazakh poet and *dombyra* player Abai Kunanbaev[8] became a proponent of Soviet ideas and education in Central Asia, reflecting the regime's influence.

Another notable example is the poet Jambul Jabaev,[9] who, according to Dmitri Shostakovich's criticism, did not compose any works about Soviet power himself. Instead, he received royalty - gonorar – the only word he reportedly knew in Russian – by signing poems authored by others with his name. Soviet ideology sought to create a new folk art that met its requirements.

This marked the beginning of an industry dedicated to producing Soviet laments, epics, and similar works. Stalin articulated the principle that ideology had the right to influence folk culture: 'Proletarian in content, national in form.' Professional poets crafted folk songs performed by folk artists, who appeared in cities, films, and newsreels. The new texts were termed *novinki* to distinguish them from traditional *byliny*. Soviet cultural policy emphasized creating new genres, such as Soviet ditties, agitprop brigades, and folk choirs, which replaced authentic peasant culture with authored works as illustrated in the most popular Soviet film, *Volga-Volga* (1938) as shown below in Video 1.2.

Video 1.2. Film *Volga-Volga*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37VKMbMHjt0
Accessed on 14 August 2024

Extensive Soviet efforts to institutionalize new cultural norms and replace local traditions with state-sanctioned practices encountered significant resistance. The regime's policies aimed at creating a homogenous Soviet culture achieved mixed results. The devastation of World War II (1941–1945), which led to the destruction of

[8] Abai Kunanbaev (1845–1904) was a prominent Kazakh poet, philosopher, and educator. He is renowned for his role in promoting modern education and Soviet ideas in Central Asia. His works often reflect a blend of traditional Kazakh oral literature with progressive ideas introduced during the Soviet era.
[9] Jambul Jabaev (1846–1945) was a renowned Kazakh epic poet and singer. Despite his significant role in preserving and performing Kazakh oral traditions, Dmitri Shostakovich's criticism highlighted that Jambul did not compose works on Soviet themes himself but was known to receive payments for signing poems by other authors with his name. This reflects the complexities and compromises in cultural production under Soviet rule.

many villages and cities, further disrupted cultural life, particularly impacting musical traditions. With the loss of numerous male performers, musical expression often adopted a more feminine character. Even with the regime's pervasive control and efforts to reshape cultural life, traditional practices did not disappear entirely. Soviet cultural policies resulted in a dual reality: one rooted in traditional values and another moulded by socialist ideology. Over time, the latter became more dominant, while traditional culture faced increasing marginalization. Nonetheless, research indicates that traditional practices survived in private, familial settings, passed down through generations outside official Soviet institutions.

These traditions retained a fragile link to the past, highlighting the ongoing tension between state power and the enduring strength of local cultural identities during the Soviet era. Sheila Fitzpatrick in *The Russian Revolution* (1982), Yuri Slezkine in *Arctic Mirrors* (1994), and Terry Martin in *The Affirmative Action Empire* (2001) have investigated the broader context of Soviet policies and post-Soviet nationalism, highlighting the tension between attempts to reclaim indigenous cultures and the resurgence of Russian nationalism. Fitzpatrick's work provides a comprehensive overview of the Russian Revolution, including the cultural and social changes that ensued. Her analysis helps set the stage for understanding the Soviet Union's approach to culture, including how revolutionary ideals influenced the treatment of ethnic and indigenous groups. Fitzpatrick highlights the early Soviet attempts to modernize and integrate various ethnicities into a cohesive socialist identity, which often meant suppressing traditional cultures in favour of a unified Soviet culture. Her work underscores the initial ideological drive behind Soviet policies that aimed to transcend ethnic differences and build a socialist state. Slezkine explores the paradoxical nature of Soviet nationality policy, which aimed to both modernize indigenous peoples and preserve their unique cultural identities. This work is crucial for understanding the broader context of Soviet efforts to reclaim and reshape indigenous cultures. Slezkine's analysis reveals the tensions and contradictions inherent in Soviet policies that sought to create a homogenized socialist society while simultaneously promoting ethnic diversity, as shown in Figure 1.5 below, for example.

Martin's concept of the 'affirmative action empire' refers to efforts to support the cultural and political development of various ethnic groups, sometimes at the expense of Russian nationalism. Although this might have been tolerable, communism itself soon faced collapse. In 2008 Valentina Suzükei stated: 'the total collapse of Soviet concepts has finally created the basis for an objective assessment of the music of non-European civilizations in the twenty-first century' (2008, p. 35).

Figure 1.5. Outside the school in Novkus-Artezian. 1970s. (My mother is sitting second from the left in the first row)

Rediscovery and Revival of Nogai Music

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991,[10] the Nogai people, like many other indigenous groups, began actively reviving their cultural traditions. This period provided an opportunity to reclaim lost identities and restore cultural practices that had been suppressed or forgotten. For the Nogai people, this meant revitalizing musical traditions, storytelling, and crafts, which helped reconnect them with their historical

[10] To avoid imposing subjective opinions, it is advisable to read the novel Snowdrops by A.D. Miller (2011), which offers insight into the 'transitional period' in recent Russian history. Miller's perspective allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural environment of that time.

roots. A significant event in this process was the 600th anniversary celebration of the Nogai Horde and its founder, Edige, in November 1992.

In developing the strategy and rationale for the album, it was crucial to consider the contributions of key researchers, each offering a unique perspective on the tradition. Bella Kardanova, in particular, focuses on various aspects of epic performance, such as onomatopoeia, monody, *Barmaq* recitation - */barmak/* (finger techniques), instrumentation, and the 'indistinctness of text' in performance. She links these elements to the ancient origins of the text, although it remains unclear which parts of *Edige* were recited by Hadji-Iskhak Djuma Kumukov (1888–1966) when he recorded the text in Terekly-Mekteb in the 1950s and what tonal choices Hadji-Iskhak made. It is also unknown whether he used the *qyl-qobuz* or *dombyra*, and whether he faced technical limitations or was a highly skilled performer (see Chapter 3). Understanding insights into epic performance provides a foundation for appreciating the broader spectrum of Nogai musical traditions.

This context helps illuminate the distinctive contributions of other key figures, such as Alibiy Romanov (1962–2021). Romanov was a notable interpreter of ancient Nogai songs, and his approach to performing and teaching was notably unique. His style diverged significantly from conventional methods typically encountered in music schools. For instance, he would strum the gut strings while vocalizing the rhythm *tubu-dum-tubu-dum*, as shown in Video 1.3 below, evoking the imagery of a boy riding a wooden horse. Rather than using standard *solfège* notation (Do, Re, Mi), Romanov referred to notes on the fingerboard as 'first note', 'second note', and 'note number three'. This pedagogical method bears resemblance to techniques described by Albert Lord in his studies of Avdo Međedović, who also used traditional methods for memorizing and performing epics. Similarly, Romanov learned to play the *dombyra* and sing tales from his parents, who were unfamiliar with musical notation. His mother guided his hand along the fingerboard, teaching various 'songs' *(küi)* to the *tubu-dum-tubu-dum* rhythm.

Video 1.3. Alibiy Romanov (1962–2021) explaining and demonstrating horse rhythm.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZX2nbHYTV8

Accessed on 14 August 2024

Thus, the preservation of this tradition falls on the performer, making the propagation of this 'theory' ambiguous and reliant on the mentor's skill, memory, and taste, as well as the apprentice's determination. Moreover, no formal qualifications are granted for mastering an extensive repertoire that could elevate an individual's social standing or secure employment for exceptional talents. Success in this 'nepotistic' domain largely hinges on fortune. This is exemplified by Asau's (Arslanbek Sultanbekov) unexpected (yet deserved, in my opinion) recognition in Turkey in 2014, when Recep Tayyip Erdoğan admired the song '*Dombyra'* and adopted it as the anthem for his political party. Courtesy of his success, Sultanbekov's contributions have been instrumental in nurturing my exploration of the text of *Edige*, particularly due to the unique timbre that the instrument produces. This distinctiveness arises from his innovative modification of the *qyl-qobyz* – specifically, the addition of a fitted fretboard to the curved neck, which facilitates chromatic playing and the use of finger pads, as shown in Figure 1.5 below.

This modification, as shown on the track *Intro,* positions Sultanbekov as the unique 'owner' of the instrument's authentic 'pitched', direct, and demystified sound, drawing from Jumabay Bazarov's technique, as described in Karl Reichl's *Edige*: *The Karakalpak Heroic Epic: As Performed by Jumabay Bazarov* (2007). Bazarov's performance, as captured in the intimate setting of the DVD[11] accompanying Reichl's research, profoundly influenced my approach to music. His voice, in sync with the uneven, interrupted bowing of the *qyl-qobuz*, conveyed a mesmerizing rhythm. Bazarov's style evoked a mystical presence, embodying the epic in a manner that transcended simple technical execution. Observing this performance informed the significance of not just playing the notes but engaging with the narrative's essence –

[11] A video snippet uploaded to my YouTube channel a few years ago, after an unsuccessful attempt to contact Reichl via email, garnered appreciative comments from Karakalpaks and Central Asians. However, one comment, delivered in a rather rude tone, pointed out that Bazarov was not the last performer of *Edige*, and that the tradition remained alive, along with some inaccuracies in the description. I responded politely, apologized for my ignorance, and corrected the text. Subsequently, the commenter apologized, explaining that previous interactions with Nogais had led to an initially aggressive tone. Our conversation continued, revealing several videos made by local activists in 1995, before Reichl recorded Bazarov, which are now available on YouTube.

an insight that has shaped my own compositions, particularly in *Ak Mamyk* (timecode 16:22.)

Figure 1.6. Sultanbekov's *qyl-qobyz* with the chromatic fretboard

Model Comparable Artistic work. Approaches and Contributions

This experience offered a lens through which I could perceive how seemingly antiquated steppe melodies, often dismissed as relics of the past, could find renewed expression, continuing to serve as vessels of cultural and emotional meaning where antiquity and modernity coexist. Moreover, Bazarov's ambiguous interpretation, despite my challenges with the Karakalpak dialect, prompted a reconsideration of the delicate balance between clarity and fluidity in my own renditions. This reflection led to broader inquiries into how my approach preserves and continues the elusive, intangible essence of the tradition, despite the lack of a clear understanding of its nature. In parallel, Paul Ricoeur's (1984) concept of narrative temporality comes into play, as it reflects how the continuity of tradition, and its intangible elements are preserved through reinterpretation over time.

My reflections illuminated how my methods align with established practices in epic narrative interpretation, framed within what might be termed the ‘Homeric’ tradition, while also engaging with what lies beyond the explicit – the enduring spirit of performance and the ongoing evolution of musical expression. This intellectual curiosity guided me toward the documentary *Akala’s Odyssey*, directed by John O’Rourke for BBC Four in 2018, as shown below in Video link 1.4. Through Akala’s engagement with Homer’s *Odyssey*, Shakespearean themes, and the ancient Greek landscapes associated with these timeless stories, I was compelled to rethink *Edige* not merely as a cultural artifact but as a narrative phenomenon on par with *Macbeth*. Akala’s method, rooted in deep intellectual and creative immersion, illuminated the universal resonance and profound emotional depth of these ancient epics, thus enriching my understanding of *Edige’s* monumental scope.

Video 1.4. *Akala’s Odyssey*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBBPVgen2dE
Accessed on 11 December 2024

In parallel to this exploration, virtual ethnography introduced me to the 2014 documentary *Qambaq - /kambak/*. Directed by Aina Cherkessova as part of her MPhil, with Islam Satyrov serving as a creative producer (who would later become the sound producer for my album), this film probes into the layers of Nogai life. *Qambaq* traces a journey from the Caucasus Mountains through Dagestan to the Volga River and finally to the Caspian Sea. This documentary, particularly through Yusuf Djumakulov’s rendition of *Edige* (as shown in Video 1.5. below, timecode 8:04), provides critical insight into how music and culture intertwine, shaping each other in profound ways.

Video 1.5. *Edige* as performed by Yusuf Djumakulov
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijSqmSXg4mE
Accessed on 14 August 2024

The film illustrates how music reflects and perpetuates ethnic identity. Martin Stokes’ (1994) hypothesis posits music as a dynamic medium through which cultural identities are continuously constructed and reconstructed. Stokes argues that music is a

reflection of identity and an active agent in its formation and transformation. This perspective is evident in *Qambaq*'s portrayal of performance of *Edige*, which is emblematic of how symbolic rituals contribute to the articulation of Nogai identity. Furthermore, Aina's exploration extends beyond male performance to emphasize the crucial role of women in Nogai culture. By presenting women's songs, laments, superstitions, and practices, she shows how these elements are instrumental in both reflecting and perpetuating the community's identity. For instance, the ritual of pouring hot lead into a bowl of water above a girl's head and interpreting the resulting patterns, as shown in Figures 1.7 and 1.8, serves as a form of divination deeply rooted in cultural tradition.

Figure 1.7. Hot lead poured into a bowl of water.

Figure 1.8. A scorpion?

Approaches

Having observed and reflected on the above, my most tangible encounter with the art of reimagining ancestral music came through my acquaintance with Tina Kuznetsova, a Russian jazz and folk diva, known for her work as a collector of folklore and an interpreter of peasant songs – 'the soul of Russia' as Figes puts in *Natasha's Dance* (2002). Her practice with the band Zventa Sventana of transforming *Babushkas'* "mouth songs" into contemporary, jazz-inflected dance tracks struck as a compelling act of decontextualization — lifting traditional material from its rural environment and reembodying it into modern sonic landscapes. It was fascinating to witness the metamorphosis of archaic texts, sung in dialects that only tonally resemble modern Russian, into dance compositions.

The synergy between my own intentions and Kuznetsova's approach became especially apparent when I encountered the text of *Edige*, recorded and rarely performed in a language similarly preserved, with vocabulary that has largely fallen out of everyday use. Unlike Tina, whose reinterpretations rely on digital instrumentation and stylistic remixing, my project centres on traditional instruments such as the *dombyra* and *qyl-qobyz*, drawing rhythmic inspiration from the dynamic

cadence of Nogai poetry. My aim is not to decontextualize folk heritage, but rather to reshape its performative code—integrating both traditional and contemporary tools to reframe its expression without displacing its essence.

Video 1.5 Zventa Sventana performing *Husband is not Home*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tY4OK-Dg_s&list=RD9tY4OK-Dg_s&start_radio=1

Accessed July 16, 2025

Around the same time, I became acquainted with Sairash Zhexembi, a Kazakh amateur musician from Almaty, who, regrettably, vanished from my radar during the creation of his ambitious musical trilogy *Kazakh El'* (Kazakh Fatherland). It was captivating to witness how fragments of melodies he composed — sometimes tentative and minimal—were transformed into epic musical pieces through the layering of string orchestra recordings atop folk instrument tracks previously captured in separate studios. In contrast to Zhexembi's pursuit of sonic refinement and orchestral completeness, my engagement with *Edige* was shaped by textual inspiration and the constraints of my limited, yet sufficient, knowledge of the language. The laconic nature of the text and the absence of professional infrastructure led me to adopt an oral approach—one rooted in tradition, as it was for our predecessors. I sing; Zhexembi, by contrast, composed *küi:* instrumental narratives without words. This small difference speaks to differing relationships to voice, words, memory, and the modes of cultural transmission we each chose to embrace, recontextualise, repackage and augment.

The call to reinterpret *Edige* became truly imminent after encountering The Hu — a Mongolian heavy folk band whose sound and presence stirred something instinctual and undeniable. Hearing them for the first time, and then briefly meeting the lead singer in Irkutsk, Siberia, near Lake Baikal, felt like a turning point. Throat singing, traditional instruments – the *morin huur*, the raw sonic drive, mythology, the Mongolian language, cheekbones, costumes, powerful performances supporting *The Gereg* (2019), along with wolves in their video clips: every abstract element, the whole

package, seemed to insist that *Edige* deserved to be musically inhabited and given a top-tier treatment.

Contributions

Different approaches and contributions of various music visionaries collectively guided me to reimagine the intangible magic of *Edige* in *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* – an antithesis of oral culture, where 'one never hears an epic song reproduce a theme in exactly the same words' (Lord, 1981, p. 69). My choice of Nogai over Russian arises from a deep mistrust of the Russian language, rooted in previous experiences, where relying on Russian sources led to misjudgements of my songs, though the last song *Kosh Keldyn, Edige* (timecode 50:14) is written in Russian and sung in an onomatopoeic style (see Appendix II for song texts).

In contrast, *Edige* has preserved the pristine and authentic nature of the Nogai language and selecting words from the original text helps maintain a vital connection to cultural heritage. This decision reflects a commitment to a language that has remained relatively untouched by profound political and social upheavals. Moreover, singing in Nogai allows one to avoid the interpretive pitfalls that could arise from using Russian, ensuring that my creative decisions remain faithful to the natural meter of *Edige*. Unlike Russian, which is heavily influenced by its iambic rhythm – a feature that is largely absent in *Edige* – the Nogai language enables genuine representation of the narrative. In conclusion, it is worth reflecting on the words of Mohammed Safargaliev (1906–1970), a courageous Nogai anthropologist and historian, who, in 1938, wrote these resonant words:

> Whether we explore the disintegration of the Golden Horde, the formation of the Moscow State and the struggle of the Russian people against the 'Tartar yoke', or the histories of the Crimean and Volga Tatars, Bashkirs, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Karakalpaks, we invariably encounter the Nogais. (1938, quoted in Sikaliev, 1994, p. 6)

Yet the only tangible reminder of the Nogai legacy remains in the red-bricked ruins of Saray-Batu, the former capital of the Nogai realms. Located at the estuary of the Volga River near Astrakhan, Saray-Batu has gradually sunk into the soil over the centuries.

In the spring of 2014, Russian archaeologists arrived with tools to excavate the site, revealing undatable ruins of stonework. Indeed, the reason behind the excavation of the symbolic 'tomb'[12] of the Nogai 'myth' remains unclear for those unfamiliar with *Edige*.

[12] The story of the opening of Tamerlane's tomb on 21 June 1941, is a fascinating and eerie chapter in history, often steeped in myth and legend. Tamerlane, also known as Timur, was a Turco-Mongol conqueror who founded the Timurid Empire in the fourteenth century. He was buried in the Gur-e-Amir mausoleum in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. In 1941, Soviet archaeologists, led by Mikhail Gerasimov, decided to open Tamerlane's tomb. The excavation was part of a broader effort to study the historical and cultural artifacts of Central Asia. According to popular accounts, the local elders, and descendants of Timur warned the archaeologists not to disturb the tomb, citing an ancient curse that prophesied great misfortune if the tomb was opened. Despite these warnings, the archaeologists proceeded with the excavation on 21 June 1941. Inside the tomb, they discovered Timur's remains, and Gerasimov later used the skull to reconstruct Timur's facial features. According to legend, an inscription inside the tomb read 'Whosoever opens my tomb shall unleash an invader more terrible than I'. The very next day, on 22 June 1941, Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. This coincidence fuelled the belief that opening Tamerlane's tomb had indeed unleashed a curse, bringing immense suffering and destruction to the Soviet Union. The story takes an even more intriguing turn with the alleged re-interment of Tamerlane's remains. According to some accounts, in November 1942, Stalin ordered the remains to be returned to the tomb with full Islamic rites. Shortly thereafter, the tide of the war began to turn in favour of the Soviets, most notably with their victory at the Battle of Stalingrad. While the tale of the curse and the timing of Operation Barbarossa remains in the realm of legend and coincidence, it adds a layer of mystique to the historical figure of Tamerlane and the turbulent times of World War II.

METHODOLOGY

Developing an Argument

This research blends ethnographic and autoethnographic approaches to investigate Nogai epic traditions, with a particular focus on the prosimetric text of *Edige* and its declining use in contemporary contexts. The methodology explores the preservation of musical traditions, the creation of new compositions, and practical engagement with Nogai culture through first-hand experiences.

Central to this study is an autoethnographic reflection that enriches the research by placing the researcher within the cultural context, merging the roles of observer and participant, and offering both personal and analytical lenses for understanding Nogai musical heritage.

Integration of Ethnography and Autoethnography

Ethnography, as described by John Creswell in his book *Research Design*: *Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2013), focuses on immersive observation and interaction with cultural groups, aiming to document and interpret their practices. In this research, ethnography was essential for gathering living testimonies, recording songs, and understanding the role of music in the daily lives of the Nogai people. Fieldwork conducted between June 2017 and March 2021 in regions such as Russian Dagestan, Astrakhan, Turkey, and Western Kazakhstan allowed for an in-depth exploration of cultural sites, epic events, and traditional performances. These activities provided the necessary cultural and geographic context for the study and enabled the collection of primary data, including audio and video recordings, photography, and field notes. Autoethnography, as articulated by Carolyn Ellis in *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (2004) and further elaborated by Garance Maréchal in *Encyclopaedia of Case Study Research* (2010), offers a reflective and introspective approach that combines personal narrative with cultural analysis. This method allows researchers to analyse their experiences within the cultural phenomena they study, offering a more nuanced and humanistic

perspective on their subjects. Through autoethnographic reflection, I critically examined my own role within the research, using my personal experiences to inform the academic analysis.

During my fieldwork, I engaged deeply with the Nogai culture, immersing myself in their musical traditions. For example, in October 2018, I travelled to the Astrakhan steppes to connect with locations tied to epic events, followed by a journey to Ankara, Turkey, in November 2018, to witness the ruins of Roman fortresses – sites possibly destroyed by Tamerlane during his battles with Bayezid in the 1400s. These choices were not only about understanding history but also about experiencing the Nogai world first-hand. By walking the landscapes, listening to the living music, and engaging with local communities, I could better understand how these traditions continue to shape Nogai cultural identity.

Reflexivity and Strategic Choices in Fieldwork

Reflexivity, a key concept in qualitative research as discussed by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2011), involves critically reflecting on one's role in the research process. The decision to travel to specific locations – such as the Astrakhan steppes and Roman ruins in Ankara – was driven by a strategic need to immerse myself in the cultural and historical landscapes that shaped the Nogai epic traditions. These travels in October and November 2018 were pivotal moments in the research, as they provided a more profound connection to the sights and sounds of Nogai history. The importance of reflexivity in this research became even more apparent during the disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which halted fieldwork in 2020. However, I adapted by maintaining online communication with Nogai musicians and researchers, continuing the collaborative process virtually. This adaptability is a testament to the resilience of both the research and the cultural traditions it seeks to document and reinterpret.

Lomax's Cantometrics and Cross-Cultural Music Analysis

A significant aspect of the methodology is the application of Alan Lomax's cantometrics, a method of song analysis that examines the relationship between musical structures and social organization. In *Folk Song Style and Culture* (1968), Lomax outlines how cantometrics can provide insights into the cultural significance of music. By employing this method, I could explore how specific elements of Nogai music – such as rhythm, melody, and tone – reflect broader cultural patterns. This analytical framework enabled a comparative study that linked Nogai music to other Turkic traditions and global musical practices, enriching the understanding of how Nogai epic songs have evolved and been preserved over time. The research draws parallels with cross-cultural musical projects like *Genghis Blues*, a collaboration between Tuvan throat singer Kongar-ool Ondar and American blues musician Paul Pena, as shown in Video 1.1.1, below. This project exemplifies the potential for cross-cultural artistic innovation and serves as a model for the reinterpretation of traditional Nogai music in contemporary forms.

Video 1.1.1. *Genghis Blues*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpSlPTC4zaI
Accessed on 14 August 2024

Engaging with Cultural Heritage through Practice

The practical engagement with Nogai musical traditions, particularly the crafting and playing of the *dombyra*, is a central component of this research. The *dombyra*, an instrument deeply embedded in Nogai culture, serves as both a musical and a cultural symbol. Learning the craft of *dombyra*-making, as shown in Video 1.1.2. below from local artisans in Karachay-Cherkessia during my visits in October 2017 and March 2021, and mastering its playing, provided a visceral understanding (I obtained epistemic value) of how the instrument's physical characteristics are intertwined with its cultural significance.

Video 1.1.2. Making the *dombyra* at Alibiy Romanov's workshop, October 2017.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YG3_tbZAU58
Accessed on 7 September 2024

This hands-on approach echoes the principles of practice-based research, as described by Robin Nelson in *Practice as Research in Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistance* (2013). My approach moves beyond theoretical analysis, offering a tangible connection to Nogai musical heritage. The research highlights the role of artisanship and craftsmanship in preserving cultural traditions, emphasizing the importance of maintaining these skills in a rapidly changing world. This suggests that the survival of Nogai music depends not only on recording and documenting these traditions but also on actively engaging with the material culture that sustains them.

Comparative Reflections on Methodology and Ethnomusicological Positioning

In comparison to other music archiving and ethnographic studies, this research shares methodological affinities with projects that blend participant-observation with creative practice, such as Jeff Todd Titon's model of *applied ethnomusicology* (2008), which emphasizes collaboration, sustainability, and ethical engagement with musical communities. Like Titon's work on vernacular sacred song traditions in Appalachia, this study moves beyond passive documentation to active cultural co-preservation. Similarly, the integration of autoethnographic reflection echoes the approach used by Michelle Kisliuk in *Seize the Dance!* (1998), where deep immersion and self-awareness become vehicles for richer musical insight. What sets this research apart is its dual commitment to historical context (through fieldwork linked to epic landscapes) and contemporary artistic engagement (e.g., the *dombyra* craftsmanship and cross-cultural reimaginings - see Video 1.1.2), situating it at the intersection of ethnographic preservation and creative reinterpretation.

Within the broader canon of ethnomusicology, this study aligns with a growing body of work that privileges prosimetric epic traditions and Turkic musical lineages, contributing to the documentation of lesser-studied oral cultures. While many ethnomusicological texts — such as Nettl's The *Study of Ethnomusicology* (2005) — focus on large, well-documented musical systems, this project addresses a gap in

Nogai -specific research, adding to the micro-histories of Turkic musical cultures. Moreover, the use of Lomax's cantometrics in this context contributes to ongoing debates about comparative analysis in global music studies, resonating with the efforts of scholars like Steven Feld (1994), who emphasize music as a relational, lived phenomenon.

Autoethnography and Contemporary Methodological Shifts

More recent debates in autoethnography have focused on the politics of representation, performativity, and the blurred lines between scholarship and storytelling. Scholars such as Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis (2021) argue for autoethnography as a method of critical self-inquiry that engages with issues of social justice, identity, and vulnerability. Similarly, Hughes and Pennington (2021), along with more recent contributors (e.g., Hernandez-Carranza *et al.,* 2021; Kamlongera, 2023), emphasize autoethnography's potential for activist research, especially when positioned within marginalized or decolonial frameworks. These perspectives have further complicated the role of the researcher, pushing autoethnography beyond personal reflection toward collaborative, ethical, and politically engaged scholarship.

Conclusion

The hybrid methodology employed in this research represents a comprehensive and reflective approach to studying Nogai musical traditions. By integrating ethnographic fieldwork, autoethnographic reflection, and Lomax's cantometrics, the study offers a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of Nogai epic songs and their contemporary significance. Through direct engagement with cultural practices and creative reinterpretation, the research contributes to the preservation and revitalization of Nogai musical heritage, demonstrating the ongoing relevance of these traditions in both local and global contexts. Furthermore, the 2019 recording of Sufi songs and performing with Arslanbek Sultanbekov in Istanbul as shown in the Video link 1.1.3 below proved to be a crucial experience.

Video 1.1.3. *Yalan Dünya* by Yunus Emre as performed by Arslanbek Sultanbekov

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Yg9tMIhoEk
Accessed on 14 August 2024

This recording marked my first deep engagement with the intricate nuances of Turkic music, where I explored the complex interactions of tones – harmony, syncretic elements, and other abstract features that define this enigmatic tradition. The collaboration also broadened my understanding of narrative and musical traditions, deepening my appreciation for the cultural exchange and creative dialogue that underpins this artistic practice.

CHAPTER 1: MAKING A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY NOGAI IDENTITY IN MUSIC

This chapter explores modern Nogai musical identity in the context of the twenty-first century, focusing on traditional cultural elements such as epic storytelling and unique musical structures. Epic storytelling and musical structures provide a comprehensive lens through which to examine modern Nogai musical identity within the context of the twenty-first century. These elements, though the wandering Nogais handed neither their written history nor music theory over to the learned world, have long defined Nogai heritage and continue to play a significant role in contemporary interpretations. Nogai music, with its ancient roots in the orient and ties to historical events, reflects influences that resonate with the experiences of their ancestors. Crucially, this exploration moves to address a key research question of this investigation: How can I reimagine and produce a twenty-first century Nogai music?

Music as a Marker of Identity

The album illustrates my approach to reimagining traditional Nogai music in a contemporary context. It blends traditional melodies with modern influences, showcasing the creative and technical processes involved in bringing the Nogai epic into today's cultural landscape. The album blends original compositions with ancient storytelling elements, incorporating musical forms that have been transmitted through generations via oral tradition. By augmenting traditional melodies often performed *a cappella* - a genuine solo singing tradition like *dengbêj*[13], the album seeks to capture the spirit of traditional Nogai music. Furthermore, this approach, emerging from an insider's perspective yet resonating with outsiders, suggests a broader framework for exploring syncretic art in modern music. Contemporary works by artists such as Björk and Bon Iver frequently integrate diverse elements – classical, electronic, and folk – creating a syncretic experience that feels both timeless and innovative. Their music –

[13] *Dengbêj* (from Kurdish: *deng* - voice, *bêj* - teller) is a traditional Kurdish oral storytelling and singing practice. A *dengbêj* is a singer and storyteller who performs long, often improvised, or memorized epics, laments, love stories, and historical narratives solo, without instrumental accompaniment.

akin to the epic songs – weaves a web of influences that cannot be easily dissected without sacrificing the essence of the art.

Reinterpreting Traditional Music

The study of Nogai musical identity involves immersing oneself in traditional songs and stories passed down through generations via oral tradition. In these traditional songs, such as *Edige*, the 'true' Nogai language is preserved, which gave me insight into their linguistic heritage and worldview. This immersion in the authentic language helped me understand the monodic structure and (compared to other traditions) relatively restricted pitch-control. These features, deeply rooted in the cultural and linguistic context, challenged my drift toward a more generic, homogenized worldview revealing other expressive and artistic possibilities.

The scarcity of documented evidence from the pre-Soviet era makes it difficult to trace a coherent musical lineage, leaving much of the tradition's history open to interpretation. However, given the limited documentation, much of the initial research depended on the songs of the *Babushkas*, the instrumental tunes of the *aqsaqals* played on the *dombyra*, and the broader auditory landscape that reflected the Nogais' connection to their heritage. James Adair's conclusion about the complexities of tracing the origins of a people through oral tradition has direct relevance to my research on the Nogai people (1775, p. 10). Much like the native American peoples (that Adair discusses), the Nogai rely heavily on an oral tradition to preserve their cultural heritage, but many of their ancient customs have been lost over time due to external pressures and historical disruptions. Adair's perspective underscores the importance of piecing together various elements of oral tradition, historical context, and cultural artifacts to reconstruct the Nogais' past and understand their identity. My practice in part is informed by Adair's approach, using the oral tradition of the Nogai, its anecdotes, and fragmented historical evidence to construct a coherent narrative. To do this, I immersed myself in the community, living among the Nogai and observing their cultural practices from the inside, allowing for a more embodied and informed engagement with their oral histories.

To begin with, it was important to consider three main aspects: (1) where and how this music was created and performed, (2) the stylistic components of the genres, and (3) the role of creators and carriers of this tradition. First, understanding the location and context enabled me to see how the music fit into its cultural and social environment, whether it was performed in ceremonies or daily life. This was crucial for accurately capturing the essence of the music in my album. It helped me identify its features – such as rhythm, melody, and instruments. Exploring who created and preserved the music showed me how it was passed down and maintained.

Songwriters Alibiy Romanov (1962–2021) and Arslanbek 'Asau' Sultanbekov (b.1965) were the first to react positively to my work inspired by *Edige* during my field trips to Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia. While other cultural gatekeepers hesitated or showed cold feet, they embraced the project with enthusiasm, providing mentorship and support. Romanov embodied a non-change of the *dombyra* tradition, while Sultanbekov features variations in performance. The unchanging nature (non-change) in Romanov's music, particularly as an example of a single modality of expression, could be attributed to his upbringing in the *aul* of Kün Batar (Where the Sun Dies), an isolated and marginalized village located ten miles west of Terekly-Mekteb[14] – an area described in Alexandrov's account. In this village, elders practised the *dombyra* in the evenings after tending to their animals. Under the light of a kerosene lamp, as recalled by Romanov, he acquired deep knowledge of this music and the essence of the accompanying language before the last practitioner passed away (Yakubov, 2020). This early exposure to an insular cultural environment likely influenced the consistent and traditional characteristics of his musical output. Between the 1990 and 2000s, the time of rampant crime, financial fraud, local terrorism, and two wars in Chechnya, Romanov, who had to multitask to survive, like most of his generation – had his fingers in many pies, still managed to perform in Kalmykia, Kirghizstan, Kazakhstan,

[14] Terekly-Mekteb is recognized as the official centre of Nogai cultural autonomy. In this settlement, books, and the Nogai-language newspaper *Nogay Davysi* are published. The 'town' (*gorod*) boasts a cultural palace, a swimming pool, a stadium, a library, several schools, the internet radio station *Nogay El*, and a television studio. The cultural and educational initiatives in Terekly-Mekteb are funded by the Russian Federation and the government of Dagestan.

Karakalpakstan, Chuvashia, Khakassia, Turkey, Romania, and Hungary, and recorded several cassette albums.

Unlike Romanov, Sultanbekov, who was introduced to the *dombyra* by Romanov in the 1990s (Yakubov, 2020), grew up in Karachay-Cherkessia in a family that was privileged by Soviet standards (his mother was a Hero of Socialist Labour). Sultanbekov comes from the village of Erken-Khalk (Free People), just a ten-minute drive from Kart-Keshu, a hill along the Zelenchuk River, the site of the last battle between the Nogai tribes and the army of Catherine II, led by Alexander Suvorov. It is possible that growing up near places of significant events that impacted the fate of the Nogai people and the peoples of the North Caucasus shaped Sultanbekov's identity and musical expression. In his original repertoire, he includes popular songs about a place, Kart-Keshu, and Kangly, one of the surviving Nogai tribes that fought to remain on their ancestral lands. The Kangly Nogai still live in the village of Kangly, just ten kilometres from the city of Mineralnye Vody.

As I reflected on my journey, I realized that my belief in the creative potential of distancing myself from the Nogai homeland was actively contested by both the emotional and cultural pull of the place. Those, who control 'the purse strings', including the 'nepotistic' and patronizing management of the Nogai State Orchestra of Folk Instruments, argued that the Soviet era offered the loftiest understanding of Nogai music, and therefore, the new rendition of *Edige* should be composed using written notation and adhere to a classical framework, leaving little time and room for the creative freedom I sought. They expressed a clear belief that innovation in Nogai music should evolve within the framework of traditions that had been formalized during the Soviet period, rather than entirely diverging from them.

When I introduced elements like a kick drum, bass, and distorted guitars, their reactions were immediate – they felt it was too evocative, too far from the norm. These comments highlighted just how inert and passive they had been. But I could not allow "Soviet history" to dictate the foundation of the *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*. The tension between their views and my argument was palpable. My approach aimed at reclaiming and reinterpreting the methods, techniques, and limitations inherited from

our ancestors. I was resolute in not allowing the management's perspective to become the sole reference point for my work. I contended that Soviet-era ideas had long since become outdated and that it was time to develop a new musical identity. This new approach should present the text of *Edige* in a manner that resonates with insiders – through a vibrant, multi-instrumental, and multilingual interpretation. Such a rendition, I argued, would offer a fresh perspective, moving beyond traditional constraints and reflecting the dynamic evolution of Nogai music.

However, it is essential to first delineate Nogai identity within a historical context. As previously discussed, the concept of identity has evolved in response to external socio-political forces throughout the tumultuous history of the steppes, which were frequently renamed and reallocated among adjacent regions such as Dagestan, Stavropol Krai, Kalmykia, and Chechnya. Despite these changes, the music of the Nogai people has remained relatively consistent. It continues to be characterized by monodic songs that revolve around subtle tonal variations and the use of 'obsolete words and locutions', as noted by Valikhanov and corroborated by my mentors and through my own field research and practice.

Pre-Soviet Identity of Nogai Music

The initial knowledge of the pre-Soviet Nogai community derives from ethnographic descriptions of outsiders, such as those provided by Nikolai Alexandrov in 1909. Alexandrov highlights the stark contrast between the former affluence of the Nogais and their current state of deprivation, characterized by miserable dwellings and economic hardship. Abdul Djanibekov's account *Söz Kaznasy – Treasury of Words –* (a book published in 2020 from manuscripts drafted between 1930 and 1950) contains songs and tales of untouched beauty from the Astrakhan region where Djanibekov lived and taught in a *madrasah*. Although this collection includes proverbs, sayings, and short songs, few elderly women — descendants of the original sources from whom these songs and tales were recorded—remember how to perform them. Much of the music that women perform ties to social customs and traditions. *Söz Kaznasy* is on display in local museums, book shops, and private collections, in contrast to my

practice, which focuses on ensuring that something ancient can actively procreate and be preserved through its continued use and transmission.

Impact of the Soviet Regime

Social scientists have stated that in the second half of the twentieth century, the presence of the *dombyra* and epic storytelling was minimal in the folk circuit in Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia. It was the Soviet type of folklore (fakelore) musicians that dominated local stages. These groups, which have historically been and continue to be organized as small choirs, consist of women performing folk songs and dances. They are characterized by their homogeneous costumes, which they wear during festive occasions. As Richard Stites explains in *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (1992), 'the communist regime almost entirely eradicated historical literature due to their low regard for oral traditions, which they failed to recognize for its richness and vastness' (Stites, 1992, p. 41).) They tabooed *Edige* as bourgeois-nationalist and religious, viewing it as a potential threat to their political system (see Reichl, 2007). However, people managed to preserve some rituals and songs through clandestine performances, private gatherings, and weddings. It is well documented that non-Russian oral epics were often labelled as bourgeois-nationalist and religious during the Soviet period. Texts published at that time, whether in prose or poetry, 'were heavily edited to align with Soviet and Communist ideology' (Köchümkulova, 2005).

Robert Conquest's *The Great Terror* (1968) offer a Westerner's interpretation of the Soviet regime and its control over cultural expression and systematic suppression of traditional practices. Conquest provides an account of the brutal methods used during the Great Purge[15] to eliminate perceived threats, including those posed by cultural and

[15] The Great Purge, also known as the Great Terror, was a campaign of political repression in the Soviet Union orchestrated by Joseph Stalin from 1936 to 1938. It involved a large-scale purge of the Communist Party, government officials, and the Red Army, as well as widespread police surveillance, suspicion of sabotage, imprisonment, and arbitrary executions. The Great Purge was characterized by a series of show trials, widespread denunciations, and forced confessions. Notable victims included high-ranking Bolsheviks such as Nikolai Bukharin, Alexei Rykov, Grigory Zinoviev, and Lev Kamenev. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of people were executed, and millions were sent to labour camps (Gulags) during this period.

intellectual figures who maintained traditional or dissenting viewpoints. He writes about Isaak Babel[16], a renowned Soviet writer and playwright, known for works like *Red Cavalry* and *Odessa Tales*, who was arrested in 1939 and executed in 1940, and Osip Mandelstam, prominent Russian poet, and essayist. Mandelstam was arrested twice during Stalin's regime, eventually dying in a transit camp in 1938.

Rediscovery and Revival of Nogai Culture: November 1992 – February 2022

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Nogai people, like many other indigenous groups, experienced a cultural awakening. This period marked an opportunity to reclaim lost identities, restore cultural practices, and embrace traditions that had been suppressed or marginalized under Soviet rule. For the Nogai, this meant reviving their music, storytelling, and traditional crafts, creating a sense of renewed connection with their historical roots. The 600th anniversary celebration of the Nogai Horde, as shown below in Figures 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 and Video 2.1.1, was a significant turning point in their journey toward rediscovering their music and identity. This open-air event in November 1992 in *aul* Terekly-Mekteb marked a new era of cultural revival, allowing the Nogai people to openly celebrate their traditions without fear of repression. At the forefront of that celebration was the song entitled *Nogai El*, as shown below in Video 2.1.2. This song since then has become an unofficial anthem among the Nogai people. Its journey from relative obscurity to cultural touchstone highlights the enduring appeal of music as a medium for cultural expression. The significance of *Nogai El* extends beyond entertainment; it has played a critical role in educating and reinforcing a sense of Nogai self-identity. The song's lyrics evoke the history and traditions of the Nogai people and a sense of belonging to an ancient and vibrant musical heritage.

[16] The monument to Isaac Babel, a renowned Russian writer, was removed from its pedestal in Odesa and relocated to a museum. Similar actions were taken with the monuments to Catherine the Great and Alexander Pushkin following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Figure 2.1.1. Yahya Kudayberdiev impersonating Edige, Terekly-Mekteb, November 1992

Figure 2.1.2. An *aqsaqal* is playing the nine-fretted *dombyra*, 600th anniversary of the Nogai Horde, November 1992.

Video 2.1.1. 600th anniversary celebration of the Nogai Horde, November 1992

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSmT5HCM1s4

Accessed on 31 July 2024

Video 2.1.2. *Nogai El* as performed by Asau in the Kremlin in 2017

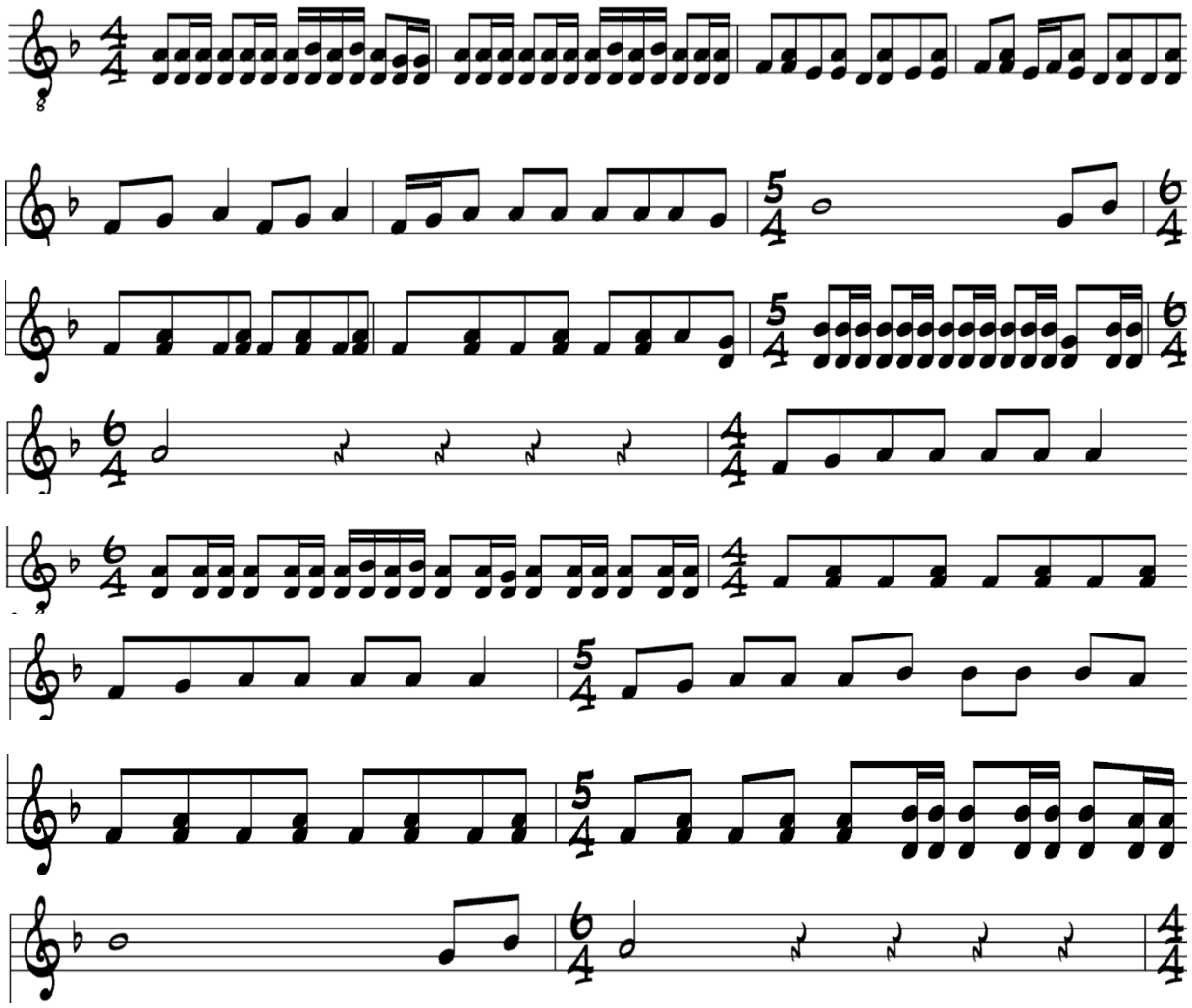
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8D14b0Clwfk

Accessed on 20 August 20, 2024

Another song, *Lashyn Kus* (Falcon) by Romanov, has become a cornerstone of Nogai musical identity, embodying what many consider the essence of Nogai folk music. Despite its brevity, the song is renowned for its intricate rhythm changes, as shown in Video 2.1.3 and Example 2.1.1, shifting around many times between 4/4, 2/4, 5/4, and 6/4. Romanov's remarkable skill is evident in this song, setting a high bar for anyone aiming to interpret *Lashyn Kus* – the quintessential example of rhythmic irregularity – to be able to claim an identity in Nogai music.

Video 2.1.3. *Lashyn Kus* as performed by Alibiy Romanov, 2018
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GEGJQIEB-M
Accessed on 20 August 2024

Example 2.1.1. Intro to *Lashyn Kus* as transcribed from Romanov's live performance.



Contemporary Nogai Music

During the period of cultural renaissance since the dawn of the twentieth century, musicians and artists have dedicated their art to revitalizing Nogai music and storytelling. Reclaiming musical identity has become a symbol of this revival, representing a collective effort to reconnect with traditional roots while embracing contemporary influences. The revival of Nogai music and culture involves a combination of rediscovering traditional songs, composing new works inspired by epic narratives, and integrating modern instruments and styles. A poignant example of this fusion is illustrated by the serendipitous discovery of a recording featuring the melody reminding me of my grandmother.

It was during a research trip in *aul* Terekly-Mekteb in August 2017. As it happened, the melody had been captured a few months prior from a Nogai woman in *aul* Edige as she conversed with a Hungarian ethnographer. The ethnographer, intrigued by her heritage, requested her to sing. The woman obliged and sang a short tune from memory. This recording, particularly the extract beginning at timecode 8:16 in the album, served as a guiding melody for the arrangement. ‘A woman’s’ song inspired me to extend this melody and weave it into a new polyphonic composition. The resulting song, suggested to be named *Ardak* by my colleague and composer MaryAnn Tedstone, begins with the snippet of a *babushka’s* voice lamenting about a khan’s daughter and a stolen dress.

Furthermore, community festivals and cultural events have become important platforms for showcasing Nogai music and fostering a sense of unity among the dispersed Nogai population. The communal aspect of these events reinforces the idea that music, crafts, and sports are unifying forces that strengthen a Nogai identity. Community festivals, particularly the annual *Steppe Bogatyr* event, are typically organized as open-air gatherings, rotating to a new location each year. These festivals hold significant cultural importance, featuring a range of activities that showcase traditional skills and community spirit. Men compete in wrestling and agility contests, while women manage essential logistics such as food, water, and finances.

The highlight of the festival is the horse-racing segment. In Karachay-Cherkessia, this involves trotting races, while in Dagestan, mixed-gait races are the focus. Since the primary horse breeders are the Kuban Nogai, they set the standards for the pacing gait. They demonstrate their skill by placing a cup of tea on the saddle and riding without spilling it, a testament to their expertise and precision. However, despite revival efforts, the community continues to face challenges that impact the sustainability of their cultural heritage. Economic instability, migration, and political uncertainty pose ongoing threats to the continuity of Nogai music. Furthermore, with these challenges come opportunities for growth and adaptation.

Alibek Koylakaev, a graphic artist and visual designer for *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*, as shown in Figure 2.1.3 below, represents a new generation of Nogai artists. Born in 1982, Koylakaev graduated from the Jamal School in Makhachkala in 1997 and continued his education at the State University of Culture and Arts at the Krasnodar Academy of Arts, graduating in 2002. Having reached an international level, his graphic paintings have become coveted luxury items. Without exaggeration, Koylakaev's portrait of Edige helped define the visual identity of the protagonist, which inspired me as I shaped the sound for the album. Koylakaev also granted permission to use his artwork in the creation of animated clips to support and promote the album. In turn, Koylakaev integrates the music from the album into his creative projects, using it to further popularize his work and contribute to the cultural revival of Nogai intangible cultural heritage.

Nine Rhapsodies about Edige against the Backdrop of External Forces

Musical identity in the twenty-first century is a complex construct shaped by globalization, digitalization, and intercultural exchange. Unlike in the past, when musical identity was tied to local traditions and social groups, modern technology has expanded the possibilities for individual and collective self-expression, allowing music to be created and shared on a global platform. As a result, musical identity increasingly manifests as a hybrid phenomenon, blending elements from various cultures, genres, and styles, while also reflecting personal, social, and cultural contexts. This involves

rediscovering roots, resisting external and internal pressures, and embracing contemporary influences to create a vibrant musical identity. In a climate when formal

Figure 2.1.3: Edige by Alibek Koylakaev

events, organized in Russia and Turkey by local enthusiasts, focus on past injustices against the Nogai people, such a heavy focus on documenting past oppression leads to stagnation. *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* invites an opportunity to address music, steering away from acknowledging historical wrongs. I argue that emphasis on geopolitical themes and historical victimhood overshadows other crucial aspects, such as innovation and emancipated artistic expression.

For example, each song explores different aspects of Edige's life, articulating events and emotions that define his journey in brief verses, detailed arrangements, and varied tones. The departure from the traditional monodic performance of the epic is driven by a desire to 'pause' and immerse the listener in music enriched with accompanying instruments beyond monody. Furthermore, the episode featuring *Kyzgyš Kus* (timecode 26:52) – a lapwing bird inhabiting the muddy banks of shallow rivers – captures the essence of identity that Tokhtamysh invokes in his final song. In response to the cultural context, I was engaging with—particularly themes of loss, resilience, and identity — I decided I would work with deliberately simple musical structures.

One example is a piece I later developed around a moment observing a bird in the wetlands, which evoked a wide range of emotional and musical associations for me. I chose to build the composition around just two chords, allowing the emotional impact to emerge through structure rather than harmonic complexity. I imagined the first chord, with a sequence of plucked notes, as mirroring the lapwing's jump—corresponding to the lyrical phrase '*Kyzgyš, Kyzgyš Kus*' (lapwing). The second chord, following it, suggested the flap of wings and ascent, paired with the words '*Kanaty kat, Moyin bos'* ('your wings are strong, and your neck is not in a noose'). This kind of purposeful simplicity—musical minimalism rich with symbolic weight—would become a central strategy in my approach to Nogai identity through sound.

The two chords, as informed by Bella Kardanova's analysis of the two-phrased nature of many rural Nogai songs in the unpublished manuscript *Call-and-Response Structures in Nogai Rural Song: Two-Phrased Modal Patterns*, feature a call-and-response pattern that underscores the emotional and narrative aspects of the story. Moreover, my approach aligns with broader studies on rural musical structures of Eastern European folk music, and John Baily's work on Afghan music, particularly the study of traditional performance practices, emphasizes how rural musical traditions utilize concise – limited tonal material - to express complex ideas and emotions (2016).

One-Take Recording: Unscripted Expression and Improvisation

When transitioning from live performances to the recording studio, I realized that capturing the liveliness of traditional Nogai storytelling was crucial. This led me to adopt a one-take approach in recording sessions, as shown below in Video 2.1.4, which, mimics the recording culture I had observed while working with Asau and Turkish musicians, where only one take was ever done. Although the album was not recorded with a full band carefully balancing takes and selecting the best one, the aesthetics behind recording each instrument were shaped by the effort to capture the performance in its entirety – its holistic energy. This approach also helped disambiguate the immediate musical and textual context between the obsolete poetry, the *dombyra*, and supporting instruments.

This album prioritizes emotional immediacy by using single-take recordings for each layer — guitar riffs, *qyl-qobyz* drones, *dombyra* countermelodies, and vocals — mirroring the spontaneity of live performance within studio constraints.

Video 2.1.4. *Yalan Dünya*. Recording the part, Istanbul 2019, Blue Kite Studio
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-1uldqh5l0
Accessed on 31 August 2024

Inspired by a riff-based philosophy, the approach embraces imperfection to preserve the intuitive, improvisational qualities central to oral traditions. Intonation in the vocal delivery, left unedited except for minimal reverb, conveys poetic nuance through mood rather than precision. While layered sequentially, the recordings simulate the real - time interplay of live ensembles. This method supports the preservation of a vanishing tradition in a reproducible form, with future work aiming to capture ensemble dynamics in live contexts.

CHAPTER 2: SHARED KNOWLEDGE IN COLLABORATIONS: WORKING WITH THE MUSICAL TRADITIONS OF THE NOGAI PEOPLE

This chapter delves into the significance of shared knowledge in collaborative efforts in shaping a musical album and underscores the role of shared knowledge in collaboration. The narrative and musical tradition of the Nogai people is, essentially, a symbolic activity rooted in 'its own world', practised and orally transmitted by a heterogeneous community, 'the specific organism that simultaneously keeps and shapes cultural heritage', compactly settled in remote *auls*, albeit, as Tiago de Oliveira Pinto puts it, 'globally connected villages' of Russian steppes in the nebulous Dagestan, mountainous Karachay-Cherkessia, and arid Astrakhan regions (2018, p. 15). Through this album, I have aimed to underscore the collaborative efforts undertaken to ensure the continued relevance of *Edige* in the twenty-first century. In doing so, this chapter adopts a reflexive approach informed by autoethnographic principles, acknowledging my own position as both researcher and artistic collaborator. Rather than presenting an external analysis of the Nogai tradition, the focus lies on how shared knowledge emerged through embodied engagement, dialogue, and co-creation—revealing how collaboration becomes not only a method but a mode of knowledge production.

Cultural Heritage and Musical Collaboration in Nogai Tradition

Though many of us work in the vast field of ethnomusicology and musicology, it is rare to be accepted as equal musicians within a studied people. However, through them we learn a culture in an exotic environment where people 'live and think differently' (Nettl, 1983, 2005.) It is even rarer that one of us takes a leading role that inspires a people to reflect on who they were and are, appealing to their 'interior music' – the innermost essence of their identity. American composer Michael Ellison serves as a prime example, having spent years working in Istanbul and having imbued much of the Turkish musical culture and style. His dedication is notably demonstrated in *Mevlana*, a staged work structured as eight tableaux, commissioned by the Istanbul Music Festival and premiered in 2012. In this opera, Turkish instruments and vocal

styles seamlessly blend with Western operatic tradition, creating a tapestry based on the legend and poetry of Rumi, the historic mystic *Mevlana*.

Reinterpreting Nogai Epic Songs: Reviving a Disappearing Tradition

In a similar vein, by revisiting a disappearing tradition of Nogai epic songs I seek to keep the legacy alive by infusing it with modernity. In light of rural exodus and political changes in Russia, *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*, in timely fashion, addresses key research questions: How can the narrative and musical tradition of the Nogai people be preserved, extended, and reproduced in a contemporary musical interpretation? Furthermore, inspired by figures like Baily, who immersed himself in Afghan musical traditions and witnessed the subsequent devastation of those cultural spaces, my ambition is to cherish and preserve the cultural moments we still have. I aim to highlight the importance of appreciating the forgotten songs passed down to us, and the memories and contributions of previous generations. This project is a call to acknowledge and celebrate the shared knowledge and the enduring power of music.

The Fieldwork Journey: Collaborations with Nogai and Turkic Musicians

Since the third week of June 2017[17] (during my MPhil field trip in August 2017), as I arrived in the 'field', on the deary streets of 'globally connected villages', 'a surface hardly different from many other crossroads' (Nettl, 1983, 2005), where everyone is recognized by their first name or a nickname, I have met and collaborated with such musicians as Romanov (storyteller and *dombyra* player), Sultanbekov - Asau (storyteller, *qyl-qobuz* and *dombyra* player), Islam Satyrov (sound producer, *dombyra*), Farida Sidakhmetova (poet), Erzhan (Erçan) Arkabay (*dombyra*) and Azhar Erkeblanova (*qyl-qobuz*), two Kazakh musicians in residence in Turkey, and Ivan Aloyshin (virtuoso guitarist) in Pyatigorsk, a 'Russian Baden-Baden' (Thubron, 2004, p. 142) – the home of my alma mater, Pyatigorsk Linguistic University. To this day, the

[17] On the third week of June 2017, there was a rare celestial event known as the 'Great American Eclipse'. It was a total solar eclipse visible across the United States, where the moon completely blocked the sun, casting a shadow on the Earth.

nineteenth-century grace and leisure of Pyatigorsk linger about the terrace springs – an aroma of Baden-Baden or Bath. Many Russian writers spent time wandering along the lower slopes of Mount Mashuk and the health-giving water limestone pavilions. Michael Lermontov, Alexander Pushkin, and Leo Tolstoy composed literary monuments in the jagged hills of Pyatigorsk that lift and fall and litter the sky behind in pinnacles of snow.

Challenges and Innovations in the Creative Process

Each of my collaborators has become a friend, providing badly needed help with 'a frivolous subject like music' (Nettl, 1983, 2005), and brought a unique perspective and expertise, helping me to shape the tonal identity of the album. With them I had the courage to reveal my burning desire to produce a twenty-first century version of the music of the Nogai. I did not feel that in their eyes, I was, as Bruno Nettl puts it, 'a city dweller who lowered himself to learn something so useless as old Indian songs' (2005, p. 134). On the contrary, my engagement with Nogai epic songs, which are disappearing from existence, has been met with respect and enthusiasm.

Cross-Cultural Collaboration: A Transformative Journey

Thus, the making of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* has been a transformative journey that influenced and augmented my perception of Nogai music. However, in the view of revivalists, the impact extends beyond my personal growth. The tradition itself has significantly benefited from this project. The album's cross-cultural collaborative contributions from practising musicians and custodians of Nogai music, who are deeply embedded in the musical traditions of the 'orient', have demonstrated the worthiness of this practice. By engaging in this collaborative process, by allotting time and sharing thoughts, these musicians validated the significance of preserving and revitalizing Nogai musical heritage. Their involvement has infused new life into the tradition, proving its relevance and adaptability in contemporary contexts. This practice compelled me to learn to play in time with animistic rhythms, detune the guitar, and learn to play in a minimalist *dombyra* style. By developing melodies gathered during

fieldwork, I transitioned from an outsider to an observer-participant to the maker and custodian of ‘the music of my community’ (Oliveira Pinto, 2018, p. 25). Such a shift required an entire recalibration of my musical approach. With my prior experience of working as a lead guitarist and songwriter with a live band performing in Russian and English, and recording ‘commercial’ songs with a sound producer in a soundproof studio, I was now emerging in the vibrant field of playing spontaneous *dombyra* tunes where, before my thoughts collected sufficiently, the momentum to record a minimalist song characterized by an ‘unusual tuning system, pentatonic melody, static harmony, and unconventional instrumental timbre’ (Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederic Lau, 2004, p. 25) would be gone. I taught myself to play and sing as though there was no editing, record as though there was no mixing, and mix as though there was no mastering.

Innovations and Experimentation in Nogai Music Composition

I aimed to study, develop, and add, for example, vocal verticality and harmony singing, as a contrast to customary unison singing, in songs such as *Togyzym* (43:56), or sublimated ‘tonal and dominant’ resolutions by adding eleventh and thirteenth notes in *Kosh Keldyn, Edige* (50:14), which, essentially, consists of one arresting chord in a suspended C minor. To produce a futuristic album of recorded songs in the Nogai language and reflect on it in a PhD thesis within the limited timeframe of 2020–2024 was a significant challenge. The process was burdened by the Covid-19 pandemic and saddened by the war in Ukraine. Thus, this album required drawing on what someone might spend a lifetime learning. It involved engaging with Nogai, Kazakh, and Turkish scholars and musicians *in situ* to hastily study their traditional practices. Relying on intuition, tacit knowledge, and, anecdotally, on superstition appeared to be a necessity. This experience deepened my grasp of the music of the Nogai people and taught me to adapt to spontaneous changes in plans, arrangements, and even participants, especially after the loss of Romanov in a car accident in August 2021. Embracing an ‘epic lifestyle’ mindset, I mapped my thoughts to earn their friendship, respect, and authority. This approach allowed me to enhance my artistic identity and incorporate unique elements into the original compositions of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*.

The Symbolic Role of Numbers in Nine Rhapsodies about Edige

Nine Rhapsodies about Edige superstitiously culminates in an album of eighteen tracks, spanning 54 minutes and 9 seconds – each figure replete with the number nine, evoking a symbolic resonance with the nine companions of Edige, the nine months of human gestation, and the nine pillars of the Mongol Empire. The concept of the 'nine pillars of the Mongol Empire' is often referenced in historical and scholarly works discussing the structure and organization of the Nogai Horde (see Trepavlov, 2001). The 'nine pillars' refer to the administrative divisions or key components that supported the governance and functioning of the Empire. These pillars may include aspects such as military organization, legal systems, diplomatic relations, and administrative structure. Scholars and historians have written about various aspects of the Mongol Empire, including its political organization, military strategies, cultural impact, and more. The 'nine pillars' concept may not always be explicitly mentioned, but discussions about the organizational framework of the Empire often touch upon similar themes. Timothy May, in *The Mongol Conquests in World History* (2012), discusses Mongol military strategies and organization. *Genghis Khan and the Mongol Empire* (2009) by William Fitzhugh and Morris Rossabi discusses Mongol trade and economic systems. *The Mongols* (2007) by David Morgan examines the cultural impact of the Mongol Empire. *The Secret History of the Mongols*, believed to have been anonymously written in the thirteenth century, offers a fascinating glimpse into the enigmatic world of the Mongols,[18] providing valuable insights into their history, culture, and legacy. This context is particularly significant given that the Nogai people — also known as Mangyt — (were) are considered the last free descendants of the armies of Genghis Khan.

The numerical motif weaves a layer of mystique and academic curiosity into the fabric of the album, which was bounced and mastered on 9 December 2023. Further

[18] According to Trepavlov, in the struggle for the Mongol throne, the Mangyts (another name for the Nogai) faithfully served Genghis Khan, who counted them 'among his most loyal companions of zealous and talented servants, dexterous shooters and horse breeders who knew how to tame falcons and hunting dogs' (2002, p. 61).

emphasized by my own birthday on 9 May, it coincidentally suggests an enigmatic alignment of cultural, historical, and personal significance in this work.

A Contemporary Preservation of Traditional Nogai Music

Nine Rhapsodies about Edige demonstrates how traditional music of the Nogai people can be preserved by absorbing its elements into a Western style of playing. By focusing on specific rhythmic and tonal elements, it parallels the approach of Bartók, who assimilated Hungarian and Romanian music by imitating and incorporating it into his own compositional style. *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* is a result of using traditional music to inspire and enrich contemporary compositions through skilled adaptation and integration.

The Influence of Alibiy Romanov: Master – Apprentice

While beginning to unpack the Pandora's box of the enigmatic and 'tabooed *Edige'* I encountered and befriended Alibiy Romanov, a luthier, custodian of this esoteric tradition, gatekeeper, preserver, and activist. His teachings, embedded in Nogai oral traditions, instilled in me an appreciation for the organic process of music creation and the importance of preserving cultural roots. This man inducted me into the art of preservation, teaching me how to make, play, and record the *dombyra*. He also shared invaluable personal details, 'such as his great-grandfather adopting the name of his deceased White Army officer friend, Alexander Romanov, in Crimea in 1919' (personal observations 2017–2021). The Kasymbaev family lineage evolved into the Romanovs, mirroring Edige's adoption of the name Kubugul — his foster brother who was sacrificed to Tokhtamysh to protect Edige. Romanov guided me through repertoires of traditional song genres, explaining the distinctions between epic songs, nursery rhymes, laments, reflective songs, and ditties. He taught me the appropriate tonalities for each genre of song and how and why to play them, including his famous compositions *Lashyn Kus* (Falcon) and *Bota Köz* (Camel's Eye). His *dombyra* mastery, poetic genius, and commitment to preserving Nogai musical heritage laid the foundation for my PhD practice.

A Farewell and Lasting Legacy

In February 2021, as I stood there, bidding farewell to Romanov after rendering the last recording of *Kenes* (timecode 41:04) and *Kün Baatar* (timecode 47:19) with him in Terekly-Mekteb, little did I know that it was our last farewell and that his parting words would linger in my mind long after I left. His last joke, 'Why does the camel refuse to go to the dry well? Because even he knows when it's time for a change of scenery!', seemed to carry a deeper meaning that only became apparent in hindsight (personal observations 2017–2021). His last joke, delivered in jest, now reverberates in my mind as echoes from the last peaceful years on earth. It is a reminder of the happy moments we shared, the laughter that filled the air, and the music that bound us together. Reflecting on Romanov's words now, I realize that he and I understood that the creation of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* would mark a significant moment in the music of the Nogai people, a transition from a muted chapter to a rapturous future. This understanding has been further reinforced recently, as a couple of artists from Astrakhan have used AI software to draw paintings using my music, a remarkable event with the epic context.

Collaboration with Asau (Arslanbek Sultanbekov)

However, given the necessity to explore the geographical scope of this musical practice depicted in *Edige*, the next logical step in October 2018 was to bring visions and song ideas to Ankara,[19] to present them to Sultanbekov, a practitioner of Nogai music forms, for inspiration, collaboration, and further development. In the song *Šantemir kyzgan kumusga* (timecode 34:37)[20] – *Tamerlane got drunk on booze* - I

[19] The place of Bayezid's defeat and the victory of the armies of Tamerlane at the Battle of Ankara on 20 July 1402, one of them led by Edige, Tamerlane's son-in-law at the time.

[20] One day a certain neighbouring khan asked Tokhtamysh for one of his outstanding breeds of falcon. But Tokhtamysh flatly refused. Then the khan persuaded Kutly-Kaya to sell him one of the two eggs, and to tell Tokhtamysh that the falcon was getting old and therefore this year it had laid only one egg. Kutly-Kaya sold one of the special falcon eggs to the khan. From that egg there hatched a young falcon, which with time turned into a famous falcon. And that khan came riding as a guest to Tokhtamysh with his young falcon. They went out hunting. And the falcon of the neighbouring khan was superior to Tokhtamysh's falcon in every way. And then Tokhtamysh asked, 'Where did you get that falcon? After all, such falcons are bred only at my place!' But the neighbouring khan remained silent. So, they sat down to have a rest. They each drank several bowls of strong kumys... and the neighbouring khan's tongue was loosened. He decided to make Tokhtamysh angry, in revenge for refusing him.

explore this historical and cultural connection through the lens of a Nogai narrative. The song portrays a scene where Tamerlane (Šantemir) and Tokhtamysh share a moment of camaraderie, drinking fermented milk and getting tipsy. This portrayal captures a rare, humanizing glimpse of these formidable historical figures. As the song progresses, it alludes to Tamerlane resting before his fateful campaign towards Constantinople to confront and ultimately victory at the Battle of Ankara in 1402. This battle was decisive, leading to Bayezid's (the Ottoman sultan then) defeat by Tamerlane's forces. The Battle of Ankara in 1402, as described in Stefan Zweig's *The Fall of Constantinople* (1929), postponed its fall for fifty years. Zweig's historical narrative recounts the events leading up to the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire in 1453. It describes the siege of the city, the final assault, and the subsequent fall of one of the most significant cities of the Byzantine Empire to the Ottomans. For me, sublimating these historical elements in the song added a layer of depth, 'connecting me with ancestors', as my friend and colleague Chartwell Dutiro (1957–2019) used to state it, through music and storytelling (personal observations 2017–2019).

Faced with the challenge of not being fluent in Turkic languages, I turned to the text of *Edige* as a study tool. It offered me a wealth of knowledge and wisdom, and as I gained confidence in Nogai, I uncovered a myriad of future songs within its verses - interplay of elements that contribute to the depth and cultural significance of *Edige*. The language here serves as a repository of thoughts, emotions, and philosophies, reflecting intricate expressions and sophisticated worldviews. The words to fit poetic descriptions of nature that I captured in songs such as *Baiterek* (timecode 24:23) and *Kyzgyš Kus* are especially evocative.

These words are expressive, nuanced, and nostalgic – *toksan eken topyragy, toksan eken kyildy* – ninety leaves have fallen from the Tree of Life, goes the line in *Baiterek* (see Appendix II for song texts). The Tree of Life is a powerful symbol of existence, growth, and the cyclical nature of life. The mention of 'ninety leaves' evokes a profound

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And the neighbour confessed that he had asked for and obtained one egg from Kutly-Kaya. Tokhtamysh grew terribly angry. On returning home, he decided to hang his falconer. But Kutly-Kaya had fled.

sense of loss, aging, and the inevitability of change. Yet it also suggests endurance and continuity, as the tree remains rooted despite the fallen leaves. Consequently, the 'medley' is not just a blend of sensory experiences but also a fusion of historical narratives and poetic excellence. This combination collectively informs and inspires the musical compositions that bring the epic to life. Ultimately, the language of *Edige* engages all the senses, animating the melodies that accompany its words.

Thus, Sultanbekov's guidance was instrumental in both ideologically and musically capturing the essence of an epic tradition, thereby concretely establishing a new tone for Nogai music. Additionally, this opportunity allowed me to present my music within the diaspora circuit, garnering appreciation, moral support, and admiration for contributing to cultural legacy. Two years later, in March 2019, Sultanbekov invited me to Turkey to play guitar on two songs in his album and perform with him in Istanbul, as shown below in Video link 2.1.

Video 2.1. Performing *Künduz-Keçe*, a Turkish epic song, with Sultanbekov and orchestra in Istanbul, March 2019
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRzfYHTl3m4
Accessed on 31 August 2024

At that time, Mehmet Bozdağ, an ambitious and influential producer of *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (the Turkish version of Game of Thrones, 2011–2019), was supporting Sultanbekov. With an audience of approximately 2.6 billion people, Bozdağ, impressed by Sultanbekov's talent, sponsored him to record an album of traditional Turkish songs, *Nogai Interpretations*, authored by Yunus Emre, a Sufi poet, and other famed poets from *Ata Dolu* (Fatherland). The album, never released due to financial implications, was titled *When I Die, Let My Word Live* and contained twelve songs featuring Sultanbekov on the *qyl-qobyz* playing ancient tales – transforming into the 'so-called Dede Korkut'[21] of the twenty-first century. Sultanbekov's approach to traditional music, observed during our sessions at the Blue Kite Studio in Istanbul's Gök Su area,

[21] Dede Korkut was a legendary Turkic bard and storyteller who is associated with a collection of epic tales known as the 'Dede Korkut' stories. These stories are considered an essential part of Turkic literature and folklore, recounting the adventures of heroic figures and tribal conflicts.

significantly influenced the album's production. Each session unfolded with a sense of purpose and dedication. The studio was a hive of activity as session musicians, known as *Ustaz*, arrived well prepared and ready to deliver their parts in one seamless take on the song *Yalan Dünya*. The outcome, as shown in Video link 2.2 below, sounds haunting and innovative for an ancient Sufi song.

Video 2.2. *Yalan Dünya* as performed by Arslanbek Sultanbekov
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Yg9tMIhoEk
Accessed on 25 May 2024

What unfolded in the studio was a testament to the musicians' understanding of their craft. Drawing from musical forms ingrained in their hearts since childhood, they seem to navigate intricate modes and scales effortlessly, relying on tacit knowledge. This inherent understanding of music's underlying principles suggested the coherence and logic inherent in Sufi music. The musicians, representing diverse musical generations, showcased their mastery with precision and dedication. Their commitment to excellence and respect for tradition permeated every aspect of the recording process, creating an environment conducive to creative exploration and spontaneous moments of inspiration. These collaborative sessions left a lasting impression on me, inspiring me to learn Turkish epics, as shown below on page 81 in the Video link 3.2, and explore new creative avenues in my own work.

Progressive Steps

In September 2021, I booked the BSU studio in Newton Park to replace drum loops I had initially used as a metronome on four songs – *Nogai Yurt* (timecode 19:30), *Ak Mamyk* (timecode 16:22), *Kün Batar* (timecode 47:19), and *Kosh Keldyn, Edige* (timecode 50:14), in particular. We replaced digital loops with the live drums and reamplified the bass parts. During two collaborative sessions with Callum Moloney on drums and Tom Cory[22] on bass, managed by my then director of studies Davey Ray

[22] I chose to invite Tom Cory because I had worked with him in the studio in June–July 2015 on my MMus album in English, which earned me a master's degree in music.

Moore, who took the role of the producer, we shared ideas, experiences, and techniques, adding liveliness and verticality to the static harmonies of the songs. Producing drum tracks required a significant technical adaptation [23] from stems rendered in a home studio to orchestrating the grooves in the state-of-the-art studio. We faced the challenging experience of tracking drums in the studio and bringing funk to the pre-recorded music in two three-hour 'Covid-19 restricted' onerous sessions stretched over two days. Accustomed to establishing a song's foundation with exciting grooves during initial drum tracking, we had to align our rhythms with pre-existing stems, which initially sounded rather static.

Revitalizing Kosh Keldyn, Edige

Kosh Keldyn, Edige was actually the first song written back in 2018–2019, inspired by Farida Sidakhmetova's interpretation of the *Kurultai* episode where Tokhtamysh Khan seeks to uncover the origins of Kubugul, later known as Edige. In 2019, as I was exploring the great Turkic figures of this civilization, I stumbled upon an autobiographical film about Rudolf Nureyev (1938–1993), a world-renowned ballet dancer and choreographer. What struck me was his approach to structuring the dramaturgy of his performances: he starts with the climax. This concept inspired me to create a dynamic composition in a single melodic mode, incorporating idioms from Arabic and Turkish music. Over time, the arrangement evolved with the addition of the *qyl-qobyz*. However, something still felt missing; despite having programmed drums and a rough bass line to establish the rhythmic foundation, the piece lacked a certain energy.

The breakthrough came unexpectedly. While experimenting with a three-stringed *dombyra* plugged into the sound card, an accidental dribble of the strings, caused by the vibration from the speakers, created a unique buzzing sound. This unintentional

[23] While I was grateful for the opportunity to work in the studio, I found that my home equipment and software were more advanced than what the studio could provide. Additionally, the studio's equipment and software were often non-operational, which posed significant challenges. Due to Covid-19 restrictions limiting sessions to three hours, and aesthetic disagreements, I had to bounce MP3s in haste and record the drums to MP3s rather than directly into the open Logic file.

string rattle, which could not be replicated through traditional *tökpe* playing technique, sparked a new arrangement idea. I decided to invite Erzhan Arkabay to extend the dribble effect by layering it with the *Aksak Kulan Küi*[24], letting the *dombyra* rhythm align with the perfectly synchronized drums, creating a feel that resonates deeper than just a sound. This limping, syncopated, and asymmetric rhythm is famously challenging to master, making Arkabay's expertise particularly valuable. His contribution incorporated the legendary tale into my song. Thus, the rhythmic foundation in the song is in part constructed upon Arkabay's interpretation of the *Aksak Kulan Küi*, as shown below in Video link 2.3, is one of Arkabay's signature tunes.

Video 2.3. *Aksak Kulan Küi* as performed by Arkabay.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_TmDfyv118
Accessed on 7 June 2024

In retrospect, I realize that I was privileged to develop a professional relationship with Erzhan Arkabay and Azhar Erkeblanova, musicians whose collaboration deepened my appreciation for what is essentially the music of human beings that transcends cultural boundaries.

Collaborative Sessions

In *Ak Mamyk*, Andy Twin, preferring precision in his home studio, insisted on using a click track, whereas, on 1 September 2021, Callum's natural 'pocket' in *Nogai Yurt* and *Kün Batar* allowed him to play drums without a metronome. Tom reworked my bass lines in *Nogai Yurt* and *Kosh Keldyn, Edige*, as shown in Video link 2.4 below, playing additional grace notes in the low end, developing the rhythmic foundation of the songs. During my next recording session at the BSU studio in Newton Park in July 2022, we retracked *Koishy* (timecode 01:59) and *Ardak* (timecode 8:16). Alex Goodyear's jazz-influenced versatility enabled him to cut his part in just two takes –

[24] *Aksak Kulan* is a famous instrumental piece played on the *dombyra*. The term *Aksak Kulan* roughly translates to a lame saiga in English. It is a well-known melody in Central Asian nomadic cultures, particularly among the Kazakhs. The piece is characterized by its distinctive rhythm, which is asymmetrical or 'limping', hence the name. It often features lively and rhythmic passages, reflecting the nomadic lifestyle and culture of the region.

one per song. Clem Saynor, a session player from Cardiff, replayed my ostinato parts on the songs using a double bass and Yamaha bass guitar. He recorded his parts in single takes – one per song.

Video 2.4. Working with Davey Ray Moore, Tom Cory, and Callum Moloney, BSU control room, September 2021
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-NDWYd0tYE
Accessed on 31 August 2024

Working with Tom Cory (bass), Callum Moloney (drums), Andy Twin (drums), Alex Goodyear (drums), and Clem Saynor (bass) provided profound insights into the possibilities of integrating nomadic traditions into a rock-band format. Their expertise demonstrated that “arresting riffs” and rhythmic patterns could transcend stylistic and genre boundaries, blending traditional and contemporary elements. Goodyear, with his versatile musicality, played my composition on the piano prior to recording the drums, offering invaluable feedback that enhanced the overall arrangement. Twin approached the sessions with meticulous preparation, arriving with each measure carefully scored on staves, ensuring precision and clarity in his performance. Cory’s exceptional skill and musical intuition are reminiscent of the greats such as Jaco Pastorius, reinterpreted my parts with a level of dexterity and ‘boogie hand’ touch that was both inspiring and transformative. His ability to internalize and elevate the music to new heights was truly remarkable. Moloney channelled the spirit and technique of legendary drummers Buddy Rich and John Bonham. His contribution to the sessions was nothing but short of extraordinary and technical brilliance that make me smile whenever I revisit the stems.

Collaboration with Farida Sidakhmetova and Islam Satyrov, Erzhan Arkabay and Azhar Erkeblanova, and Ivan Aloyshin

As the research progressed to the progression assessment stage due in February 2022, in October 2021 I sought the expertise of Islam to help me present to the board a PhD-level song that would exemplify my dedication and progress by February 2022.

Islam Satyrov mixed *Ak Mamyk*, transforming my session stems into a cohesive and polished musical piece suitable for evaluation. Islam's meticulous production techniques and dedication to authenticity played a vital role in shaping the sonic identity of the album. His deliberate departure from Western music traditions and focus on preserving Nogai musical heritage redirected the sound towards authenticity and integrity. Together, Islam and I worked toward capturing the essence of the song. Islam supervised the production process, ensuring a cohesive and authentic representation.

Because creating this album was like climbing a high mountain, and the narrative flow became increasingly complex, throughout the whole process of creating from 2020 to 2024, I needed an expert in language and poetry to discern which parts of the epic were sung or dictated when recorded by Russian scribes in the 1950s and 60s, being unfamiliar with the tone of songs and tongue of the Nogai people. Farida Sidakhmetova, volunteered to assist. The final song, *Kosh Keldyn, Edige*, is my rendition of Sidakhmetova's translation of *Edige* (see Appendix II for song texts). This song summarizes the album in Russian and, in my view, provides an eloquent portrait of the protagonist. Russian is a language spoken by 99.9% of Nogais in the Russian Federation. This was an intentional and strategic decision to close the album with a clear, accessible message and to foreground my adaptation of *Barmaq*.

The song concludes with the phrase "*Kosh Keldyn, Edig*e" [Welcome back, Edige] followed by the evocative cry of the *qyl-qobuz*, symbolically marking Edige's return and the restoration of cultural memory. Sidakhmetova, an expert in the obsolete Nogai word, contributed to the project's linguistic and poetic dimensions. As a poet, translator, and activist, her insights into the Nogai language and epic texts were invaluable. Her steadfast commitment to authenticity ensured that every element of the epic's narrative was meticulously crafted. Working under her guidance was both a challenge and a privilege. Her influence maintained the cultural integrity of the work, with her poetic translations enriching the thematic depth of the album and preserving the historical legacy of *Edige*.

Erzhan Arkabay (*dombyra*) and Azhar Erkeblanova (a female *qyl-qobuz* player), the only holders of music degrees amidst my collaborators, brought a unique blend of formal education and cultural attentiveness to the project. Representing the similar culture of Kazakhstan, Arkabay and Erkeblanova, relatives to the Nogai separated by borders and one language, similar to the divide between the English and Americans, grew up in the steppes, spending summers in *yurts*, attending to animals, and playing music and games. They learned to play 'primitive songs' before entering music schools, acquiring their skills in the nomadic tradition.[25] Arkabay and Erkeblanova's expertise in nomadic music was evident in their approach. Each *qyl-qobuz* part (two) in *Ardak*, Erkeblanova recorded in a single take. She ensured that each part was recorded, on my request, in a single take. Focusing on the collaborative exchange of musical knowledge, it is pertinent to mention my collaboration with the guitarist, composer, and producer Ivan Aloyshin. We had previously produced two commercial tracks for my publishing company, Zvuk-M, based in Pyatigorsk, as shown below in Videos 2.5 and 2.6.

Video 2.5. *Padaut Zvezdy* (Stars are falling)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvYBy9BCpbg
Accessed on 7 June 2024

Video 2.6. *Devochka i Dozhd'* (A girl and the rain)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmJabhWsqd0
Accessed on 7 June 2024

In December 2022, I reconnected with Aloyshin, who had fled from Pyatigorsk in October 2022 and was still unsettled. After a brief sojourn in Samarkand, where he visited Tamerlane's tomb and offered a *Du'ā'*[26] before proceeding to Hanoi, he finally found some stability on the 27th floor of a tenement building (personal observations

[25] As described by Romanov, this key method of learning involves biting the neck of the *dombyra* in the cradle to experience its resonance and become a singer of tales in adolescent years.
[26] *Du'ā'* (Arabic: دعاء) is a prayer of invocation, supplication, or request, asking help or assistance from God. It is an integral aspect of Islamic worship and spirituality. *Du'ā'* serves as a direct line of communication between a believer and Allah.

2020–2024). Ivan needed work, and I needed someone to mix down my 2021–2022 studio sessions. As he began this task, mixing *Koishy* (01:59), *Nogai Yurt* (19:30), *Ardak* (8:16), and *Kosh Keldyn, Edige* (50:14), the release of Extreme's[27] sixth album *Six* (2023), featuring Nuno Bettencourt's one-minute solo in 'Rise', re-ignited my interest in melodic guitar solos.

Inspired by this resurgence and seeking to achieve a similar impact, I asked Aloyshin if he could play a 'one-take solo' alongside Azhar's *qyl-qobuz* in *Ardak*. Aloyshin agreed, and that collaboration added a new dimension to the song, blending traditional and modern musical elements. Aloyshin's performance and mix, infused with his signature style and technical mastery, enhanced the sonic quality of the album. His contributions added layers of emotional and cultural depth, reflecting his journey and resilience, which remind me of Edige's flight to liberty and Rudolf Nureyev's 'jump to freedom'.

Local Intellectual Debates

As mentioned above, this journey through the musical and cultural heritage of the Nogai people was not only shaped by collaboration with traditional musicians but also intertwined with interactions with the so-called intelligentsia and intellectuals. Local 'storms in the teacup' – passionate debates and competitions over who could claim the title of a Nogai Proper – provided a backdrop of continuous controversy and rivalry. Witnessing these varied interpretations of Edige's lineage and legacy highlighted the complexities and divisions within the Nogai community. One particularly contentious topic was extension of Edige's heirs into the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, embodied in the Yusupov dynasty and their alleged curse. The Yusupovs, a wealthy and influential family, faced a tragic pattern of losing every other male heir, a misfortune some attributed to a fifteenth-century curse by a Nogai witch. This curse was believed to have been cast upon the family after one of the Yusupovs converted

[27] "Extreme" is an American rock band formed in Malden, Massachusetts, in 1985. The band's line-up consists of Gary Cherone (vocals), Nuno Bettencourt (guitar), Pat Badger (bass), and Kevin Figueiredo (drums). They are known for their eclectic musical style, which combines elements of hard rock, funk metal, glam metal, and even some touches of blues and classical influences.

to Christianity, questioning whether the fall of the Russian Empire was preordained by this ancient malediction. The story of Felix Yusupov, famous for his involvement in the murder of Rasputin on 30 December 1916, often emerged in these discussions as a symbol of the family's tragic and complex legacy. "The Yusupov matter" appears to me to have been an excuse to justify the way Nogai people fantasize about their former relevance in the history of the Russian state. The Yusupovs, the wealthiest ever dynasty in the world – friends of Napoleon Bonaparte, Byron, Voltaire, and Pushkin – finally tied the knot with the Romanovs. Maybe that's why the Nogais feel they have influence on the Russian mind and fate.

The Yusupov Connection

Adding another layer of intrigue to the Yusupov saga was Walter Colebatch, a British banker, who claimed, as I understood it then, to be a descendant of the saved Yusupovs. According to Colebatch, his ancestor had been saved from the curse by being secretly sent to the Nogai Horde by his mother, Zenaida (Zeinab) Nikolaevna Yusupova (1861–1939), instead of being buried in a cardboard box she as pretended. He visited me in Bristol and shared his fascinating story of travelling on a BMW motorbike in 2007 from London to Magadan, visiting the Nogais in situ en route in Dagestan, Karachay-Circassia, and Astrakhan.

Discovering Nogai in English

During this journey, I have twice met and talked to Oliver Bullough, the author of *Let Our Fame Be Great*, at the Hay-on-Wye literature festival in 2010, and at WOMAD in 2019. Oliver was the first to write about the Nogai in English, sparking my curiosity and realization that the world knew very little about the Nogai people. Oliver himself mentioned that he struggled to find substantial information on the Nogai. This realization propelled me to delve deeper, utilizing books and resources that were not accessible to Bullough during his research. I sought to extend the first chapter of his book into this PhD, merging theory and practice to retell the Nogai past in song,

supported by my authority earned from an MPhil and six previous musical albums, along with several collaborations with top artists in Eurasia.

Creating a New Musical Language

Amid a multitude of intellectual debates and historical explorations, I found myself struggling to forge a new musical path that honoured the epic tradition while also pushing its boundaries. The challenge was to create a fresh, palatable musical language that could surround the text of *Edige* in Nogai. This task required finding players and researchers who were deeply ingrained in the traditions yet experienced in what Attali, as quoted in Levin and Suzükei (2015), referred to as 'nomadizing' the art form of music. These individuals needed to be capable of moving fluidly between ancient traditions and contemporary innovation. This process of creating a new musical language was perhaps the hardest part of the project. It demanded a deep connection with the archetype of Edige – the protagonist, allowing me to become him in spirit and performance. As I performed into the microphone – whether playing the *dombyra*, guitar, singing, or using a jaw harp – I felt a profound transformation. The printed text of the epic of *Edige* served as my anchor. Each performance required multiple takes, often a dozen or more, to track the basic idea and capture the essence of the music. The experience ricocheted into my consciousness, altering my appreciation of intellectual discussions and debates. Previously, my understanding of these dialogues was shallow. However, as I immersed myself in the epic narrative and the associated musical traditions, I began to appreciate the depth and complexity of these intellectual pursuits. The collaboration with traditional musicians, scholars, and intellectuals enriched my understanding of the Nogai culture and its intricate history, allowing me to create music that resonated with authenticity and innovation.

The Role of Collaboration

Overall, these forays into collaborations with the intelligentsia and intellectuals were crucial in shaping the project. They provided a broader context for understanding the cultural and historical significance of the Nogai people, while also pushing me to

explore new creative horizons. The resulting music not only honoured the epic traditions but also brought them into the modern era, ensuring their relevance and continued resonance in contemporary culture.

Conclusion

These collaborations have underscored the necessity of shared knowledge in preserving and revitalizing the musical traditions of the Nogai people. The creation of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* highlights how shared knowledge and partnerships can maintain the vitality of cultural heritage. This album, rooted in a 'parallel tonal world' of Nogai musical traditions, offers a musical glimpse into a vast culture deserving both preservation and contemporary reinterpretation. Drawing from scholars and musicians like Tiago de Oliveira Pinto and Michael Ellison, this project aims to infuse Nogai epic songs with a contemporary flair while respecting their historical roots. This is not merely an act of preservation but a celebration of cultural moments amidst societal changes and rural exodus. Influenced by the commitment of scholars like John Baily, this project stands as a tribute to music's enduring power to connect generations and preserve heritage.

Since June 2017 and onwards, collaboration with musicians such as Romanov, Sultanbekov, Satyrov, Arkabay, and Erkeblanova has been instrumental in my understanding how to contribute to the extension of the musical and narrative tradition of the Nogai people. The journey through 'epic' places like Pyatigorsk, Ankara, Istanbul, Samarkand, the harbours of Astrakhan at the estuary of the Volga (*Edil*) River, and Irkutsk, where I had 'a long-day lunch' with the members of Huun-Huur-Tu in 2014, offered me unique insights into the interconnectedness of culture, history, and landscape. Each collaboration contributed expertise and encouraged the aspiration to create a twenty-first-century rendition of Nogai music. The support and acceptance I found within these collaborations transformed me into a custodian of Nogai music. This intimate privilege allowed me to write songs with them, embracing animistic rhythms and adopting the 'interval' *dombyra* style in my guitar playing.

Furthermore, despite the challenges of isolation posed by the Covid-19 pandemic and a personal existential crisis brought on by the war in Ukraine, the making of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* stands as a testament to dedication to cross-cultural collaboration. These collaborations tap into critical issues of post-colonialism and the ongoing colonization in Russia, the safeguarding of intangible heritage, and pressing humanitarian concerns. It emphasizes the importance of language education to access a wealth of literary and musical sources, breaking down barriers and cultural walls. These collaborations demonstrate how traditional Nogai music instigated an interpretation, akin to Bartók's approach to folk music adaptation. The influence of Romanov was profound, as was exploration of historical themes, such as the Battle of Ankara, adding depth, connecting past and present through music and storytelling. Despite language barriers, with Romanov's assistance in interpreting *Edige*, its text provided a wealth of knowledge and inspiration, guiding the album. Collaborating with social scientists such as Bella Kardanova and intellectuals like Eldar Idrissov[28] from Astrakhan State Academy enriched my understanding of the Nogai people's narratives, concerns, and aspirations. These partnerships pushed creative boundaries and ensured that the resulting music resonated authentically while embracing innovation. These collaborative efforts provided a broader context for understanding Nogai culture, ensuring its relevance in contemporary society. Through shared knowledge, mutual respect, and creative synergy, this project embodies the spirit of cultural stewardship, ensuring that the animistic vibration of the musical heritage of the Nogai people continues to resonate with audiences across time and space.

[28] Eldar Idrissov's team has embarked on using AI to infuse my music with epic context. Eldar's aim is to integrate the entire album into various artistic forms, including a planned ballet performance.

CHAPTER 3: WORKING WITH TRADITION: *NINE RHAPSODIES ABOUT EDIGE*

Cultural Significance and Interpretation

This chapter examines my own work with *Edige* as a textual and symbolic entity, emphasizing its connection to cultural heritage, musical innovation, and the process of tradition preservation (Shelemay, 2006.) Special attention is given to the nuances of instrumentation and cultural context, as well as the challenges encountered when working with traditional texts, rural motifs, manual tuning, and pitch variability in indigenous instruments. The chapter also provides a detailed account of the transformation of *Edige* from a prosimetric text, enriched with previously unnoticed dynamic elements, into a recontextualized and polyphonic musical form created in a studio environment. In this context, the studio is viewed as a space that facilitates the reimagining, preservation, and extension of traditions (Shelemay, 2006). Further chapter explores how traditional texts are adapted into melodically cohesive songs, then considers aspects of instrumentation, arrangements, sound ambience - as elaborated in the Appendix IV. These strategies aimed at making *Edige* relevant and accessible to dwellers of McLuhan's 'global village' in a contemporary cultural context (Stokes, 1997, p. 130).

Heroic *Edige* as Text. From Words to Notes

The Cyrillic versions of *Edige*, transcribing the indigenous Nogai language, function as vital records of a tradition that has outlived its everyday linguistic context. Though the language is no longer widely spoken among surviving Nogai communities, these texts document and preserve the epic's cultural and historical continuity. However, in performance, the text often becomes fluid, enriched with additional details and moods that written text cannot convey. This fluidity reflects the nature of oral traditions, as discussed by Karl Reichl in the book *Singing the Past: Turkic and Medieval Heroic Poetry* (2000), where performers adapt their recitations to the context, introducing variations that respond to the audience and moment, thus enriching the narrative in ways a fixed, written form cannot.

Edige is a prosimetric epic song (*dastan*) – a blend of prose and meter, as noted by Reichl in his other account, *Edige: Karakalpak Heroic Epic: As Performed by Jumabay Bazarov* (2007). This study of the Karakalpak variant of *Edige* highlights an obsolete storytelling technique in which the performer alternates between verse recitation and prose narration, pausing to sip tea and tune the *qyl-qobuz*. Existing renditions of *Edige* by Bazarov, available online, were foundational references for the album. Video 3.1 below presents a Karakalpak variant of *Edige*, recorded on 16 February 1995, during a performance in Kenesbay Allambergenov's house, a Karakalpak writer. Allambergenov opens with a five-minute introduction, presenting the Karakalpak (Kyrgyz) version of *Edige* as the variant of *Ustaz* Erbolat (no surname known), an epic singer who passed down his knowledge to the then 19-year-old Bazarov.

Bazarov, an improvisor, begins his version with a brief narration about the backstory of Edige's birth. He retells the encounter between Barkaya (Baba Tukles) and a bird bathing in the River Nile (according to Valikhanov's variant), which led to the birth of his son. Sikaliev's variant, however, as recorded by Ustaz Hadji Iskhak Kumukov in the 1950s, appears to represent an earlier version of Edige, as observed by Valikhanov. He noted that Edige had been attributed to the Nogai people, though it later spread beyond the Nogai realm—the interfluve of the Volga - *Edil* and Ural - $Yaik$ rivers. The rivers, *Edil* and $Yaik$, are the indigenous names, still used by ordinary Nogai speakers (for example, '*Edil–Yaik arasy'* as referred to in the text of *Edige*), and the Kyrgyz embraced the story, adding their own layers (*Edige*, 2015, p. 72).

Video 3.1. *Edige*, full performance of the *Song of Tokhtamysh* as rendered live by Jumabay Bazarov

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vE-cft_9i5I
Accessed on 11 August 2024

This observation aligns with the fact that most versions begin with *Song of Tokhtamysh*, while the Nogai variant stands apart by tracing the myth back to its very origins. It starts with the discovery by a shepherd of a skull, a mysterious message, an immaculate conception, and the birth of a boy who becomes a fisherman, a warrior,

and a sage – Barkaya, also known as Baba Tukles Aziz. Bazarov's version, as I noted earlier, begins with the *Song of Tokhtamysh, in medias res*, thus representing a later development in the epic's evolution. Moreover, Bazarov's version operates within a primordial framework, where Edige's identity as a Nogai is implicit and requires no explanation – ethnic identities as deeply rooted and naturally understood by those within the culture.

My interpretation, as a recorded musical version, while limited by linguistic knowledge, education in Russian, cultural upbringing, and various other factors, is enhanced by the studio environment, which allows for the layering of multiple musical planes and the exploration of more complex soundscapes. It follows a more constructed approach, aligning with the hypothesis of 'the musical construction of place' advanced by Martin Stokes (1997). Derived from Sikaliev's literary text, *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* provides a structured narrative that conscientiously outlines the hero's journey from birth to triumph. This approach allows me to present *Edige* in a way that is accessible to contemporary audiences who may not share the same cultural background or implicit understanding of the hero's significance. In adapting the long, continuous oral narrative into a sequence of discrete songs, I aimed to preserve key elements of the epic and also to reframe them in a musical structure more familiar to modern listeners.

How can I extend and produce a twenty-first-century variant of Nogai music? To address this, I propose fusing traditional Nogai music with contemporary compositional techniques, employing modern instrumentation and digital studio production to create a reimagined soundscape that retains the core elements of Nogai traditions while appealing to modern audiences. In doing so, I follow the chronology of Sikaliev's variant, as published in *Nogai Heroic Epos* (1994), beginning with an illiterate shepherd stumbling upon a skull in the steppe, bearing a mysterious engraved message.

In a twist that differs from Bazarov's version, the skull's significance lies in the belief that Barkaya was born from flour ground from this skull – a detail Bazarov omits. Additionally, Barkaya falls in love with a bird, but at Lake Sekerli or *Ozero Slandkoe*

as it appears on maps in Kazakhstan or Lake Chekerly in Crimea, rather than around the River Nile, as in other versions. Bazarov's version skips over this previous generation, including the skull, the prophecy, the immaculate conception, and the birth of Barkaya. This 'missing generation' in the context of the discussion on 'why' and 'how' is referred to as the 'Nogai period', as it pertains to the *Nogai El* – the great people of the Nogai – or '*Nogailynin avir yurt*' as recorded in Valikhanov's variant of *Edige* (*Edige*, 2015, p. 82). Bazarov describes it as '*mynsan Nogai*' or 'countless Nogai', a term also noted by Reichl (2007). This '*minskoye pokolenie*', as General Suvorov referred to it in his reports following the suppression of the Nogai uprising in 1783, represented the core of the Nogai Horde – a critical detail that is absent in Sikaliev's version.

Phonetic Complexities: Tuning-In Pronunciation

The text of *Edige* contains deeper meanings beyond its literal storyline. However, it is crucial to examine the Cyrillic script in which this text is recorded. The Cyrillic script used to transcribe the Russian language creates inconsistencies and issues when used with the Nogai language, particularly with Nogai pronunciation, grammar, and punctuation. Such issues arise from the very first sentence of the epic. For example, as shown in Example 3.1, when the voiced consonant ***Б*** */b/* precedes the vowel ***И*** */i/*, it softens to ***Би*** */bi/*. Thus, if we read the first word – ***Бир*** – according to this rule, it becomes ***Бирь*** */bir'/,* which does not match the Nogai pronunciation ***Быр*** */br/*, reminiscent of a horse's sound. Or, if *Byr* were pronounced in English (e.g., similar to 'beer'), it might be transcribed as /bɪɹ/ (with a rhotic 'r').

Example 3.1

Epic text

Бир ярлы койши…

Bir yarly koishy

Byr yarly koishy…

[One poor shepherd…]

Translation 1.

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Bir yarly koishy	One poor shepherd…

Furthermore, the letters ***и***, ***ы***, or ***у*** in the word for ‘one’ do not capture the Nogai sound. This mispronunciation is akin to softly saying ‘fish’ or ‘dish’, which compromises pronunciation rules and introduces a theatrical element that might provoke a smirk. A native Turkish speaker would also struggle with the Cyrillic text, leading to deviations from the intended meaning without guidance from native speakers. The next word, ***ярлы*** */yarly/*, meaning ‘poor’, cannot be read by Russian rules, where stress is placed on the dominant ***я***, similar to ***яблоко*** /*yabloko*/ – apple – or ***яма*** */yama/* – ditch. In this case, the stress should be on the final syllable – ***ярлы*** */ly/* – as stressing the first syllable creates a different word. Similarly, the third word, ***койши*** /*koishy*/, meaning ‘shepherd’, is stressed on the last syllable; stressing the first syllable – ***койши*** – alters its meaning to ‘sufficient’. Incorrect stress placement in *Byr yarly koishy* can change the mood of the text.

For example, as shown in Table 3.1 below, emphasizing the initial vowel introduces a playful tone, which is unsuitable for this fragment. The beginning should be unhurried and ‘long’ - *Uzun yiir*, a genre found in other Turkic cultures designed to engage the audience. A long song – *Uzun yiir*, or *hava* – requires a measured pace to convey depth and emotional resonance, establishing a calm tone to immerse the audience in the narrative’s significance. While playful intonations have their place, they should be used judiciously to maintain the intended tone.

While my work is audio-based rather than text-based, the issue of script and pronunciation remains highly relevant, as the performance of *Edige* is intertwined with the language in which it is performed. The use of the Latin script, particularly in the context of Turkic-speaking regions such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, where recent language policies have mandated its use, broadens accessibility for contemporary audiences. It also facilitates phonetic pronunciation for

Western listeners, enabling them to engage with the sounds of the language even if they do not fully grasp the meaning of the words.

Word	Correct Stress Placement	Incorrect Stress Placement	Meaning Change	Notes
***бир* (one)**	Soft sound (like 'fish' or 'dish')	Hard pronunciation, focus on 'и', 'ы', or 'y'	Mispronunciation, adds a theatrical element	Difficult for non-native speakers, alters the word's natural sound
***ярлы* (poor)**	Stress on final syllable ('-*ly*')	Stress on the first syllable ('*я*-')	Changes to a different word	Similar to Russian words like *яблоко* (apple), where stress changes meaning
***койши* (shepherd)**	Stress on last syllable ('-*shy*')	Stress on the first syllable ('*кой*-')	Changes to 'sufficient'	Stress changes the mood and tone of the phrase
***Uzun yiir* (long song)**	Slow, unhurried pace	Quick, playful intonation	Shifts to a more playful or inappropriate tone	Intended to convey depth and emotional resonance

Table 3.1. Stress placement in Nogai pronunciation of Cyrillic script

This is significant for an audio project like mine because pronunciation directly impacts the way the epic is perceived and interpreted by listeners who are unfamiliar with the original language. For example, Western listeners, unfamiliar with the language, might mispronounce *Edige* (with a soft 'g' similar to 'genre'); the transcription might look like /ˈɛdɪʒɛ/ or /ˈɛdɪʤ/, leading to misunderstandings about the cultural significance of the work, such as mistakenly associating it with the Edge, U2's legendary guitarist.

This issue of pronunciation and script also connects to my own upbringing, where I witnessed first-hand how language barriers affect musical interpretation. Growing up in my hometown in Pyatigorsk in the 1980s, I witnessed local musicians perform English-language songs, such as The Beatles' 'Yesterday', without knowing the actual words. They would transcribe the lyrics phonetically into Russian, creating amusing and sometimes nonsensical versions of the songs. This practice of transcribing by ear,

without understanding the original language, is still alive today among musicians performing to MiniDiscs along the Black Sea coast.

More so, Romanov and Sultanbekov have also encountered similar challenges in conveying the linguistic and cultural nuances of epics across different regions and languages. For instance, Asau's efforts to bridge linguistic barriers during his 'overseas' career exemplify this challenge. To enhance comprehension, he released a video performance of *Yalan Dünya – Bitter life*, a song by the medieval poet Yunus Emre, accompanied by subtitles in Turkish, as shown in Video 3.2. This choice, despite *Yalan Dünya* being a well-known *ilahi* (religious hymn), highlights the ongoing struggle with linguistic accessibility and the need for accuracy in pronunciation.

Video 3.2. *Yalan Dünya* as performed by Sultanbekov .
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Yg9tMIhoEk
Accessed on 25 May 2024

Barmaq in Edige

Like any language, the Nogai language possesses a distinct rhythm and tonality. As informed by '*in situ* interlocutors', *Barmaq* is an instructional method originating from preliterate times and forms the rhythmic backbone of countless songs sung by Nogai men and women. Although comprehensive academic studies on the syllabic *Barmaq* are limited and only briefly mentioned, for example in Levin's book *The Music of Central Asia* (2015), my own understanding was therefore developed directly from my parents and primary sources during field trips. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 2017 I began a series of field trips to Nogai settlements, in the Russian Federation, as shown in Table 3.2 below, focusing on re-learning the Nogai language and the art of storytelling. I interviewed elderly men and women – *Babushkas* – as shown in Video link 3.3 below, from various backgrounds, asking them to sing and explain the rhythms and melodies they remembered.

Year	Location(s)	Purpose / Activities
2017	Russian Dagestan and Beyond	Initial ethnographic fieldwork to immerse in culture, study traditional music, and learn about the dombyra. Collected stories, legends, and songs. This foundational journey shaped future research.
2018-2019	Turkey, Western Kazakhstan, Astrakhan Region, Russian Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia	Visited epic locations and historical sites like the Astrakhan steppes and Roman ruins in Ankara. Recorded motifs, collaborated with musicians, and engaged in performances to understand the essence of their music.
2020-2021	Russian Dagestan, Karachay-Cherkessia, Aul Erken Shakar, Aul Terekly-Mekteb	Continued research amid the Covid-19 pandemic, revisiting key locations to work on the "Nine Rhapsodies about Edige" project. Engaged with local musicians and cultural organizations, enriching research through direct interaction with the culture.

Table 3.2. Table of field trips to Nogai settlements

Video 3.3. *Babushkas'* monodic songs in *Barmaq* as recorded in *aul* Edige between 2017 and 2021
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTuIJ6j2YNo
Accessed on 24 July 2024

These interviews were documented through audio recordings, video footage, and notes. When I asked those well versed in Nogai traditions about the nature of this poetic style, whether it belonged to Asian, Mongolian, or Turanian traditions, the answer was simple – *Barmaq*. Unlike the metrical patterns familiar in European poetry, such as the iamb *(da-dum)* or structured forms like the Persian *ghazal*,[29] *Barmaq* stands out with its unique rhythm.

It begins and ends with a rising tone:

↗Dum ↘ da ↗ Dum ↘ da → Dum –× da ↗ da

[29] The *ghazal* is a form of lyrical poetry that originated in Arabic verse and later flourished in Persian literature. Characterized by its structure of rhyming couplets and a refrain, each *ghazal* typically explores themes of love, loss, and longing, often incorporating rich imagery and emotional depth. The form has been embraced and adapted across various cultures, notably in Urdu and Turkish poetry, where it retains its intricate rhyme scheme and thematic focus.

Barmaq creates a sense of suspension or unresolved tension, as if a question remains unanswered. The melodic pattern of *Barmaq* simply transitions from recitation to singing through a shift in pitch. Although I initially perceived *Barmaq* as a simple, uniform melody, delving deeper revealed its complexity and importance in understanding oral tradition. This simplicity made *Barmaq* a central focus of my research.

I learned *Barmaq* through direct immersion in Nogai communities, where I worked closely with local singers and storytellers who passed down this tradition orally. The *dombyra* played a central role in this process, as its technique and repertoire feature simple, repetitive melodies that align seamlessly with *Barmaq's* rhythmic structure. These melodies, often varied in tempo and key, became essential tools for internalizing the rhythm. My goal was to preserve *Barmaq*, recontextualize and augment it, elevating it as a cultural identity marker while repackaging it for contemporary audiences by crafting succinct and dynamic song verses from subjectively chosen prose and poetic lines in *Edige*.

For example, in *Ak Mamyk* (16:22), if one were to recite my (secondary) verse with a Shakespearean flair, the result would likely sound out of place:

↘*Kolyna* ↗*arsha* ↘*tayak* ↗*berdirtip* / ↘*Koltygina* ↗*tayak* ↘*suentip* / ↘*Alla-Taalady* ↗*eskirtip* / ↘*Alyp* ↗*keldy* ↘*kart* ↗*yirawdy*↘

Barmaq's intonation alternates with a distinct pattern of rising and falling tones (↗*Kolyna* ↘*arsha* ↗*tayak* ↘*berdirtip*). It differs from the fundamental iambic beat: *da-dum – da-dum – da-dum* = To be or not to be, that is the question – of a 'Shakespearean' verse. Attempting to fit *Barmaq* into an iambic framework would strip it of its unique rhythmic character, reducing its natural flow to something almost comical.

It appears that the true essence of *Barmaq* lies in its ability to evoke a suspended, unresolved feeling, which is lost when imposed upon a rigid metrical structure. The correct *Barmaq* flow, however, goes something like:

↗Kolyna ↘arsha ↗tayak ↘berdirtip / ↗Koltygina ↘tayak ↗suentip/ ↗Alla-Taalady ↘eskirtip / ↗Alyp ↘keldy ↗kart –×yirawdy↗

Barmaq, with its inherent irregularity, is uniquely suited for the authentic performance of *Edige*. For the album's philosophy, preserving the *Barmaq* rhythm was crucial; substituting it with iambic intonation would compromise the music's contextual integrity. I reinterpreted *Barmaq* by drawing on the subtlety of Alibiy's technique, as well as feminine voices and songs from the Nogai steppe. In practice, I applied *Barmaq* directly to the creation of the album. The rhythms and tones of *Barmaq* were both retained and recontextualized, maintaining their original essence while aligning with contemporary sensibilities. For example, in the track *Ak Mamyk*, I used *Barmaq's* characteristic rise and fall to structure the verses, layering guitars and the *dombyra* to mirror and enhance these natural rhythms.

Structural Elements of *Edige* and Practical Application

In crafting the musical narrative for the album, I integrated structural elements intrinsic to *Edige* to enhance both historical authenticity and emotional resonance. Key among these elements are repetition and parallelism, used to reinforce thematic consistency. For example, in the tracks *Koishy* (Shepherd) and *Ak Mamyk* (White Featherbed), I use repetitive musical motifs that mirror traditional refrains, creating a rhythm that feels both familiar and immersive. This technique helped me align with and logically synchronize with the tradition, allowing the rhythm to gradually evolve into a dynamic and metrically precise structure, governed by clear, countable beats. Dramatic segmentation played a crucial role as well; the album is structured into distinct musical episodes reflecting significant events such as Edige's escape – *Kubuguldyn Asily* (Kubugul's Lineage) – subsequent encounters, and triumph – *Kosh Keldyn, Edige* (Welcome Edige). Heroic themes are accentuated through instrumental passages – *Köz Yasyl* and *Kün Batar* (Green/Blue Eyes and Where the Sun Dies) – (see Appendix V for the notation of *Kün Batar*).

Incorporating elements of oral tradition, such as the recitative in *Barmaq* in the track *Kenes* (Blessing), emphasizes the significance of receiving blessings. This song

reinterprets the roles of the two main characters, dividing the dialogue between the guitar, *dombyra*, and jaw harp. The decision to focus on this specific stanza, centred on the hero's lineage and origins, was intentional and aligns with contemporary sensitivity to Edige's genealogy, particularly in the academic discourse of Central Asia. By focusing on Edige's genealogy, I attempt to interpret the hidden message in the text, re-evaluating the chronology and making a symbolic claim that Edige's lineage exceeds even that of Genghis Khan. Additionally, the album incorporates symbolic imagery, including references to natural elements such as the lapwing in the track *Kyzgyš Kus*. This song integrates aspects of the natural world into the musical narrative.

The first track, *Intro*, introduces the *qyl-qobuz* in C as the tonal foundation of the album. Although C was not consistently used throughout, it became a symbolic and structural anchor, emerging from the final track, which I had composed first to give the project its direction. This key also aligns with the tuning of the three-string *dombyra*, where the second string is set to C, allowing for harmonic overtones that naturally complement the *qyl-qobuz*. By both beginning and ending the album in C, I sought to create a cohesive framework that connects the varied musical and cultural elements explored throughout.

The second track, *Shölmen Yürgen Bala* (01:02), draws on the theme of dreams and ambiguity — central to the narrative of *Edige* — to shape the album's polyphonic texture, using a dreamlike logic to guide its musical development. The line *Yora, yora shölmen yürgen bala* (literally - Unravel, unravel the dreams, steppe child) reflects the role of Baba Tükles Aziz, a revered figure known for his role as interpreter of dreams and later in life as the executor of law – *Tore* and *Yasaq* (*Edige*, 2014, p. 436.)

Invocation of Baba Tükles in metaphor summarizes Bazarov's introduction to *Song of Tokhtamysh* in two lines, as shown in Example 3.2. The track features a bluesy ostinato pattern, as shown in Video 3.4, that creates a 'non-resolving' motif. The howl of the wolf, throat singing, and jaw harp are symbolic references to Tengrianism, invoking the Nogai's mythic origin from the blue wolf. Through this, the track highlights

my role as a storyteller, working with a range of instruments in a modern studio environment to create a multi-instrumental album.

Video 3.4. Composing *Shölmen Yürgen Bala*
https://www.youtube.com/shorts/5TvwgVJH8oo
Accessed on 14 August 2024

Example 3.2

Song text as interpreted and performed by me and the rhythm pattern repeats through: ↗*Dum* ↘ *da* ↗ *Dum* ↘ *da* → *Dum* –× *da* ↗ *da*

Yora, yora Shölmen yürgen bala, yora, yora, yora, yora

Yora, yora Khannyn tusün yora, yora, yora, yora, yora

Translation 2.

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Yora, yora Shölmen yürgen bala, yora, yora, yora, yora *Yora, yora Khannyn tusün yora, yora, yora, yora, yora*	Unravel, unravel the dreams, child of the steppe (2 times). Unravel the dream of the great khan, Come now, unravel it, unravel...

Early in *Edige*, the text introduces symbols that are significant in world mythology, starting with the skull and the mysterious inscribed message. This message remains unreadable to the illiterate shepherd, who subsequently brings the skull to a learned figure. The figure reads the inscription before shattering the skull, turning it to dust. This motif aligns with the broader use of bones in literature and music as symbols of hidden knowledge and ancestral connections. For instance, Luka Lesson's song 'Bones' uses similar imagery:

> There are 206 bones in our bodies and mine are just like yours,
> but I'll be white ochre if I want to.
> I'll be bleached by sun and soaked by sand if I want to.
> I'll be eaten and reclaimed, decomposed, and desired if I want to.

‘Bones’ here serve as the legacy we leave behind. Textual transformation necessitated alignment with the poetic and musical traditions of the region. As illustrated below, the English translation serves merely as an informational converter and does not capture the phonetic and intonational nuances of the original text. Unfortunately, the Nogai text remains obscured behind Cyrillic script, requiring specialized training – first in reading rules, and only then in the language itself (for example, Paul Pena learned Tuvan independently despite being blind). My song lyrics are composed directly from the original source material and are not a free interpretation.

Example 3.3

Epic text as translated by David Hunt

> One day he [shepherd] came across the skull of a man. After turning it over with his stick, the shepherd noticed an inscription on the skull’s forehead and showed it to a certain literate man. The inscription ran: ‘Before death I killed ten thousand men, after death I will kill only forty.’ The shepherd was surprised. He brought the skull home and smashed it into flour and gave it to his wife without explanation. His daughter, curious, tasted the flour and miraculously became pregnant. She later gave birth to a boy named Barkaya. (Hunt, 2012)

Barkaya’s tale reminded me of *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign*, a twelfth-century classic of Russian epic literature. The tale recounts the unsuccessful campaign of Prince Igor Svyatoslavich of Novgorod-Seversk against the Polovtsians (Cuman/Nogai). In *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign*, a poignant episode foretells the fate of Prince Igor. The soothsayers predict that Igor will meet his death at the hands of his own horse, captured in the vivid prophecy: Igor, your fate is sealed, and you will meet your end at the hands of your own steed (part 5). This imagery of death by one’s own horse underscores the tragic nature of the hero’s fate. Additionally, there is a scene where Igor steps on the skull of his horse, further symbolizing the impending tragedy. These elements of prophecy and symbolism in the text heighten the drama and depth of the epic, reflecting both ancient beliefs and personal tragedies of the characters. Growing up in Russia, where *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign* was a part of my school curriculum, I absorbed these narratives without fully realizing their deeper significance. However, revisiting them through the lens of my current work revealed to me how these

seemingly simple symbols hold powerful meanings that transcend time and culture. This realization inspired me to write a song that could bridge the ancient with the modern – symbolizing my musical identity shaped by Russian culture – and archaic, reconnecting me to the language and traditions of 'my community', as Tiago de Oliveira Pinto puts it (2018, p. 15).

The instrumental composition *Köz Yasyl* (05:48), which translates to - green-eyed (or more accurately a spectrum between green and blue), a Homeric epithet, symbolically elevates the hero, without needing words; the title alone encapsulates his significance. However, this title functions as more than a mere description of his appearance; it serves as a coded reference to the hero's status and importance, akin to recognizing an expected guest by the green robe he might wear. The concept of coded language extends beyond this context. For instance, during the conflict in the North Caucasus in the 1990s and 2000s, orthodox Muslims were discreetly referred to as *bet sipagan* – those who caress faces with hands – whispered by those who did not share their views. Interestingly, when pronounced with iambic stresses, *bet sipagan* could be distorted to mean *deltsy pagany* – corrupt businessmen. Similarly, in *Köz Yasyl*, the coded reference allows the listener to grasp the hero's stature and importance while maintaining an air of mystery and anticipation.

This highlights the symbolic role of such key words within oral traditions, where subtle cues communicate significant meaning. Moreover, this track respects the tradition of *küi* performances – short, wordless instrumental compositions that are common throughout Central Asia (Levin, *et al.*, 2015). By presenting the hero's journey through music rather than words, the track demonstrates how instrumental compositions can bridge traditional forms with modern interpretations, sustaining the legacy of Nogai music.

Kubuguldyn Asyly (12:23), the next song in the album, anticipates the events that unfold in the following track. *Kubuguldyn Asyly* delves into the genealogy of Edige, presenting it as surpassing even that of Genghis Khan – a critical structural element within the epic.

Example 3.4

Epic text as translated by David Hunt ⟲

> Sybra the *yuyrau* had led Tokhtamysh to understand that Kubugul's[30] descent surpassed the high birth of all the khans, and he asked the khan not to persecute him. But it was a gamble, to entertain the hopes of the crafty Tokhtamysh. That is why Sybra the yuyrau notified Edige that it was necessary to escape through the upper opening of the kibitka. (Hunt, 2012)

Tokhtamysh, frustrated and lamenting his inability to even match Edige's swiftness, let alone surpass him, is confronted by Sybra, who asserts that Edige's unparalleled lineage elevates him above all others in the steppe.

Example 3.5

Epic text as translated by David Hunt ⟲

> And when Edige, after sitting on a horse, had galloped away, the khan's men, who jumped up in order to pursue him, were unable to sit on their horses, for the stirrup straps and the saddle-girths snapped, and the men and saddles fell to the ground. But there was no possibility of getting Edige back: he could not be over taken. Then Khan Tokhtamysh grew angry at Sybra the yuyrau, with the words: 'What have you done?' (Hunt, 2012)

In recrafting this narrative, I chose to transform the prose dialogue between Sybra and Khan Tokhtamysh into a song. This decision was driven by my goal to preserve and revitalize Nogai traditions through contemporary music, directly engaging with my research question on the preservation of cultural heritage. By turning direct discourse into song lyrics, I sought to elevate the dialectical confrontation between the characters and provide a musical interpretation of their power struggle. This also connects to a broader discourse surrounding the significance of Edige's lineage, which remains a key aspect of historical narratives. The symbolic importance of Edige's origins is intertwined with historical events, such as the Nogai contribution to defending Muscovy against the Lithuanian knights at the Battle of the Vorskla River in 1399 (Trepavlov, 2002).

[30] Edige adopted this name – Kubugul - to disguise himself and survive prosecution.

By embedding this narrative into a musical format, I am contributing to ongoing discussions about the Nogai's role in Russian history – whether they were allies or aggressors. Thus, the song becomes more than just a retelling of history; it is a means of exploring and questioning the complex legacy of the Nogai people. The climax of the 'dispute' occurs when Sybra affectionately calls Tokhtamysh - *balam* (my dear child) and asserts his right to reveal Edige's lineage, which he claims surpasses all others in the Golden Horde. Sybra enumerates the forty khans he has known, declaring that none, not even Tokhtamysh, can rival Edige.

Example 3.6

Song text as interpreted and performed by me and the rhythm pattern repeats through: ↗*Dum* ↘ *da* ↗ *Dum* ↘ *da* → *Dum* –× *da* ↗ *da* ◌

Sybyradai kart yiraw
Annatty Kubuguldyn asylyn. Khanlardan da artyk eken Kubuguldyn asyly
Kuvlama de dep karady, Khanga senip bolmaidy
Sonnan sebep Edige ge kenes berdi
Kuvlama de dep karady Khanga senip bolmaidy
Sonnan sebep Edige ge kenes berdi:
Mynnan shygyp kašh- Kašhyp shygyp ket
Togyz yodaslaryn da birge Šhöl, uvsan, Bereket Artynnan da kuvar
Astynda yer yanar, Ama, sen yas Soltan, saga Nogai Yurt bolar

Bridge ◌

Nogai Yurt – Atam, anam tuvgan yurt
Toktamysh Sybyraga kanikyty.
Ei, kara Kart, sen ne ekyn?
Yet almyakmyn kuvlasamda Kubuguldyn yorgasyn
Sybyra Toktamyshka söz kaitardy: 'Ei, balam, men saga annatym
Edigedin asily, Shyngizkhannynda artyk usaidy.
Ei, balam, men saga annatym Ei, balam, men saga annatym
Edigedin asilyn.

Translation 3.

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Sybyradai kart yiraw Annatty *Kubuguldyn asylyn.* *Khanlardan da artyk eken* *Kubuguldyn asyly* *Kuvlama de dep karady,* *Khanga senip bolmaidy* *Sonnan sebep Edige ge kenes berdi* *Kuvlama de dep karady* *Khanga senip bolmaidy* *Sonnan sebep Edige ge kenes berdi:* *‘Mynnan shygyp kašh Kašhyp shygyp ket* *Togyz yodaslaryn da birge Shöl, uvsan, Bereket Artynnan da kuvar Astynda yer yanar, Ama, sen yas Soltan, saga Nogai Yurt bolar Nogai Yurt – Atam, anam tuvgan yurt* *Toktamysh Sybyraga kanikyty.* *Ei, kara Kart, sen ne ekyn?* *Yet almyakmyn kuvlasamda* *Kubuguldyn yorgasyn* *Sybyra Toktamyshka söz kaitardy: ‘Ei, balam, men saga annatym* *Edigedin asily,* *Shyngizkhannynda artyk usaidy.* *Ei, balam, men saga annatym Ei, balam, men saga annatym* *Edigedin asilyn.*	The old man, the bard Sybyra, revealed to Tokhtamysh the secret origin of "Kubugul." It turned out that his lineage surpassed all the royal clans of the steppe. "Do not cast him out," pleaded Sybyra. "But a khan cannot be trusted," he added, and so he gave the hero his parting words: "Flee from here, and keep running with your nine companions. They will pursue you, and the steppe will burn beneath your feet, but in return you shall be granted the Nogai Yurt — your ancestral home, where your forefathers were born." Tokhtamysh grew furious! "What have you done, fearsome old man! Even if I give chase, I won't catch the dust of his stallion’s hooves." The bard replied: "Ah, my child, I told you who Edige truly is, as you asked — and his lineage is mightier than that of Genghis Khan!"

In *Ak Mamyk* (16:23), the narrative focuses on Sybra, a singer of tales who is summoned to a *Kurultai* to testify about Edige’s lineage. The term *ak* (white) is imbued with sacred significance, symbolizing Sybra’s power and invincibility. Sybra is described as being a 160-year-old man leaning on a hawthorn staff – a symbol imbued

with sacred significance (*Arsha Tayak*).[31] This reverence is reflected in the imagery of the 'white featherbed' that covers him and the hawthorn staff he holds, both of which carry deep symbolic meaning.

Example 3.7

Epic text as translated by David Hunt

> After making the wheels out of silver and taking a sacred oath from him that he would not tell a lie, in a large golden carriage, they brought Sybra-yuyrau. The khan gave a seat to this Sybra among the honoured guests, and when Sybra had drunk up the honey, and when the honey had gone down to his kidneys, and after the kidneys had swollen with the honey, after wriggling his teeth and nose, Sybra began singing (Hunt, 2012). [The original punctuation is corrected here for the sake of clarity; for the original, see the appendix.]

In order to represent this imagery musically, I adapted a verse attributed to Yanbay, a revered court singer and adviser to Tokhtamysh. The adaptation process involved aligning the verse with the *Barmaq* flow, requiring only minor adjustments to seamlessly integrate it into the song while preserving key details – such as Tokhtamysh's anticipation of Sybra's arrival, even as the elderly Sybra struggled with age and frailty. Incorporating this verse into the composition was a deliberate choice to enhance traditional narrative elements, bridging historical and symbolic content with contemporary musical expression. This approach allowed me to maintain the core thematic aspects of the original narrative while adapting them to suit my unique musical context. The created transformation of prose into a 'rhymed' structure for the song here follows *Barmaq* principles, although rhyme itself is not an inherent feature of the method. Rather, the rhymed form was introduced as a compositional choice to enhance musicality while aligning with *Barmaq's* emphasis on metre and pacing.

[31] *Arsha Tayak* translates as 'hawthorn', rather than 'red pine' as suggested by Hunt. In Nogai culture, hawthorn carries significant symbolic value, often associated with protection and resilience. Similarly, hawthorn is revered in various other cultures; for instance, in Celtic mythology, it symbolizes hope and protection, while in Greek tradition, it is linked to the goddess of love, Aphrodite. Additionally, in Chinese culture, hawthorn is celebrated for its medicinal properties and is often associated with happiness and prosperity.

Example 3.8

Song text as interpreted and performed by me and the rhythm pattern repeats through: ↗*Dum* ↘ *da* ↗ *Dum* ↘ *da* → *Dum* –× *da* ↗ *da* ◌

Arbaga miner ali yök

Atka mince, silker dep

Arbaga mince, shorshir dep, shorshir dep

Astina ak mamyk saldyrtyn

Yaklaryn uvlav uvlatip

Astina ak mamyk saldyrtyn,

Saldyrtyn

Bridge ◌

Kolyna arsha tayak berdirtip – Koltygina tayak suentip

Alla-Taalady eskirtip – Alyp keldy kart yirawdy

Kolyn yaip, Khan shikty – Tör basinda yer berdy – Toktamysh kulagin saldy

Sybyra ynyrandy. Tolgaim dep ymtyldy.

Ashpaga auzy barmady, Ashpaga auzy barmady…

Translation 4.

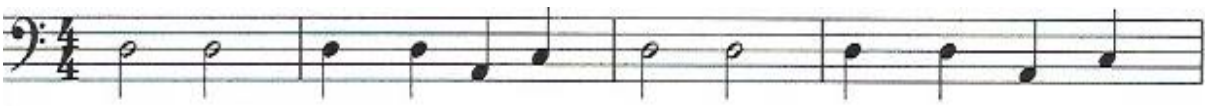
Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Arbaga miner ali yök *Atka mince, silker dep* *Arbaga mince, shorshir dep, shorshir dep* *Astina ak mamyk saldyrtyn* *Yaklaryn uvlav uvlatip* *Astina ak mamyk saldyrtyn,* *Saldyrtyn* *Kolyna arsha tayak berdirtip* *– Koltygina tayak suentip*	The old man has no strength to climb into the cart— If he mounts a horse, he will fall to pieces. If he sits in the cart—it will jolt him, jolt him without mercy. So they laid a white featherbed beneath him, And bound him tightly so he wouldn't fall, Laid that white featherbed beneath

Alla-Taalady eskirtip – Alyp keldy kart yirawdy *Kolyn yaip, Khan shikty –* *Tör basinda yer berdy –* *Toktamysh kulagin saldy* *Sybyra ynyrandy. Tolgaim dep ymtyldy.* *Ashpaga auzy barmady,* *Ashpaga auzy barmady…*	him… They placed a staff in his hands, a walking stick to hold, And, after reciting a prayer to bless the journey, They brought the bard to Tokhtamysh. The khan opened his arms wide, Seated him at the centre of the table, And, leaning close, began to listen. Sybyra prepared himself, He gathered his strength to speak— But could not open his mouth...

Explaining Ak Mamyk

As aurally transcribed, *Ak Mamyk* reflects how harmony enriches *Barmaq* - a typically monophonic genre. The song maintains one motif. It blends key elements of Nogai music — the *dombyra*, *qyl-qobuz*, jaw harp, with electric guitars and bellowing drum fills. The piece juxtaposes traditional pentatonic scales with modern harmonic progressions, creating a unique tonal landscape. Rhythmically, it combines steady, percussive patterns reminiscent of folk dances with syncopated and driving beats from rock influences. The texture shifts dynamically between sparse, intimate passages and dense, layered sections, enhancing the emotional range. This fusion of traditional and contemporary techniques gives the *Barmaq* - based song a sense of both continuity and evolution, balancing tradition with innovation. *Ak Mamyk* begins with 'the wheel', followed by a cymbal swell and the *qyl-qobuz*, setting the tone and mood.

The *qyl-qobuz* part



1. The reverb-treated *dombyra* part, is played using the tökpe technique. This technique enables the simultaneous performance of two notes, allowing the melody to be played alongside a transposed version of itself, a fourth above:

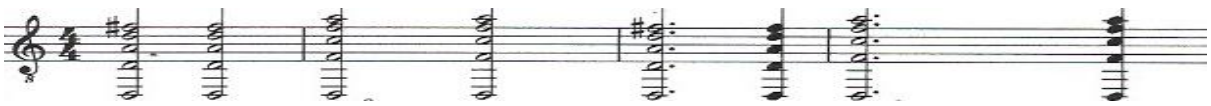
The *dombyra* part

2. Bass guitar primarily repeats the lower notes within the D chord, performing reduced arpeggios in unison with the *dombyra*. This approach innovates traditional Nogai recording practices, which typically use Wav or MIDI bass. My focus was on capturing the dynamic interplay of low frequencies that complement the *dombyra's* drone. Tuning the bottom string down to D ensures seamless execution of the repeated motif at a consistent pitch.

Bass part

3. The same principle applies to the guitar parts. Despite the seemingly limited nature of *Barmaq*, its irregularity is balanced and transposed through open strings in the initial *'dombyrized'* chord sequence, suspended in D and F/D chords in the *BARMAQ* (custom) tuning (see explanation of *BARMAQ* tuning further in the chapter). The second guitar part, in the upper octave, strikes two notes to sustain the drone on the high strings, complementing the *dombyra's* sound.

Guitar riff one:



Guitar riff two:

Element	Description
1. Introduction	- **Walk Beat & Cymbal Swell**: A reimagined 'walk beat' introduces the track, followed by a cymbal swell. - **Qyl-Qobuz**: Establishes the tone and mood, setting the atmospheric foundation for the piece.
2. Dombyra Technique	- **Reverb-Treated Dombyra**: Played using the tökpe technique, allowing simultaneous performance of two notes. - **Melody & Harmony**: The melody is played alongside a transposed version a fourth above, creating a rich harmonic texture.
3. Bass Guitar	- **Reduced Arpeggios**: Repeats lower notes within the D chord, in unison with the dombyra. - **Focus**: Captures the dynamic interplay of low frequencies to complement the dombyra's drone. - **Tuning**: Bottom string tuned down to D for consistent pitch.
4. Guitar Parts	- **Chord Sequence**: Balances the irregularity of Barmaq with 'dombyrized' chords suspended in D and F/D. - **Upper Octave Guitar**: Sustains the drone on high strings, complementing the dombyra. - **Guitar Solo**: Evokes ambient vastness, reflecting the steppe and Edige's narrative.
5. Barmaq Tuning	- **Tuning Strategy**: Allows for intricate playing of 'dombyrized' major/minor chords. - **Ergonomics**: Chord fingerings become more natural and ergonomic, aiding in seamless chord transpositions that stay in tune with the dombyra and qyl-qobuz.
6. Jaw Harp (Ambient Instrument)	- **Ambient Layering**: The jaw harp adds a subtle, resonant layer to the track, blending seamlessly with the other instruments to enhance the ambient atmosphere. - **Textural Depth**: Provide organic, rhythmic pulse that complements the overall soundscape.

Figure.3.1. Key Elements in the Arrangement of *Ak Mamyk* (16:23)

The table above highlights the comparison between traditional and modern musical elements clear. It shows how instruments, rhythms, and harmonies from Nogai music are mixed with electric guitars and drums, creating a fusion that's both familiar and fresh. The table is useful because it visually lays out the balance between these two worlds, helping to show how the song manages to stay rooted in tradition while also pushing boundaries. By seeing the comparison side by side, it's easier to understand how this mix works and why it is so effective.

Explaining Nogai Yurt

In *Nogai Yurt* (19:30), the musical narrative departs from the chronology, reflecting a traditional storytellers' tendency to rearrange events, enhancing the oral tradition's fluidity. The song celebrates Edige's journey as he departs to his ancestral homeland.

Example 3.9

Epic text as translated by David Hunt

> A day when iron bits have snapped, and the reins have hung down in men's hands, a day when the khans' wives arrayed themselves in black, and loaded up their pack on a black camel, and harnessed the cart with a shaft of limewood, saying:
>
> 'Ey, our time has come to this', my open, infinite land,
>
> My open, unbounded native land,
> The land, where in a white beshmet,
> My father became a son-in-law.
> The land, where in a white covering,
> My mother became a daughter-in-law,
> The land, where with their tails streaming in the wind,
> Innumerable herds of horses grazed.
> The land, where pouring out the yellow honey,
> The people would gather at the sabantoy.
> A warm land, where the bushes would burn,
> A land where a foal became a mare,
> A land where a calf changed into a cow.
> A young camel-calf shedding its hair. (Hunt, 2012)

The *qyl-qobuz* introduces the first singer (Damir *tolgaidy*), where the singer becomes part of the epic song reflecting in a *tolgaw* – a traditional reflective song. Singing in the first person, the song begins by depicting the grandeur of the *Nogai Yurt*, the ancestral birthplace of Edige. By emphasizing this location, the opening verse roots the song in specific historical, cultural, and geographical settings. This song highlights the importance of identity, lineage, and heritage in Nogai storytelling, evoking key figures like Edige, Nuradin, and Shora, warriors who became central to Nogai folklore. This focus on ancestry deepens the song, connecting the performer to a broader narrative that extends beyond the individual track. It also establishes a rhythmic foundation in

Barmaq for the rest of the song, where words from the distant past continue to shape the present. In my creative process, this emphasis on ancestry and cultural origins serves as a tribute to the *Nogai Yurt* – *Nogai Šhöl*, the Nogai steppe – and the sense of nostalgia it embodies.

Example 3.10

Song text as interpreted and performed by me and the rhythm pattern repeats through: ↗*Dum* ↘ *da* ↗ *Dum* ↘ *da* → *Dum* –× *da* ↗ *da* ⟲

*(*Damir *tolgaidy* – here I become a singer of tales - *yiraw)*[32]

Ey, Ey Nogai Yurt Atam, Anam tuvgan yurt
Yiilyp salam bergen yurt
Ey, Ey Nogai Yurt Atam, Anam tuvgan yurt
Yilyp slam bergen yurt
Kimdigimdy kesken yurt

Biev savgan sütli yurt
Kumuz ishken Kutly yurt
Edil – Yaik Arasy
Yilky mynan tuvgan yurt
Edil, Edil su
Yagan oipan kum baskan

The deliberate repetition of the first verse by the four participants, along with the four-voice chorus at the end, was a conscious creative choice. This approach serves as a counter-narrative to the dominant rhetoric of twentieth-century Russian historians, who often imposed a ‘cult of Russianness’ on the Nogai people while ignoring the fact that this ‘great culture’ deprived them of their land, language, and history. By repeating the verse, I emphasize the importance of preserving memory and resistance, highlighting

[32] *Tolgaidy* derives from *tolgaw*, a tradition of reflective song that serves as a foundational element in epic narratives.

the resilience and continuity of Nogai cultural identity despite historical attempts to erase it.

Chorus

Kumga suday tal bitken	A willow has risen above the water,
Butagı suvga iylgen	Its branches bend toward the water,
Yapıragı kaldayğan	Its leaves are like arrows.
Baqası, koyday, şuvlağan	Frogs on the lake are as large as sheep,
Balygy, taydaу, duvlagan	Fish frolic like foals,
Yılan bar, bakanday	The snakes are enormous…

Translation 5.

English (trans. Yakubov)	English (trans. Yakubov)
Ey, Ey Nogai Yurt Atam, *Anam tuvgan yurt* *Yiilyp salam bergen yurt* *Ey, Ey Nogai Yurt Atam,* *Anam tuvgan yurt* *Yilyp slam bergen yurt* *Kimdigimdy kesken yurt* *Biev savgan sütli yurt* *Kumuz ishken Kutly yurt* *Edil – Yaik Arasy* *Yilky mynan tuvgan yurt* *Edil, Edil su* *Yagan oipan kum baskan* *Kumga suday tal bitken* *Butagı suvga iylgen* *Yapıragı kaldayğan* *Baqası, koyday, şuvlağan* *Balygy, taydaу, duvlagan* *Yılan bar, bakanday*	Hello, Nogai Yurt – a place where my father and mother were born. Hello, Nogai Yurt, a people who gathered to welcome me. Here my umbilical cord was cut. Here they milk camels, and drink fermented milk in abundance – a land between Volga and Ural. Stallions are bred here in thousands Drinking the water of *Edil* Again, I am on my knees before you. A willow has risen above the water, ts branches bend toward the water, Its leaves are like arrows. Frogs on the lake are as large as sheep, Fish frolic like foals, The snakes are enormous…

Symbolism. Instruments: The *Qyl-Qobyz*, *Dombyra*, and the Obsolete Jaw Harp – *Khomus*

It is essential to examine the core musical instruments that shaped the album's sound: the *qyl-qobyz*, *dombyra*, and the now-obsolete jaw harp (*khomus*). Though seemingly simple, these instruments are complex in practice, and their intricacies made studio recording particularly challenging. In addition, each instrument carries deep cultural significance. The *qyl-qobyz*, as shown in Figure 3.2, is steeped in superstition, with a long-standing belief that mastery of the instrument must be passed down from epic heroes through dreams. This mystical transmission of skill and knowledge is similar to traditions described by Theodor Levin, who documents a conversation with the *manaschi* Rysbek Jumabaev. Rysbek recalls that his journey as a *manaschi* – a performer of the Kyrgyz epic *Manas,* began when he had a dream in which the renowned *manaschi* Sayakbay Karalaev recited *Manas* (2015, p. 188).

Aravin continues the 'mystical narrative' surrounding the instrument and the art of mastering the epic. In *From Küi to Symphony*, he writes:

> With hope and fear, people greeted *Bakhśy* covered in strange attire, adorned with jangling metal pendants, carrying a staff – a rod in his hand, with a flat top where forged plates and horn-shaped curls swayed and rang mysteriously when shaken. (2017, p. 46)

Such accounts reflect a deeply rooted belief that becoming a master of an instrument or epic performance requires more than just practice – it requires a spiritual transmission of knowledge. The *qyl-qobyz*, in particular, is played by only a few, with its tradition tracing back to legend, as noted by Aravin:

Figure 3.2. The *qyl-qobuz*

> Dede Korkut was a man who dared to seek immortality. In his travels around the world, he found no answers to the eternal questions of life and death. Returning to his native lands by the Syr Darya, Korkut crafted the instrument by hollowing it out from juniper [hawthorn] wood. He covered the lower part of the body with the hide of a sacrificed camel, leaving the upper part open as a symbol of the celestial sphere. He made the two strings and bow from horsehair, hence the name of the instrument: *qyl* [horsehair] – *qobuz* [lute] The sounds of this enigmatic instrument attracted animals and birds. One day, while Korkut, exhausted from playing, was sleeping, death, in the form of a poisonous snake, bit him, and he died (2017, pp. 52–53).

Earlier chapters detailed the reconstruction of our Nogai prototype of the *qyl-qobuz*, based on Sultanbekov's designs. This process yielded an instrument with a unique, almost enigmatic timbre. In *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*, the inclusion of the *qyl-qobuz* is essential: it not only revives a vital piece of musical heritage but also symbolizes the return of the lost art of playing the *qyl-qobuz*. The problem with *the qyl-qobuz*, however, is that there is no repertoire for this ancient instrument. So, one has to think it up, become a composer. Reimagined within the album's context, a fusion of the *qyl-qobuz*, *dombyra*, guitars, and drums, the *qyl-qobuz* becomes one of the defining 'voices' in this rock interpretation.

Figure 3.3. Recording the *dombyra* in the Blue Kite Studio, Istanbul, 2019

The *dombyra*, as shown in Figure 3.7 above, serves as a profound medium of cultural expression, functioning as both a musical instrument and as a vessel for transmitting the oral tradition. Structurally similar to other Central Asian stringed instruments, two *dombyras* are distinct in their two and three-stringed variations, allowing for flexible tuning and playing techniques, such as *shertu* (picking) and *tökpe* (strumming).

In *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige,* the decision to use two *dombyras* was driven by the desire to create two distinct voices and capitalize on the variations each instrument allows. The two-stringed and three-stringed *dombyras* offer unique tonal possibilities and flexibility, essential for achieving the desired musical texture and expression. On one hand the three-stringed *dombyra* played a particularly important role in the songwriting process, as it allowed for flexible tuning to match specific chord sequences. For example, in the piece *Kyzgyš Kus*, the three-stringed *dombyra* was tuned to F# C# G#, which facilitated the use of the *tökpe* technique – strumming that creates rich overtones, contributing to the song's immersive and resonant sound. On the other hand, the two-stringed *dombyra*, as shown in Figure 3.3, served more as an accompanying instrument, ideal for recording rehearsed passages. While its tuning is more traditional, it provided a solid foundation that complemented the more experimental use of the three-stringed *dombyra*. By using both, I was able to

compensate for the limitations of each individual instrument and achieve a more dynamic and layered sound.

The construction of the *dombyra*, akin to the *qyl-qobuz*, is imbued with cultural symbolism. It is crafted with nine 'ribs', a design choice that, as explained by Romanov and other luthiers, reflects the symbolic significance of the number nine. In the context of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*, the number nine symbolizes the completeness of the epic's journey and the entirety of Edige's saga. In many cultures, including Central Asian traditions, the number nine holds special significance as the last single-digit number, representing the completion of a cycle before the commencement of a new one. Christopher Bawden's work *The Modern History of Mongolia* (1994) elaborates on this symbolism, explaining how the number nine signifies completeness and cosmic order in Mongolian culture. Within the epic, the nine represents Edige's journey alongside eight of his closest companions, forming a complete unit. Additionally, the number nine is autobiographical, reflecting two cycles of nine years spent travelling and researching the music of this enigmatic language, and uncovering the forgotten meanings within 'obsolete words and locutions' in *Edige* (Valikhanov *et al.*, 1864).

The jaw harp, or *khomus*, as shown in Figure 3.4, is a sought-after instrument made in Siberia, though now considered obsolete in modern Nogai music. Drawing on this tradition, I used *khomus* to infuse a sense of personal and emotional connection into the sound of the music. *Khomus* offers a resonant sound that is modulated by the player's mouth shape and breathing. Despite its historical recognition in the Western world during the eighteenth century through explorers such as Joseph-Marie Amiot and James Cook, the *khomus* has traditionally been viewed by the Nogai community as less representative of their cultural identity than the *dombyra* and *qyl-qobuz*. I chose to incorporate *khomus* into the album to draw on its rich Altai origins and enhance the soundscape with its unique auditory qualities. This decision was motivated by several factors: first, the *khomus* adds a layer of cultural richness and authenticity that connects with the broader Central Asian musical heritage. Second, its distinctive sound provides a diverse sonic texture that complements and contrasts with the other instruments in the album, reflecting a commitment to musical exploration and

innovation. Additionally, *khomus* produces an ambient sound (see Appendix IV for an explanation of ambient recoding technique) that mimics throat singing and evokes the sounds of the reeds from the outskirts of Nogai settlements, further enriching the album's atmosphere. And finally, as oral tales and anecdotes inform us, historically, nomads in Siberia used the *khomus* in courtship rituals; when a boy fancied a girl, he would begin to play it as a gesture of affection.

Figure 3.4. *Khomus* – the jaw harp

Arrangement Strategies/Harmony

This section delves into the harmonic aspects – the interplay of tones. Originally, this music is monodic, focusing on a single melody without harmony. In the context of the Nogai musical tradition, standardized sheet music is virtually non-existent. Unlike other musical traditions in Russia, where notated music is widely available, traditional Nogai music has not been formally transcribed into a widely accessible format. This leaves orchestration largely open to interpretation and personal adaptation. Additionally, as someone who primarily learns and composes by ear rather than reading sheet music, I rely on my instrument to guide my writing. While forming a strategy, I categorized instruments into groups: 1) traditional – *dombyra*, *qyl-qobu*z, jaw harp, and vocals; 2)

modern acoustic and electric guitars, bass, double bass, Hammond organ, and harmonica; 3) recording tools, software, microphones, and special effects.

These categories served as a framework for organizing the sonic elements of the album. On one hand, traditional instruments were primarily used to evoke the cultural essence and historical depth of the Nogai musical tradition, grounding the album in authenticity. Modern instruments, on the other hand, were employed to explore new harmonic possibilities and create a fusion of past and present. The third category – recording tools and effects – enabled me to enhance the overall texture of the compositions.

The fourth was the challenge of aligning these instruments with the voice. The guitar and *dombyra* are ideal companions for my voice, with the guitar adding a percussive element and the *dombyra* providing warmth. I *dombyrized* the guitar by developing a specific tuning system and applied two approaches: emphasizing rhythm like a bass and tapping on suspended chords with added notes and riffs. This technical adjustment was aimed at integrating traditional and modern sounds. Since traditional Nogai music is passed down aurally and lacks standardized notation, much of Romanov's repertoire, for example, remained unwritten. Though he began teaching children late in life, even his most talented students struggled with transcription. I notated *Lashyn Kus* from a live performance, not only to preserve it but also to establish a visual connection with the flow of his fingers — helping me better understand and interpret his technique. To integrate his technique, I played the guitar to match the *dombyra's* irregularity, ensuring a sequential blend.

This tuning allowed the guitar to complement the *dombyra* and other instruments, creating a cohesive musical mix where traditional and contemporary elements work together effectively.

Tuning

Creating this album prompted a broader rethinking of my compositional methods. Instead of starting with rhythm and bass lines, as was my traditional approach, the

structure of *Edige* guided me toward a more fluid and adaptive methodology. Although I employed multiple instruments, the *dombyra* remained central. Its distinctive timbre anchored the musical landscape, shaping not only the melodies but also the album's atmosphere and spirit. In Central Asian culture, combining traditional instruments with modern ones, such as a *dutar* or *saz* with a guitar, is not unprecedented. However, this project distinguished itself by the profound influence of the *dombyra* on all other instruments. The *dombyra* did not merely accompany the guitar or other elements, it redefined them. For instance, in the track *Šantemir Kyzgan Kumusga* (34:38), I retuned the bass guitar to match the *dombyra*'s pitch.

***BARMAQ* Tuning** and *YouTube link to the album*

While composing on the guitar offered efficiency, my connection to the *dombyra* remained strong, leading me to create an equal number of one, two, and three-minute songs exclusively for this instrument. The duration of these pieces is not arbitrary but rooted in the traditional length of folk songs, as noted in *The Music of Central Asia* (Levin *et al.*, 2015).

The challenge in composing for *Edige* lay not only in technical execution but in reconciling the irregular rhythmic and melodic patterns of *Barmaq* with harmonic development. Rather than imposing Western harmonic logic onto a traditionally monophonic form, I sought ways for harmony to emerge organically from the phrasing and cadence of the original text. A pivotal reference was Bazarov's performance (Video link 3.1, from 50:45), where his phrasing—marked by uneven repetition, microtonal inflections, and dynamic pauses—informed my approach to timing and tonal contour. I mirrored these qualities in my own vocal delivery, particularly in *Ak Mamyk* (16:23), where I built the harmonic structure around two recurring chords. The stasis created by minimal harmonic movement allows the vocal line to carry emotional intensity and narrative shape, enriching *Barmaq's* typically sparse texture without disrupting its traditional flow. In this way, 'the harmonic restraint' became a tool to foreground the text's epic character (Valikhanov *et al.,* 2015), while also facilitating moments of subtle modulation that nod toward contemporary compositional technique. However, despite extensive theoretical research, studio experience, and keen

dombyra practice, the key to unlocking how to compose a song 'of an epic character' was a special guitar tuning, which I will describe in the next paragraph.

I named it as the *BARMAQ* Tuning – conclusively spelt in capital letters.

BARMAQ tuning, as shown in Figure 3.5, emerged from that. '***BAR'*** represents the chosen fret, '***M'*** stands for the note **E** (Mi), '***A'*** for the note **A** (La), and '***Q'*** for *Qambaq – [kambak]* - a camel thorn that symbolizes a 'rolling stone' (thanks to Mr Keith Richards).

But before discovering *BARMAQ* tuning, I had been exploring unusual tunings and the unconventional use of capos by musicians ranging from Joni Mitchell to Michael Hedges (1953–1997). These artists would use open tunings, or block three or four strings with the capo at a time, leaving either the high or low strings open, a technique famously exemplified by John Mayer's epic 2007 performance of 'Neon' at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. In that performance, Mayer drops the low string to C (while keeping the rest in standard tuning) and uses a 'boogie hand' technique, employing his thumb and index finger to simultaneously manage rhythm, melody, harmony, percussion, and a touch of magic – all on an acoustic guitar, with no capo. This had a profound impact on me. I began searching for a tuning that would accommodate my limitations, highlight strengths, and conceal weaknesses.

A clue arrived unexpectedly in Keith Richards's autobiography *Life* (2010), where Richards discusses playing a five-string guitar in open G tuning – a chapter that I found so compelling I read it twice (the first time I had ever reread anything was Nabokov's *Laughter in the Dark*) and followed it by watching Keith's interview online. And because that evening I was playing my song *Kuvshin* with the low string tuned to G, I simply placed the capo on five strings on the third fret and found myself on the outskirts of Keith Richards's sonic kingdom. From there, I began experimenting with DADGAD/DADGBD tunings, combined with a **capo** on the third fret or any other fret, and so on, gradually becoming more and more complex.

Therefore, the tuning remains open to 'fine-tuning', as in 'What will be the sound tonight?' However, the tuning employed consistently throughout nearly all tracks on

the album, as shown in the sound of the complete album in Video 4.3.7 below, is as follows: 1st string E, 2nd string B, 3rd string E, 4th string B, 5th string A, and 6th string D.

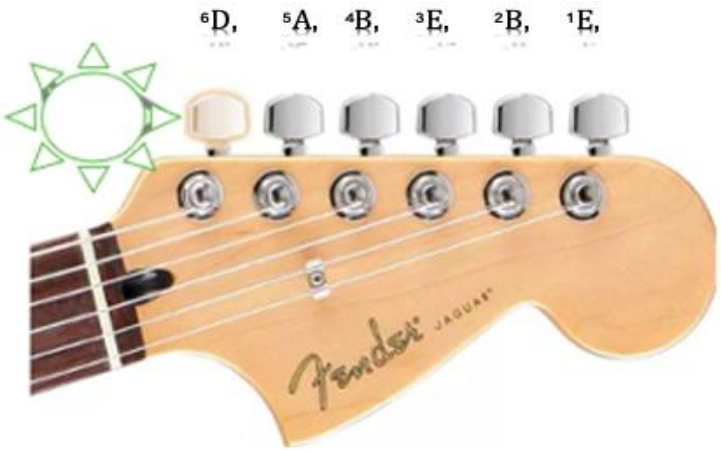


Figure 3.5. ‘Standard’ *BARMAQ* tuning.

Further experimentation aimed at adapting the guitar to emulate the tuning of the *dombyra* involved placing the capo on the third fret. The experiment, as shown in Figure 3.6, yielded the following tuning configuration: 1st string G, 2nd string D, 3rd string G, 4th string D, 5th string C, and 6th string D.

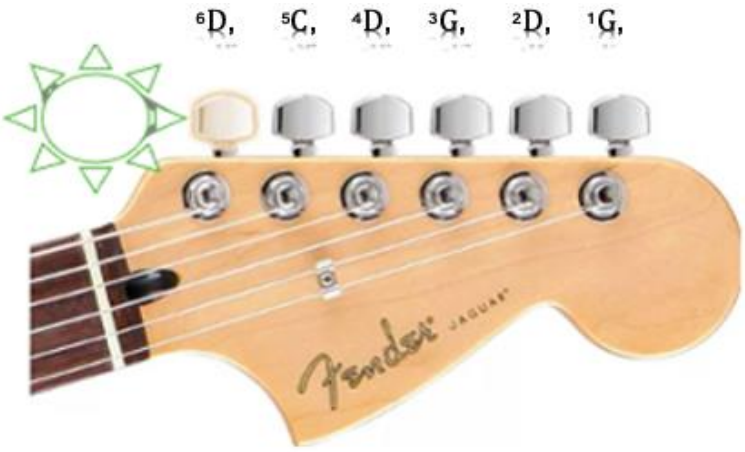


Figure 3.6. *Dombyrized BARMAQ* tuning.

In essence, *BARMAQ* tuning is a method of tuning the guitar based on the principles of *dombyra* tuning, which is also highly flexible. As shown in Figure 3.6 above, in

BARMAQ tuning, all notes replicate the traditional tuning of the *dombyra*, that is DG, and GDF of GCD on the third-stringed *dombyra*. This allows a similar playing technique on the guitar as on the dombyra. *BARMAQ* tuning facilitates greater intricacy in playing 'dombyrized' intervals. This tuning enhances chord ergonomics, allowing fingers to naturally find the correct frets. Thus, chord transposition becomes straightforward, maintaining harmony and alignment with the *dombyra* and *qyl-qobuz.*

For example, in *Shölmen yürgen Bala*, '*dombyrized' BARMAQ* tuning allowed me to achieve a natural resonance that mirrors the harmonic drones of the jaw harp, which is typically tuned to C. This tuning made it possible to execute intricate chord voicings that are challenging in standard tuning but feel intuitive and natural in *BARMAQ* tuning. The tuning simplifies finger placement, enabling me to play complex chords with ease. The decision to use *BARMAQ* tuning in the *Ak Mamyk*, *Nogai Yurt*, and *Baiterek* is not simply a matter of subjective preference; it is rooted in a connection to tradition, where the *dombyra* plays a foundational role. In these songs, the *dombyra* leads the melody, while the guitars follow, enhancing the overall texture. Theoretically, this approach draws on principles similar to polyphony and counterpoint in Western music, where one instrumental line initiates the theme and the other complements it, developing the musical narrative. *BARMAQ* tuning, in this context, facilitates smoother transitions between intervals and allows for the easier execution of complex chords, all while preserving harmonic richness. These concepts are informed by both my study of traditional music and my own compositional practice.

YouTube link to the album:

Video 3.5. *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxDWyqDKgss

Accessed on 14 August 2024

Conclusion

This conclusion marks the culmination of a multi-layered journey—scholarly, creative, and personal — undertaken through the practice-based PhD *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige*. At its heart lies an act of cultural stewardship: preserving and revitalising the musical and narrative traditions of the Nogai people. The *Epic of Edige*, long regarded as a cornerstone of Nogai oral tradition, forms the axis around which this project has developed. My task was not only to translate this tradition into a contemporary musical format but to participate in its ongoing evolution, ensuring that its themes remain audible and relevant today.

Before engaging directly with the text of *Edige*, I had spent years developing a musical voice across various genres and styles. This personal musical evolution took place both within and outside of the Nogai cultural context. In many ways, I considered myself an outsider to the epic tradition, removed from its sonic structures and poetic cadence. The everyday life of modern Nogai habitats often occludes the significance of this heritage. Yet, as this project demanded an immersion into the linguistic, melodic, and rhythmic essence of the Nogai epic, I was compelled to re-examine my own positionality and cultural inheritance. What emerged was not just a creative reinterpretation, but a process of rediscovery — of an epic hero, and of self.

From the beginning, I envisioned myself as a musical archaeologist: excavating intangible heritage, uncovering lost or dormant sonic traditions, and reassembling them within a modern framework. Through this lens, the project became not only a means of cultural transmission but an intimate, intuitive response to ancestral memory. The album's composition involved frequent flashbacks — personal moments and memories resonating with the epic's themes of exile, resistance, ambition, and return. In interpreting *Edige*, I was also navigating my own story, shaped by displacement, adaptation, and musical migration.

The traditions I sought to engage are not fossilised relics of the past. Rather, they are living repositories of cultural identity. In Nogai history, events such as *Kurultai* — a communal gathering of tribes and elders — were not just occasions for political

alliance or social bonding; they were moments where music, poetry, and oral storytelling affirmed collective values. These gatherings served as powerful mediums of resistance and continuity, especially in the face of external pressures — be they imperial, Soviet, or post-Soviet. *Edige*, in particular, was often performed by an *aqyn*, a bard whose role extended beyond entertainment to encompass the preservation of communal history and heroic lineage.

This tradition of epic storytelling echoes practices across Eurasia: the *dastan* of Central Asia, the performances of Balkan *guslars*, and other oral histories anchored in performance and memory. However, the specificity of the Nogai epic — its melodic inflections, its unique blend of poetic ambiguity and political aspiration — gives *Edige* a singular voice. While it may not match the grandiosity of Homeric or Persian epics in sheer length or renown, it contains, in my view, profound symbolic and historical weight. In its cryptic narrative and layered meanings, *Edige* tells not just the story of a hero, but of a people struggling to assert sovereignty and preserve coherence in a world of shifting allegiances.

Throughout the PhD process, I came to see *Edige* as a Nogai mirror of the “hero’s journey” — a structure most famously articulated by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The narrative arc — rise from obscurity, test of character, tragic decision, exile, and eventual legacy — shares elements with epics like *Macbeth*, *The Odyssey*, *Shahnameh,* and *Manas*. Yet, these comparisons are most fruitful when grounded in specificity. *Edige* reflects not a universal myth but a culturally situated narrative of nomadic resilience. In contrast to Lear’s voluntary abdication or Odysseus’s journey home, the narrative of *Edige* navigates its own questions of honour, betrayal, and community through the lens of obsolete Nogai ethics and politics.

This project also brought forth an essential musical question: how does one respectfully and innovatively bring ancient musical traditions into contemporary structures without diluting their essence?

The process began with instrumentation. The *dombyra* and *qyl-qobyz*, essential carriers of Nogai sonic identity, became focal points of experimentation. The *dombyra's* modal tuning system and rhythmic precision required a rethinking of guitar structures. I modified the guitar to become a hybrid instrument — altering both its physical properties and its tuning method. The invention of *BARMAQ* tuning, which stemmed from *Barmaq* recitations of *Babushkas*, allowed each guitar string to align with the *dombyra's* open tuning, creating a continuity between old and new timbres. This tuning not only unlocked previously inaccessible melodic intervals but allowed me to retain a sense of modal authenticity while introducing polyphonic layers.

Similarly, the *qyl-qobyz* underwent a transformation in its tuning and amplification. For example, in the song *Kosh Keldyn, Edige*, both strings of the instrument are tuned in unison to C, creating a ghostly chorus effect. This was not just a stylistic choice but a practical necessity: the natural range of the horsehair strings (C to G) had to be harmonised with other instruments, all tuned precisely to 441 kHz. The result was a subtle but haunting soundscape that honoured the instrument's raw, ancient quality while allowing it to integrate into a modern studio mix. A slight reverb and treble boost enhanced the ethereal overtones of both the electrified *dombyra* and *qyl-qobyz*, preserving their spiritual resonance in the layered textures of rock instrumentation.

Beyond the traditional instruments, I introduced a diverse rhythm section: live drums, darbuka, cajon, Turkish percussion, melodic and double bass. These additions were not arbitrary; they answered an unspoken call in the monophonic essence of *Edige*, which seemed to yearn for a kinetic pulse — a rediscovery of its steppe groove. The percussion highlighted the music's underlying *earthy drive*, reanimating the songs with movement, urgency, and depth. This rhythmic foundation brought the epic's journeys and battles to life in new sonic terms, allowing listeners to feel its drama as much as hear it.

Adapting these arrangements was rarely theoretical — it was a deeply intuitive process rooted in tacit knowledge. Years of working across genres gave me the tools to understand how to achieve harmony between contrasting elements: the folk and the modern, the oral and the recorded, the raw and the refined. Often, I relied on *feeling*

rather than formula. Sound choices emerged from a place of instinct, memory, and experimentation—trusting the song to reveal its ideal form.

What also emerged was the autobiographical dimension of the work. The stories in *Edige* resonated with moments in my own life: struggles with exile, cultural displacement, and creative reinvention. While this project is undoubtedly scholarly, it also serves as a personal memoir — each song a chapter in a parallel journey. Through the epic, I have come to understand aspects of my own identity that were dormant, even obscured. In performing *Edige*, I was doing more than preserving a story — I was participating in it, shaping it through my own lens.

Here, the Nogai language itself – my native but partly forgotten tongue – became a vital medium between internal world and musical expression. Returning to it was a linguistic reunion and a transformation of musical thinking. Guided by its phonetics, stresses, pauses, length of vowels, and tonal vibration, I began to hear and feel music differently. Language became a map for rethinking sonic structures – it reshaped approach to rhythm, melody, arrangement, song architecture, and overall sound palette. Through it I resounded the internal music of “my community”, encoded in the very voice of the language.

The creation of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* was also shaped by global crises. The Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine disrupted timelines, fragmented collaborations, and forced the creative process into remote modes. This physical distance, however, paradoxically deepened the emotional closeness I felt to the material. Separated from homeland and studio, I turned inward—and to the archive. Digital access to historical materials, remote collaboration with musicians, and reflective solitude became tools of necessity. In this context, music became not only a form of resistance but of survival—a space where cultural continuity could still unfold.

Yet not all responses to the project were supportive. In parts of Russian Dagestan, particularly within traditionalist music communities, my work was met with resistance. Rock music, associated with Western liberalism, hedonism, and capitalist aesthetics, was seen as incompatible with traditional forms. Many practitioners of Soviet-era

musical traditions view fusion as a threat to cultural purity. In this setting, my work was read not as homage but as heresy. This resistance highlighted a broader tension between innovation and preservation—between those who see tradition as a fixed inheritance and those who see it as an evolving process.

This divide highlights a central argument of this thesis: that music is not merely a cultural product but a method of cultural inquiry. It is a tool for preserving oral tradition, making sense of crises, and bridging temporal and spatial divides. Through music, the past is not just remembered; it is reactivated, reinterpreted, and projected forward. In this sense, the project exemplifies the potential of ethnomusicology that studies tradition, but as a living means of sustaining and extending it.

In conclusion, *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* stands as an act of cultural reclamation, adaptation, and expression. It affirms the capacity of music to carry ancestral memory while embracing change. The album, grounded in both lived experience and scholarly rigour, reveals that tradition is not static — it is kinetic, dialogical, and alive. Through the integration of ancient instruments and modern arrangements, autobiographical reflection and communal memory, this project has transformed *Edige* from a distant relic into a living, resonant narrative. It ensures that the voice of the Nogai people does not fade — it is amplified and renewed

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Appendix I

Synopsis: Edige

Edige is a prosimetric *dastan* where in the heart of a distant land ruled by Khan Tokhtamysh, a remarkable tale unfolds, centered around a young boy named Edige – an epic hero, whose extraordinary abilities and mysterious lineage become the focus of intrigue and apprehension. Edige, distinguished among his peers by his agility, courage, and strength, catches the attention of Khan Tokhtamysh when it is revealed that he is not the son of a humble horse-herd, but rather the offspring of Kutly-Kaya, a renowned warrior in hiding. This revelation sets off a chain of events that lead to Edige's transformation into Kubugul, "son of a bogatyr" (warrior) to protect him from the wrath of the Khan. As Kubugul grows, he demonstrates his prowess by tending to a certain khan's calves while his brothers oversee the Khan's prized horse herds. Meanwhile, Khan Tokhtamysh, seeking to bolster his prestige, commissions the creation of a magnificent golden cart whose value baffles all who encounter it. Intrigued by the cart's mystery, the Khan seeks counsel from a young cowherd, who, despite his humble station, offers a cryptic assessment of its worth. This interaction sparks the Khan's interest in the boy, leading to further inquiries that ultimately reveal the boy's true identity as Kubugul. Despite Kubugul's reluctance to leave his current responsibilities, the Khan persuades him to take on the task of herding horses, marking his entry into the world of the Khan's court. However, Kubugul's presence unnerves the Khan, who begins to suspect hidden motives behind his enigmatic demeanour. To unravel the mystery of Kubugul's origins, Khan Tokhtamysh interrogates his horse-herders and seeks counsel from esteemed elders and renowned storytellers, yet none can provide answers. As tensions rise, Kubugul's symbolic gestures and mysterious actions only deepen the Khan's suspicions. In a pivotal moment, Sybra-yuyrau, a respected singer of tales, is brought before the Khan to shed light on Kubugul's lineage. Through his songs, Sybra unveils Kubugul's connection to legendary khans of old, hinting at a destiny that surpasses even the most esteemed rulers. Despite Sybra's revelations, Khan Tokhtamysh remains

unsettled, unable to shake the feeling of foreboding surrounding Kubugul. As the mystery deepens, the Khan grapples with the implications of Kubugul's presence in his realm and the looming confrontation that seems inevitable. In the end, the tale of Kubugul unfolds as a captivating saga of identity, power, and destiny, with each revelation pushing the Khan and Kubugul towards a fateful encounter that will shape the course of their lives and the destiny of their land. In the vast, desolate steppe, Kubugul's true lineage and destiny unfold amidst a backdrop of intrigue and danger. Sybra-yuyrau, through his songs, reveals Kubugul's surpassing ancestry to Khan Tokhtamysh, warning against persecution. Sensing the danger, Sybra advises Kubugul to escape through the kibitka's upper opening, which he does with the help of his comrades, the horse-herders. The Khan, furious at Sybra's interference, sends Yanbay to retrieve Kubugul at any cost. Yanbay, through persuasive songs, tries to entice Kubugul back with promises of riches, power, and honour bestowed by the Khan. However, Kubugul remains resolute, refusing to return to a life tainted by deceit and oppression. In a powerful rebuttal, Kubugul rejects the Khan's offers, symbolizing his defiance by refusing honey, fur coats, prized horses, and other gifts. He refuses to bend to the Khan's will, standing firm in his resolve to forge his own path. Despite the Khan's attempts to lure Kubugul back, he remains steadfast, symbolizing his rejection of the Khan's authority and his determination to live by his own principles. Kubugul's defiance marks a turning point in his journey, as he embraces his true identity and faces the challenges that lie ahead. Some days later, Edige and his nine companions encounter a snake with nine heads and one tail. Urged by his friends, Edige swiftly takes action and decapitates the serpent. Later, they encounter another serpent with one head and nine tails, but despite their efforts, it eludes them. Reflecting on this, Edige proposes that they choose a leader among themselves. Unanimously, they elect Edige as their chief, pledging to stand by each other in times of trouble. They continue their journey and visit Khan Shatemir or Tamerlane (Šan temir – Timur from China). During their stay, Edige and his friends go hunting. In their absence, Kabarty-Alyp Batyr, with a formidable force, arrives and demands Shatemir's daughter in marriage. Faced with the threat, Shatemir reluctantly agrees, advising his daughter to comply and trust in Edige's intervention if necessary. Shatemir describes Edige's distinctive traits to his daughter, enabling her to recognize him: all his clothes are white, yet

unstained; he sits directly on the ground or uses his whip as a cushion; during prayer, he places his dagger in the ground before him; and he never dirties his attire when slaughtering animals. Meanwhile, Kabarty-Alyp seizes Shatemir's daughter, and upon their return from hunting, Edige and his companions stumble upon the scene. Observing the tell-tale signs of the abduction, Edige quickly grasps the gravity of the situation.

Edige and his nine companions follow the tracks of Kabarty-Alyp Batyr instead of going to Khan Shatemir's immediately. Edige joins Alyp's army as a cook, leaving hidden food for his companions. Despite working for Alyp, Edige's actions catch the attention of Shatemir's captive daughter, who suspects his true identity. She questions him, and Edige admits his identity, strategizing with her to defeat Alyp. When Alyp prepares to sleep, Edige takes the opportunity to strike him in his vulnerable spot, killing him. Edige and Shatemir's daughter then lead Alyp's captured army to victory. Edige rejects Shatemir's offer of half his khanate but agrees to marry his daughter. They live together in Shatemir's palace in Samarkand, and their son Nuradin grows up to become a jigit. One day, Nuradin's companion taunts him about his father Edige's exile by Khan Tokhtamysh, igniting Nuradin's desire for revenge. Nuradin seeks his father's support, and Edige, despite limited resources, decides to confront Tokhtamysh. They approach Tokhtamysh's khanate, where Tokhtamysh anxiously awaits Edige's arrival. Edige employs a clever tactic, creating the illusion of a vast army passing by Tokhtamysh's territory throughout the night, intimidating Tokhtamysh. When Tokhtamysh sends his meagre forces against Edige, they are easily defeated, some even defecting to join Edige and Nuradin. Realizing his vulnerability, Tokhtamysh attempts to flee. Nuradin asks for permission to pursue him, promising to bring Tokhtamysh's head. Edige agrees, granting Nuradin's request to marry Tokhtamysh's daughters while he takes Tokhtamysh's wife for himself. As Tokhtamysh prepares to flee, he sings a final lament, aware of his impending downfall:

Ei, you lapwing, you lapwing, with sturdy wings,
with a soft neck,
with a horny beak for a mouth.

Do not call, lapwing-bird.
Now I have no subjects to take your eggs.
Do not worry, you wildfowl.
You were the master of the lake.
I was the master of the land.
Nuradin, the son of Edige.
Has parted you from the lake.
He has parted me from the land.

Finally, Tokhtamysh attempts to attack Nuradin, but he misses, prompting Nuradin to swiftly decapitate him with a sabre. Just as Nuradin prepares to return to his father, Yanbay asks for permission to inform Edige of the victory. Nuradin agrees, and Yanbay hurries off, not to Edige but to Tokhtamysh's daughters. He informs them of Nuradin's deed and advises them to feign pregnancy by strapping pillows to their bellies, suggesting that Nuradin may take them as concubines. The daughters comply, anticipating Nuradin's arrival. When Nuradin returns to his father and presents Tokhtamysh's head, he notices the daughters' swollen bellies. Questioning them, they blame their condition on Edige's actions. Enraged by his father's alleged role, Nuradin demands Edige's immediate departure. Edige retreats to solitude after leaving his homeland, while in the khanate, a goat-related mishap leads to a man's unjust punishment by Khan Nuradin. Seeking guidance, the man meets an old sage who advises him on arguing his case. Following the sage's counsel, the man approaches Nuradin, who grows suspicious and learns the sage is none other than Edige. Nuradin reconciles with his father after a difficult journey home, but their peace is short-lived as Tokhtamysh's son seeks revenge. Yanbay, captured by the enemy, offers to deceive Nuradin, leading him into danger under false pretences. Yanbay's enthusiastic description of the abundant game near Lake Sekerli (Sweet Lake) spurs Nuradin to follow him eagerly, unarmed. However, upon reaching the lake's vicinity, Nuradin realizes too late that it is a trap set by Kadyr Berdi. Despite the danger, Nuradin proceeds bravely and walks straight into Kadyr Berdi's tent, where he is immediately captured. Kadyr Berdi orders Nuradin to sit on a chair with sharp spikes, causing excruciating pain as they pierce his thighs. Despite the agony, Nuradin maintains his

composure and confronts Kadyr Berdi with a determined smile, refusing to show weakness to his enemy. Kadyr Berdi is impressed by Nuradin's resilience and pride, even in the face of suffering, and by his eloquence. Overwhelmed by these qualities, Kadyr Berdi decides to forgive Nuradin for the death of his father and extends a hand of friendship. Nuradin accepts the offer but insists on Yanbay's death, which Kadyr Berdi agrees to. With Yanbay's death, Kadyr Berdi (Kalmyk) and Nuradin (Nogai) reconcile completely, living as neighbouring khans and brothers-in-law in peace.

Appendix II: Song Texts

Nine Rhapsodies About Edige (all songs are original)

Songs:

1. Intro: *Qyl – Qobuz* - *Qyl – Qobuz*
2. *Shölmen yürgen bala* - *Guitars/ bass/ dombyra/ khomus,/cajon*
3. *Koishy* - *Full band*
4. *Köz Yasyl (instrumental)* - *Guitars/ dombyra/ drum/ bass,*
5. *Ardak* - *Full band*
6. *Kubuguldyn Asyly* - *Acoustic guitar/dombyra*
7. *Ak Mamyk* - *Full band*
8. *Nogai Yurt* - *Full band*
9. *Baiterek* - *Guitars/ dombyra/ drum/ bass,*
10. *Yas Soltat, Kadyr Berdy* - *Guitars/ dombyra/ drum/ bass,*
11. *Kyzgyš Kus* - *Guitars/ dombyra/ drum/ bass,*
12. *Kara Yiraw, oina* - *Full band*
13. *Šantemir kyzgan kumusga* - *Full band*
14. *Aldap-suldap* - *Full band*
15. *Kenes* - *Acoustic guitar/dombyra/ khomus*
16. *Togyzym* - *Guitars/ bass/ dombyra/ khomus,/cajon*
17. *Kün Batar (instrumental)* - *Full band*
18. *Kosh Keldyn, Edige* - *Full band*

1. ***Intro –*** (original material)

2. ***2. Shölmen yürgen bala*** - **Steppe Child -** (original material)

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Yora, yora Shölmen yürgen bala, yora, yora, yora, yora Yora, yora Khannyn tusün yora, yora, yora, yora, yora	**Unravel, unravel the dreams, child of the steppe (2 times). Unravel the dream of the great khan, Come now, unravel it, unravel...**

3. ***Koishy –*** **Shepherd**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Koishy kyrda koilaryn bagyp yu̇rgen Aldyna adamnyn bas süegi kelgen Koishy kyrda koilaryn bagyp yu̇rgen "Men œlmei turup san myn adam œltergenmyn Œlgenen son kyrk adam œlcrermyn Dep yazilgan eken adamnyn bas süegte Dep yazilgan eken Koishy kyrda koilaryn bagyp yu̇rgen Aldyna adamnyn bas su̇egi kelgen Koishy kyrda koilaryn bagyp yu̇rgen Tu̇s kœrdym, tüs kœrdym, Tüsümde kyrk kara it kœrdym Sol yagynnan ïrma On yagynnan ïrma Tüs kœrdym, tüs kœrdym, Tüsümde kykr kara it kœrdym Tüs yoragan adam, Ne süisé beremyn... Koishy kyrda koilaryn bagyp yu̇rgen Aldyna adamnyn bas su̇egi kelgen Koishy kyrda koilaryn bagyp yu̇rgen Tu̇s kœrdyn, tüs kœrdyn, Tüsünde kykr kara it kœrdyn Kyrk Vazirler, seni œlcrer Durs boldy, dyrs boldy Vazirler aksakka asylyp œldy	**The shepherd led his flock of sheep Across the steppe, in silence deep— And once, he stepped upon a skull. Inscribed upon its hollow dome: "In life, I slaughtered countless men— A hundred thousand met their end. In death, I'll take down forty more..." It read upon the bone, the bone, The weathered, whispering bone... Still, the shepherd led his flock Through the steppe, from rock to rock... "I saw a dream, a dream I saw— Forty black dogs chased me down. Twenty to my left they ran, And twenty raced me on the right..." Whoever solves this dream of fright Shall have, as gift, their heart's delight... Still, the shepherd led his flock Through the steppe, from rock to rock... "A dream you saw, a dream you dreamed—**

Tүs yoragan bala, *Ïtten tuvgan bala* *Koishy kyrda koilaryn bagyp yүrgen* *Aldyna adamnyn bas sүegi kelgen* *Koishy kyrda koilaryn bagyp yүrgen* *Koilaryn bagyp yүrgen*	**Forty black dogs chased you indeed.** **Forty viziers seek your fall—** **Their hands are hidden, daggers drawn…"** **And so it came to pass with time:** **Forty viziers met the line—** **Hung in loops of silken thread...** **And he who solved the dream was known** **As one of dog-blood, not of throne...** **Still, the shepherd led his flock** **Through the steppe, and never stopped—** **The flock of sheep, he walked and walked...**

***4. Köz Yasyl* – (A green-eyed) instrumental**

***5. Ardak* – Ardak (My grandmother's name)**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Er aitar, er aitar *Er dushpany (dugazhy) œzi aitar* *Tuvdy, tuvdy degende* *Tuv bieler soiganmai* *Boldy, bodly degende* *Boz bieler soiganmai* *Er aitar, er aitar* *Er dushpany (dugazhy) œzi aitar.*	**The man will speak—** **The praying man will speak.** **Climbing the ridge, you gaze—** **Why do you search for my bloodline?** **Climbing the hill, you gaze again—** **Why do you seek my father's home?** **The man will speak—** **The praying man will speak.**

***6. Kubuguldy Asily* – Kubugul's lineage**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Sybyradai kart yiraw *Annatty Kubuguldyn asylyn. Khanlardan da artyk eken Kubuguldyn asyly* *Kuvlama de dep karady,* *Khanga senip bolmaidy* *Sonnan sebep Edige ge kenes berdi*	**The old man, the bard Sybyra, revealed to Tokhtamysh the secret origin of "Kubugul."** **It turned out that his lineage surpassed all the royal clans of the steppe.** **"Do not cast him out," pleaded Sybyra.** **"But a khan cannot be trusted," he**

Kuvlama de dep karady *Khanga senip bolmaidy* *Sonnan sebep Edige ge kenes berdi:* *'Mynnan shygyp kašh* *Kašhyp shygyp ket* *Togyz yodaslaryn da birge Shöl, uvsan, Bereket* *Artynnan da kuvar Astynda yer yanar, Ama, sen yas Soltan, saga Nogai Yurt bolar Nogai Yurt – Atam, anam tuvgan yurt* *Toktamysh Sybyraga kanikyty.* *Ei, kara Kart, sen ne ekyn?* *Yet almyakmyn kuvlasamda Kubuguldyn yorgasyn* *Sybyra Toktamyshka söz kaitardy 'Ei, balam, men saga annatym* *Edigedin asily,* *Shyngizkhannynda artyk usaidy.* *Ei, balam, men saga annatym Ei, balam, men saga annatym* *Edigedin asilyn.*	**added, and so he gave the hero his parting words:** **"Flee from here, and keep running with your nine companions.** **They will pursue you, and the steppe will burn beneath your feet,** **but in return you shall be granted the Nogai Yurt — your ancestral home, where your forefathers were born."** **Tokhtamysh grew furious!** **"What have you done, fearsome old man!** **Even if I give chase, I won't catch the dust of his stallion's hooves."** **The bard replied:** **"Ah, my child, I told you who Edige truly is, as you asked —** **and his lineage is mightier than that of Genghis Khan!"**

***7. Ak Mamyk* - White featherbed**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Arbaga miner ali yök *Atka mince, silker dep* *Arbaga mince, shorshir dep, shorshir dep* *Astina ak mamyk saldyrtyn* *Yaklaryn uvlav uvlatip* *Astina ak mamyk saldyrtyn, Saldyrtyn* *Kolyna arsha tayak berdirtip – Koltygina tayak suentip*	**The old man has no strength to climb into the cart—** **If he mounts a horse, he will fall to pieces.** **If he sits in the cart—it will jolt him, jolt him without mercy.** **So they laid a white featherbed beneath him,** **And bound him tightly so he wouldn't fall,** **Laid that white featherbed beneath him…** **They placed a staff in his hands, a**

Alla-Taalady eskirtip – Alyp keldy kart yirawdy *Kolyn yaip, Khan shikty –* *Tör basinda yer berdy –* *Toktamysh kulagin saldy* *Sybyra ynyrandy. Tolgaim dep ymtyldy.* *Ashpaga auzy barmady,* *Ashpaga auzy barmady…*	**walking stick to hold,** **And, after reciting a prayer to bless the journey,** **They brought the bard to Tokhtamysh.** **The khan opened his arms wide,** **Seated him at the centre of the table,** **And, leaning close, began to listen.** **Sybyra prepared himself,** **He gathered his strength to speak—** **But could not open his mouth...**

8. Nogai Yürt – **Nogai Kingdom**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Ey, Ey Nogai Yurt Atam, *Anam tuvgan yurt* *Yiilyp salam bergen yurt* *Ey, Ey Nogai Yurt Atam,* *Anam tuvgan yurt* *Yilyp slam bergen yurt* *Kimdigimdy kesken yurt* *Biev savgan sütli yurt* *Kumuz ishken Kutly yurt* *Edil – Yaik Arasy* *Yilky mynan tuvgan yurt* *Edil, Edil su* *Yagan oipan kum baskan* *Kumga suday tal bitken* *Butagı suvga iylgen* *Yapıragı kaldayğan* *Bɑqɑsı, koyday, şuvlağan* *Balygy, taydɑy, duvlɑgan* *Yılan bar, bakanday*	**Hello, Nogai Kingdom – a place where my father and mother were born.** **Hello, Nogai Yurt, a people who gathered to welcome me. Here my umbilical cord was cut.** **Here they milk camels, and drink fermented milk in abundance – a land between Volga and Ural.** **Stallions are bred here in thousands** **Drinking the water of Volga** **Again, I am on my knees before you.** **A willow has risen above the water,** **ts branches bend toward the water,** **Its leaves are like arrows.** **Frogs on the lake are as large as sheep,** **Fish frolic like foals,** **The snakes are enormous…**

9. Baiterek - **Tree of Life**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Esik aldym, Baiterek *Baiteregim yigildy* *Toksan eken yapyragy* *Toksany da kyildy* *Baily turgan karakus*	**O Tree of Life, opener of worlds—** **You've fallen low,** **You've tumbled down...** **From ninety leaves you once had grown,** **All ninety now are scattered, gone.**

Ўrkip ushty avaga Ol, ne bolar? *Ol, ne bolar?*	**The bird who sang upon your bough** **Has flown—** **What will be now?**

10. Yas Soltat, Kadyr Berdy **- Young sultan, Kadyr-Berdy**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Yas Soltan, Kadyr Berdy *Küshyn bar sogyspaga* *Basym kar, yasim üiken* *Karamai törelikke...*	**Young sultan, Kadyr-Berdy,** **You still have strength to fight, to ride—** **While my hair, though black as night,** **Too old am I for wars and flame,** **And sorrow gathers 'round my name…**

11. Kyzgyš Kus **- Lapwing**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Kyzgyš, Kyzgyš Kus *Kyzgyš, Kyzgyš Kus* *Kanatyn kat, moiyn bos Ausyn,* *burnin müiz kus* *Kyzgyš, Kyzgyš Kus* *By yasida, zar' kylyp* *Kœp kishkirma, Kyzgyš Kus* *Ümyrtkandy almaga* *Maitagym kasimda yök* *Èr iyesi men edym* *Köl iyesi sen edyn* *Meny èrden airgan* *Seni kölden airgan...* *Nuradin* *Kanatyn kat, moiyn bos* *Ausyn, burnin müiz kus* *Kyzgyš, Kyzgyš Kus* *Kudai bermiger myradyn* *Sadakyn salmasyn beline* *Sary maidan sorgaip*	**Hey, lapwing, lapwing, you—** **With wings of steel, with neck so soft,** **With beak of horn and mouth so sharp.** **Cry not, wild bird, don't raise your voice—** **To gather your eggs, I have no men,** **No subjects march beneath my hand.** **Rest easy, gamebird of the skies—** **I once ruled the land,** **And you, the lake.** **But Nuradin tore me from my earth,** **And tore you from your water's edge…** **May the Lord forbid his wishes rise—** **That sword that swings upon his hip...** **Let him, grey and old, ride out a Cossack along the mother Volga river.**

Yanima kyindyk keldi Ana- Edil, Nuradin *Kazak shykty elinnen Yaindy tart* *Ogyndy at, Nuradin...* *Kanatyn kat, moiyn bos* *Ausyn, burnin müiz kus* *Kyzgyš, Kyzgyš Kus*	**Draw the bowstring—** **Loose the arrow—** **Nuradin.**

12. Kara Yiraw, oina **- Dance, fearless bard**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Oina Sybra, oina *Dastan yiirin koima* *Ai astynda bir köl bar Ailanasy* *At shaptyrsa etkisiz Ortasyna bitken* *Koga mynan tal da bar* *Erikkenler, yalkanlar* *Kaban kuvyp atkysyz* *Ai astynda bir köl bar Ai, balam,* *Ai, Toktamysh* *Er dugazhy œzi aitar.* *Er dugazh – öz ulum Assalam aleikum Valeikum...*	**Dance, Sybyra, dance—** **And sing your endless *dastan*.** **Dance, Sybyra, dance,** **You fiery bard, you fearless one.** **Beneath the moon, there lies a lake—** **So vast, no rider circling round** **Could reach its edge or close its shape.** **And at its heart, the sedge still grows,** **The willow leans, the cold wind knows…** **But those who chase and laugh and ride,** **Pursuing boar with bow and pride—** **They'll miss the mark, the beast will flee.** **For dreams like this are not to be.** **Beneath the moon, that lake still sleeps—** **With reeds that whisper, sorrow-deep…** **Ah, my child, my Toktamysh.** **The praying man will say to his son:** **"As-salamu alaykum" — "Wa alaykum salaam.**

13. Šantemir kyzgan kumusga **- Tamerlane got drunk on boose**

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)

Sen bu yakshi tukum zunkardy kaidan taptyn *Bu tukum kuru mende bolmasa* *Bit khannan da bolmas* *Šantemir kyzgan kumusga* *Šantemir aitty Toktamyshga* *Šantemir kyzgan kumusga* *Šantemir aitty Toktamyshga*	**Where did you find such a noble falcon?** **Such falcons soar only in my khanate—** **No other khans have birds like this…** **Tamerlane drank his boose,** **Tamerlane said to Toktamysh…** **Tamerlane got drank on boose,** **And Toktamysh too got drank on boose.**

14. Aldap-suldap – Lie and Deceit

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Togyzynda bara kör Aldap suldap *Edigedy Ei, togyz er,* *Ei, togyz er Kasynyzga ala kör...*	**Hey, nine brave lads—** **Ride swift, ride hard, ride after Edige…** **Deceive him with smiles, draw him near—** **Then cut his head and bring it to me…**

15. Kenes – Blessing

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Œsti, œsti *Kubugul šholde œsti* *Kumman ushty zamanlar* *Kozdy, kozdy, Tokhtamysh sonda kozdy Shybyn Yan, deidi Sybyra* *Ei, Kubugul* *Ei, Edige* *Saga bir söz bar mende* *Ei, Edige* *Ei, Kubugul* *Saga Bolar Nogai Yurt...*	**Kubugul rose and grew in the steppe—** **Time flew past like wind-blown sand.** **Toktamysh grew fierce, his anger burned,** **While Sybyra muttered: "The soul is a fly…"** **Hey, Kubugul — hey, Edige —** **I have a word to give to thee.** **Hey, Edige — hey, Kubugul —** **The Nogai throne shall be your rule.**

16. Togyzym[33] – The Nine Companions

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Yolda ne boldy... *Sydiruv arka* *Siluv tœß* *Syrtta yirlar togyzym* *Kara kuslai shonkaip* *Karavyl shiga togyzym* *Yolda ne boldy...* *Yolda boirev, œle kalsa* *Kara keske bœlermin* *Aruvlep, üvundiryp* *Ak kebinmen kœmermen* *Yolda ne boldy... Yolda ne boldy...* *Yolda ne boldy... Togyzym?* *Yolda ne boldy... Yolda ne boldy...* *Togyzym...*	Like the vertebrae of a single spine— We are bound, my friends! Like a sharp-eyed falcon, you must Stay watchful, my friends! What happens on the road— Stays in the road. And if death awaits ahead— Then I shall wash you with my own hands, Wrap you in a shroud of white, And lay you in the native earth. So let it be. What happens on the road— Stays in the road.

17. Kŭn Batar – instrumental – see Appendix V for the notation.

18. Kosh Keldyn, Edige - Welcome home, Edige!

Russian	English (trans. Yakubov)
Славен Хан Токтамыс, *Славен сильным отчаянным войском* *Славен щедрой, богатой землёй* *Славен Хан Токтамыс* *В диком поле, вскормленный собакой Тобе* *Среди этого войска* *Подрастал Кубугул – Эдиге* *Много дней и ночей ты проводишь без сна, о, мой Хан* *Ты снедаем тревогой* *Кобылиц крутогрудых зарезал мой Хан*	Glorious is Khan Toktamysh, Glorious with his bold, relentless horde. Glorious his land—rich, generous, wide— Glorious is Khan Toktamysh! In the wild steppe, suckled by Tobe's hound (breed: Central Asian Shepherd Dog), Among the war-band fierce and proud, A boy grew tall—Kubugul, Known to the world as Edige. O my Khan, you wander sleepless Through countless days and nights—

[33] Unbeknownst to me at the time of creating the track, *Togyzym* bears a harmonic resemblance to a piece *Güllerin İçinden* from the musical legacy of Mazhar-Fuat-Özkan (MFÖ band). This may be attributed to a melody sung to me by Romanov during a field recording in Dagestan in 2020, which I later recalled and adapted/reimagined on the 12-string guitar in *BARMAQ* tuning (capo on the third fret – 6th string in C) and the *dombyra* in the studio. Romanov was reportedly familiar with MFÖ's repertoire and, according to local accounts (someone heard it on the grapevine), may have once jammed with a member of MFÖ band.

Угощает гостей пьянящим,	**Your heart devoured by worry's fire.**
искрящимся мёдом	**My Khan slaughters round-chested**
И украсил шатер свой коврами из	**mares,**
мягкого ворса	**And offers his guests the sparkling**
Не забыл и меня ты, седого певца	**mead—**
Сыбырау И на тор посадил	**His yurts are draped in velvet rugs,**
Посреди седовласых, почтеннейших	**And even me —Sybra, grey, old**
старцев	**bard—**
Да, я беден, истлела одежда моя	**He's placed in honour at his feast,**
Уже четыре столетия скитаюсь я,	**Among the eldest, wisest men.**
Что ты хочешь услышать, мой	**Yes, I am poor, my clothes are rags,**
Хан, от меня?	**Four hundred years I've roamed this**
Я расскажу тебе быль	**steppe.**
Про молодого султана	**And what would you have of me, my**
Он поднимает копытами пыль	**Khan?**
От Самарканда до Тегерана	**What song shall I sing you tonight?**
Он переходит бродом Эдиль	**I'll tell you the tale of a youthful**
Без колебаний бросается в бой	**sultan—**
И вот однажды, в городе Солнца	**He rides, kicking up the dust,**
Он встретится с тобой	**From Samarkand to Tehran.**
Я засохший ковыль	**He fords Volga without a pause,**
Я усохшая кость	**And hurls himself into the fight.**
Я безумный певец	**And one day, in the City of the Sun,**
Многим ханам бесславным	**He shall stand before you.**
Я славные песни сложил,	**I am dry feathergrass,**
Но, об этом, который песком	**A withered bone,**
омовенья в степи совершал	**A mad old singer.**
И был отпрыском двух Аргамаков	**For many khans unworthy of fame,**
Я «толгау» не читал… Он мой	**I sang songs of false glory—**
Султан!!!	**But for this one,**
Идёт дорогами святых	**This child of two Argamak,**
В чалме из белой как снег кисеи	**I have not sung my song…**
Тулпаров райских и лихих	**He is my Sultan!**
Он выбирает для езды	**He walks the roads the saints have**
Подобно мертвому до зари	**walked,**
Не поднимая лица от холода	**His turban white as fallen snow.**
Подобно мертвому до зари	**Of all the steeds, both wild and**
Спит во дворцах из чистого	**blessed,**
золота!	**He chooses only those that burn.**
В его артериях – кровь Пророка,	**Like one who lies in death till dawn,**
Ассалау- ассалам	**He lifts not his face from the cold.**
Скорей откройте ему ворота	**Like one who lies in death till dawn—**
Он всё равно откроет их сам…	**He sleeps in palaces of gold.**
Его соколы на подлёте	**In his veins flows the blood of the**
Его домбристы настроили «Ре»,	**Prophet—**
	Assalam 'alaykum!
	Hurry — open wide the gates for him!

Курултай при любой погоде, ***Kosh Keldyn, Edige!***	**Yet know:** **He will open them himself, if need be.** **His falcons circle, sharp in flight,** **His *dombyrist* have tuned to the note "*Re*."** **The party is on,** **In rain or sun, to roar:** **Welcome home, Edige!**

Appendix III

Decadent Trip to + 007 Zone (October 2020 - April 2021)

It is April 2021. The world is beginning to heal from the wounds inflicted by the pandemic. Vaccines have become a symbol of hope, slowly pulling us back from the precipice of despair. I have just returned from a six-month field trip to Russia, stretching from November 2020 to April 2021, a pilgrimage into the soul of a culture that is both familiar and unknowable. This journey, part of my PhD research at Bath Spa University, was as much about the study of music as it was about the search for identity. Upon arriving back in the UK on 17 March 2021, I entered the liminal space of quarantine—ten days of solitude to reflect on the experiences that had unfolded.

Three negative COVID-19 tests later, and a quick, nearly painless AstraZeneca jab at Ashton Gate Stadium on 31 March, I found myself in a new house in Bristol. The attic became my sanctuary—a place of physical isolation but also one of mental and creative introspection. Here, in this quiet space, I began to unravel the threads of my journey through Russia, Karachay-Cherkessia, and Dagestan. What began as an ethnomusicological field trip evolved into something far more profound—a personal odyssey into the depths of cultural memory, musical heritage, and the echoes of the past.

Lockdown in Bristol. Escape to Russia.

The first lockdown in March 2020 had been a descent into an abyss of uncertainty. The British Prime Minister's announcement reverberated in my mind like the tolling of a distant bell, signalling the onset of a new, strange reality. I was confined to my flat in Bristol, surrounded by books, newspapers, and endless streams of digital information. But all the reading in the world couldn’t provide the answers I sought. Why did people make music? What purpose did it serve in a world that had suddenly become so fragile?

The pandemic seemed to mock my academic pursuits, making them feel obsolete in the face of such widespread devastation. Yet, in the quiet of isolation, I reached for my guitar and *dombyra*. Their strings vibrated beneath my fingers, sending ripples through the stillness. Music became my lifeline—a way to reclaim a sense of purpose. The *dombyra*, with its ancient resonance, connected me to something timeless, while the guitar grounded me in the present. Together, they led me to a revelation: the indecipherable language I had been singing in was Nogai. This was the language of the ancestors, the language of the Epic of Edige.

From that point on, I was no longer merely a researcher; I was a vessel for something larger. I became a medium for voices that had long been silenced, their stories woven into my music. In the depths of lockdown, I created a series of compositions inspired by the Epic of Edige. The music flowed from me like a torrent, raw and unfiltered. I shared these initial recordings with a select group of Nogai musicians — Alibiy Romanov, Arslanbek Sultanbekov, Islam Satyrov—and my family. Each of them responded with warmth and encouragement, reinforcing the feeling that I was on the right path.

By October 2020, the need to escape Bristol had become overwhelming. I was ready to immerse myself in the physical landscapes that had birthed the music now playing in my mind. I booked a flexible Aeroflot ticket from London to Krasnodar, eager to reconnect with the Russian soil. Moscow greeted me with its usual fervour — a chaotic blend of energy and history that always managed to unsettle and inspire me in equal measure.

After three weeks of semi self-isolation with my family in Moscow, I ventured deeper into the Russian wilderness, to the Stavropol region. My destination was a secluded wooden house at the foot of Camel Mount near Pyatigorsk. The house was nestled in a landscape that seemed to vibrate with ancient energy — the Great Caucasus Range looming in the distance like a slumbering titan. Here, I found solace in the simplicity of life. Tanya and Alice, the house’s owners, treated me with an almost maternal kindness. They fed me with hearty, sapphic meals and shared the local folklore as if these stories were a currency of the soul. Their cat

Naicy and dog Junah became my silent companions, their presence a reminder of the uncomplicated beauty of life.

Each morning, I woke to the sight of the sun creeping over the horizon, its light spilling across the mountains like molten gold. It was a view that made me feel both infinitesimal and profoundly connected to the world. In the quiet of Pyatigorsk, I hibernated—playing my instruments, refining my compositions, and allowing the landscape to seep into my bones. I felt like a hermit musician, suspended between worlds, drawing from the ancient and the modern to create something entirely new.

Business and Music in Karachay-Cherkessia. Aul Erken Shakar.

My journey took me next to Aul Erken Shakar in Karachay-Cherkessia, a place that felt like the edge of the world. The village was a patchwork of memories, both mine and those passed down through generations. I was welcomed by a small group of loyal followers—people who had somehow found resonance in my music, my words, my search for something that often felt elusive even to me.

Here, my business was with the Nogai State Drama Theatre Group. Their director, Valery Kazakov, was a man who carried the weight of Nogai culture on his shoulders, yet he did so with a lightness that made him approachable. He was a poet, a patriot, and a mentor who believed in the power of art to transcend the limitations imposed by society. Together, we delved into the Epic of Edige, singing prosimetric excerpts that felt like incantations—calls to the past, summons to the spirits of the land.

The project we envisioned was grand in scope: Nine Rhapsodies about Edige. It was to be a musical narrative, weaving together the stories of the epic with contemporary soundscapes. Valery supported the idea with an enthusiasm that was both inspiring and, at times, overwhelming. He saw the potential for this project to receive presidential funding, a rare opportunity in a country where culture often had to fight for survival. But the path was not straightforward. Bureaucracy loomed large, and the March 2021 deadline for the grant application hung over us like a guillotine.

During the long months of lockdown in Bristol, I had pre-recorded several Nogai jiirs—short, poetic songs that I envisioned as fragments of the rhapsodies. These recordings became my calling cards, a way to demonstrate the fusion of ancient and modern sounds that I had been cultivating. But as I moved through the cultural landscape of Karachay-Cherkessia, I encountered a painful truth: the musical tradition I sought to revive was on the brink of extinction. Without Arslanbek Sultanbekov, the scene felt barren, devoid of the talent needed to bring the Nine Rhapsodies to life.

Business and Music in Dagestan. Aul Terekly-Mekteb.

My travels eventually led me to Aul Terekly-Mekteb in Dagestan, a place where the steppes stretched endlessly under a sky that seemed too vast to comprehend. Between November 2020 and March 2021, I made several trips to this remote village, hoping to find musicians who could breathe life into the Nine Rhapsodies. The Nogai State Orchestra of Folk Instruments was my last hope, but the pandemic had taken its toll on them as well.

I arrived at the orchestra's rehearsal space on a cold, grey morning, my breath fogging in the air as I approached the building. Inside, the atmosphere was heavy with frustration and fatigue. The musicians, masked and weary, gathered for a performance that was meant to impress me. But as the music began, I felt a pang of disappointment. The sound was flat, the energy drained. These were not the vibrant melodies I had imagined; this was a shadow of what could have been.

The musicians apologized, explaining that they had been practicing old Soviet war songs—music that held no connection to the Nogai spirit I sought to evoke. The pandemic had robbed them of their ability to gather and rehearse properly, and their lives had become a series of mundane struggles. One musician complained of a hangover, another of sick relatives. They were all exhausted by the weight of their circumstances.

As I stood there, listening to the echoes of what could have been, I felt a deep sense of loss—not just for the project, but for the culture that had once thrived in

these lands. The musicians, despite their weariness, clung to their dreams of performing on grand stages like the Royal Albert Hall. They believed that Nogai music deserved a global audience, but the reality of their situation made such dreams seem distant, almost impossible.

The bureaucratic hurdles were equally daunting. The orchestra's managers spoke of grants and funding with a sense of resignation, their words heavy with the weight of a system that seemed designed to stifle creativity. I learned that seeking international funding came with a catch: under Russian law, any organization receiving foreign support had to register as a 'Foreign Agent' — a label that carried dangerous implications in modern Russia. The fear of being branded an enemy of the state was palpable, and it cast a long shadow over our discussions.

In the end, we were forced to accept that the *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* would have to wait. Without the necessary funding, and with the musicians in such a fragile state, the project couldn't move forward. We agreed to revisit the idea in 2022 or 2023, which, on reflection, meant – never!

Appendix IV

Ambient Recording: Technique and Application.

In 1975, following a car accident that left Brian Eno confined to bed, he discovered a revolutionary way to experience music. While listening to distorted harp recordings intertwined with ambient sounds from the street and wind, he realized that music could seamlessly blend with its surroundings, ultimately paving the way for the genre of ambient music. The track *Kara Yiraw, Oina* (30:15) exemplifies the fusion of direct and ambient recording in a minimalist style. Its textures arise from a raw recording of Alibiy Romanov's playing the *dombyra* alongside the sound of a horse's neigh, captured with a Zoom H3-VR. The intention was to introduce the 'horse' as a character, with its cantering gait providing a rhythmic foundation for the song. I inadvertently recorded the sound of hooves during a night-time horse ride on a snowy evening in Karachay-Cherkessia in 2019. In the studio[34] (perfectionists paradise), I sought to create a 'breathing' effect by sampling these hoof beats in ProTools. They were then transformed through a compressor chain into a 'digitized horse rhythm,' where each hoof strike corresponds to an element of the drum kit. This experiment was designed to preserve and extend Alibiy Romanov's unique *dombyra* part, as part of answering the broader question of how to maintain and evolve the Nogai musical tradition in a contemporary context. By incorporating the sounds of the steppe — such as the horse's neigh and hoof beats — and processing them through modern technology, like a synthesizer, I explored how traditional sounds can coexist with digital elements. This led to the creation of an ambient fusion, blending the natural environment with electronic production techniques, which mirrors the broader effort to innovate while staying rooted in tradition.

The graph vi.1.1. and Figure vi.1.1. below illustrates the process of integrating horse hoof samples recorded with a Zoom H3-VR into Superior Drummer 3 by Toontrack. These samples are then processed through a compression chain in Logic Pro. This

[34] Islam Satyrov rendered the sampling of the 'horse rhythm,' which is why I did not delve into the process myself; I only possess a general understanding of the details without in-depth knowledge. I observed the process online through discussions and messages, and I applied the outcome to realize my own ideas in practice.

approach is relevant to my research questions about preserving and evolving Nogai music traditions in a contemporary context. By incorporating the sounds of horse hooves into digital drumming software, I demonstrate a method for preserving and reimagining traditional, natural sounds within modern musical frameworks. The use of these samples and their processing through contemporary tools like Superior Drummer 3 and Logic Pro showcases how traditional sounds can be adapted and extended, bridging the gap between Nogai music and modern production techniques.

Horse | ZOOM - Superior Drummer 3/Toontrack | Compressor Chain | Logic Pro

Graph vi.1.1.

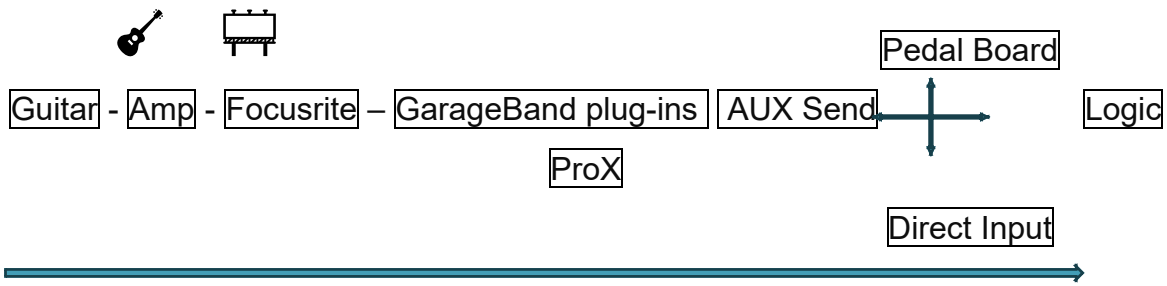
Figure vi.1.1

The guitar part was recorded in the GarageBand project using a Focusrite interface. I processed the guitar with built-in plugins, then sent the stereo signal through an effects pedal to a guitar amplifier to achieve 'the woof sensation.' I captured the sound with an AKG 3000 B dynamic microphone, set to -10 dB, and then re-recorded it into Logic Pro X project. After that, I added more processing and compression with plugins to bring out as much ambience and dynamics as possible. The background elements were synthesized sounds from the Logic Library, selected at my discretion to

complement the song. Figures vi.1.2., below illustrate an example of connecting a guitar to an amplifier, effects, a processor, and software:

Figure vi.1.2 – Workstation

These included snippets from Alibiy's *dombyra* parts, a horse neigh, a coin dropping on the table, all woven together to convey Sybra's message. I chose to fuse ambient and Nogai aesthetics - a horse neigh, in this case, to explore how traditional Nogai music can be preserved and expanded within a modern, minimalist context. Brian Eno's discovery of ambient music, where sound naturally interacts with its environment, inspired me to apply a similar approach to Nogai music. The graph vi.1.2. below illustrates an example of connecting a guitar to an amplifier, effects, a processor, and software:



Graph vi.1.2.

The ambient atmosphere I created for *Kara Yiraw, Oina* is directly related to my research questions about preserving and evolving Nogai music, as it reflects how personal and cultural narratives can be translated into modern musical forms. Sybra's narrative contrasts Lake *Sekerli*, a symbol of sweetness and love located in Crimea, as shown in the Figure vi.1.3, with Bazarov's variant at the river Nil, which embodies a more complex emotional depth.

Figure iv.1.3. Lake Sekerli

In this narrative, the sweetness associated with Lake *Sekerli*, where Barkaya both found and lost love, shifts to the bitterness represented by the river Nil. This emotional transition from the sweetness of love to the bitterness of loss is captured in the ambience of the track. I aimed to convey this transformation through the ambient soundscape, which reflects a sense of emptiness and subtle melancholy.

By incorporating these symbolic elements into *Kara Yiraw, Oina*, I sought to capture the profound emotional journey described in Sybra's story. The ambient textures in the track evoke the transition from joy to sorrow.

epic text as traslated by David Hunt

> Ay, Tokhtamysh, ay, my child, I will tell what I myself have seen: Beneath the moon there is a certain Lake (Sekerli – sugar lake - in the original text), if you gallop around it on horses, you will not encompass it and growing in its middle there is sedge and willow. If you are bored and only amusing yourself, you cannot shoot down the wild boar you are chasing (Hunt, 2012.)

The transformation of prose into a 'rhymed' structure here follows *Barmaq* principles.

song text as interpreted and performed by me

Oina Sybra oina, dastan yiirn koima

Oina Sybra oina, Kara Yirau

Ai astynda bir köl[35] *bar*

Ailanasy At shaptyrsa etkisiz

Ortasyna bitken Koga mynan tal da bar

Erikkenler, yalkanlar Kaban kuvyp atkysyz

Ai astynda bir köl bar Ai, balam, Ai, Toktamysh
Er dugazhy œzi aitar

Er dugazhy – öz ulum Assalam aleikum Valeikum...

Nogai	English
Oina Sybra, oina *Dastan yiirin koima* *Ai astynda bir köl bar Ailanasy* *At shaptyrsa etkisiz Ortasyna bitken* *Koga mynan tal da bar* *Erikkenler, yalkanlar* *Kaban kuvyp atkysyz* *Ai astynda bir köl bar Ai, balam,* *Ai, Toktamysh*	Dance, Sybyra, dance— And sing your endless *dastan*. Dance, Sybyra, dance, You fiery bard, you fearless one. Beneath the moon, there lies a lake— So vast, no rider circling round Could reach its edge or close its shape. And at its heart, the sedge still grows, The willow leans, the cold wind knows…

[35] In the Nogai language, the word köl can refer to both 'river' and 'lake.' However, given that Sybra's lyrics describe a setting where one cannot easily ride around on horseback, it is inferred that "*köl*" in this context refers to a 'lake' rather than a 'river.'

Er dugazhy œzi aitar. *Er dugazh – öz ulum Assalam aleikum Valeikum...*	But those who chase and laugh and ride, Pursuing boar with bow and pride— They'll miss the mark, the beast will flee. For dreams like this are not to be. Beneath the moon, that lake still sleeps— With reeds that whisper, sorrow-deep… Ah, my child, my Toktamysh. The praying man will say to his son: "As-salamu alaykum" — "Wa alaykum salaam.

The ambient elements in *Kara Yiraw, Oina* enable the *dombyra* to interact with natural soundscapes, evoking the vast, open steppe that is central to Nogai culture, and the wall of guitar sound. This approach, as detailed in table iv.1.1. below, aligns with the workflow conducted during field trips and reflects a metaphysical journey in search of how to preserve the essence of Nogai music while integrating it into contemporary musical forms.

Stage	Description
Field Recording	- **Location**: Karachay-Cherkessia - **Context**: Light canter on a snowy night - **Equipment**: Zoom H3-VR - **Action**: Recording horse hooves
Studio Processing	- **Action**: Sampling hoof beats - **Software**: Superior Drummer 3 used for sampling and layering - **Outcome**: Transforming into a rhythm section
Mapping	- **Hoof Strikes Mapped to Drum Kit Elements**: - Harness: Cymbals and Hi-hats - Hind Legs: Kick Drum - Fore Legs: Snare - Hooves on Ground: Overheads
Sound Processing	- **Action**: Compressor chain applied - **Outcome**: Achieved a 'breathing' effect
Bass Guitar	- **Action**: Plays cyclical pattern - **Connection**: Reflects 'circular movement' in 'Edige' text
Final Product	- **Outcome**: 'Horse Rhythm' sounds like drums, creating an engaging auditory experience

Table iv.1.1. Workflow of Creating Ambient Horse Rhythm in *Kara Yiraw, Oina* (30:15)

Studio: Sound Recording – transfer, sync, editing, mastering.

Recording this album was a real technical adventure. It was not just about capturing sound; it was about getting it all to come together smoothly. With contributors from Turkey, Vietnam, Russia, Kazakhstan, and England, we had a mix of recording environments and gear that added layers of complexity to the process. Some collaborators worked in top-notch studios, delivering high-quality tracks with just a few takes. But not everyone had the same setup, so we ended up with a variety of recording quality. This meant that a lot of time was spent on editing and syncing to make sure everything fit together seamlessly. So why did this matter for my research? The whole point was to preserve the essence of Nogai music while integrating it into a modern context. By navigating these technical challenges, I was able to blend traditional sounds with contemporary production techniques, making sure the final album not only stayed true to the Nogai's roots but also resonated in today's music scene. It's a great example of how careful recording and editing can help maintain cultural authenticity while embracing innovation.

For example, the process of replacing loops with live drums on tracks such as *Nogai Yurt, Ak Mamyk, Ardak, Koishy, and Kosh Keldyn, Edige* directly addressed the challenge of integrating traditional Nogai music with contemporary production techniques. The replacement of loops with live drums involved significant editing and timing adjustments, which was crucial for aligning the live elements with the dynamic structures of the pre-arranged compositions. This integration aimed to connect with the natural rhythm and 'heartbeat' of the music, enhancing the authenticity and emotional impact of the pieces. The involvement of British session musicians, despite budget constraints, was intended to offer fresh perspectives on Nogai rhythms and techniques, providing an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange. Their contributions, although differing from my initial expectations, offered intellectually stimulating and creatively rewarding results. This process highlights the intersection of traditional and

modern elements in my work and underscores the importance of adapting traditional music to contemporary contexts while preserving its core essence. Ultimately, this experience aligns with my research objectives of evolving Nogai music within modern frameworks while maintaining its cultural authenticity. The collaboration with session musicians and the integration of live drums were key in achieving a more dynamic and emotionally impactful sound, demonstrating the practical application of innovative techniques to traditional music.

As the album progressed from *Nogai Yurt*, I consciously guided it into a more introspective and reflective phase with the tracks *Baiterek* (24:23), *Yas Soltat, Kadyr Berdy* (25:45), *Kyzgyš Kus* (26:51), and *Šantemir kyzgan kumusga*. These songs are the result of a creative process that took place primarily in my home studio, supplemented by field recordings and framed by intentional arrangements. I made all metrical and ambient decisions based on a deeply personal approach, relying on my instincts and the emotional resonance of the texts to shape the soundscapes of these long, drawn-out songs, which feature harmony singing in contrast to other unison songs. The percussive elements of the guitar and *dombyra* naturally emerged as the primary rhythmic markers, which often made additional rhythmic layers unnecessary. However, when the compositions called for it, I subtly introduced rhythm using a bass drum, tambourine, or cajón to enhance the overall texture without overwhelming the inherent rhythm of the tracks.

The instrumental composition *Kün Batar,* marking the beginning of *Nine Rhapsodies about Edige* and the final track *Kosh Keldyn, Edige,* marking the end, are integral to addressing my research questions on blending traditional Nogai music with contemporary forms and exploring its emotional and cultural dimensions. *Kün Batar* captures Alibiy's legacy and personal connection to his music by merging traditional and modern techniques. The use of the Phrygian mode, repetitive loops, and delay effects reflects both Alibiy's choice and his passionate desire for escape and return to his roots, mirroring our shared internal struggles and cultural connections. This piece highlights how traditional elements can be preserved while integrating innovative methods, directly addressing the research aim of evolving Nogai

music within contemporary contexts. *Kosh Keldyn, Edige* represents a synthesis of various musical influences, including blues, and embodies a 'newly reclaimed' identity in Nogai music. The dynamic interplay of *Aksak Kulan Küi* rhythms with Phrygian guitar melodies, along with shifting strumming patterns on the *dombyra*, creates a rich and cohesive sound. The harmonica, along with a mid-tempo, one-chord, repetitive twelve-bar progression and driving rhythm section, nods to the blues and rock influences I grew up with. This combination symbolizes the universal theme of longing for a better place, echoing the farewell to the passing train and the broader notion that 'the grass is always greener on the other side.'

Figure iv.1.4. Entrance to *aul* Kün Batar

Satellite link to *aul* Kün Batar:

https://yandex.ru/maps/?l=sat&ll=45.586930%2C44.292267&z=16

Accessed on 14 August 2024.

Rhythmic material in *Nogai Yurt (19:30)*

Asymmetrical poetry, with its unpredictable rhythms and patterns, might seem like it would clash with the structured framework of Western popular music. But instead, this provided a creative opportunity. The structured beat of the music is like a steady pulse, while the poetry, with its irregular cadence, plays off that pulse, creating tension and release. The notes land on the beat but with a subtle delay, stretching into the next, almost like they are resisting the pull of strict timing. This push and pull create a dynamic energy, where the so-called irregularity of the poetry finds its place within the musical structure.

Nogai Yurt (19:30) ascends a half step above *Ak Mamyk*, with the rhythmic flow dictated by the stresses in Barmaq. The eight-bar riff features 21 notes, 24 words, 20 syllables, and 19 stresses, while the verse maintains 21 notes but with fewer words (14) and more syllables (46), along with 16 stresses. These metrics informed my creative decisions.

song text as interpreted and performed by me

Stress:

↗ Ei, ↗ ei, ↗ No → gai ↗ Yurt → Atam → anam → tuv → gan → yurt → Yii → Iyp ↘ salam ↘ ber → gen ↘ Yurt ↗

Syllables:

{Ei} - {ei} - {No} - {gai} - {Yurt} - {A} - {tam} - {a} - {nam} - {tuv} - {gan} - {yurt} - {Yi} - {i} - {Iyp} - {sa} - {lam} - {ber} - {gen} - {Yurt}

Kimdigimdy kesken yurt

Biev savgan sütli yurt

Kumuz ishken Kutly yurt

Edil Yaik Arasy

Yilky mynan tuvgan yurt

Edil, Edil su

Yagan oipan kum baskan

Syllables:

{Kim} - {di} - {gim}-{dy} - {kes} - {ken} - {yurt} - {Biev} - {sav} - {gan} - {süt} - {li} - {yurt} - {Ku} - {muz} - {ish} - {ken} - {Kut} - {ly} - {yurt} - {E} - {dil} - {Ya} - {ik} - {A} - {ra} - {sy} - {Yil} - {ky} - {my} - {nan} - {tuv} - {gan} - {yurt} - {E} - {dil} - {E} - {dil} - {su} - {Ya} - {gan} - {oi} - {pan} -{kum} - {bas} - {kan}.

Nogai	English (trans. Yakubov)
Kimdigimdy kesken yurt *Biev savgan sütli yurt* *Kumuz ishken Kutly yurt* *Edil – Yaik Arasy* *Yilky mynan tuvgan yurt* *Edil, Edil su* *Yagan oipan kum baskan*	Here my umbilical cord was cut. Here they milk camels, and drink fermented milk in abundance – a land between Volga and Ural. Stallions are bred here in thousands Drinking the water of Volga Again, I am on my knees before you.

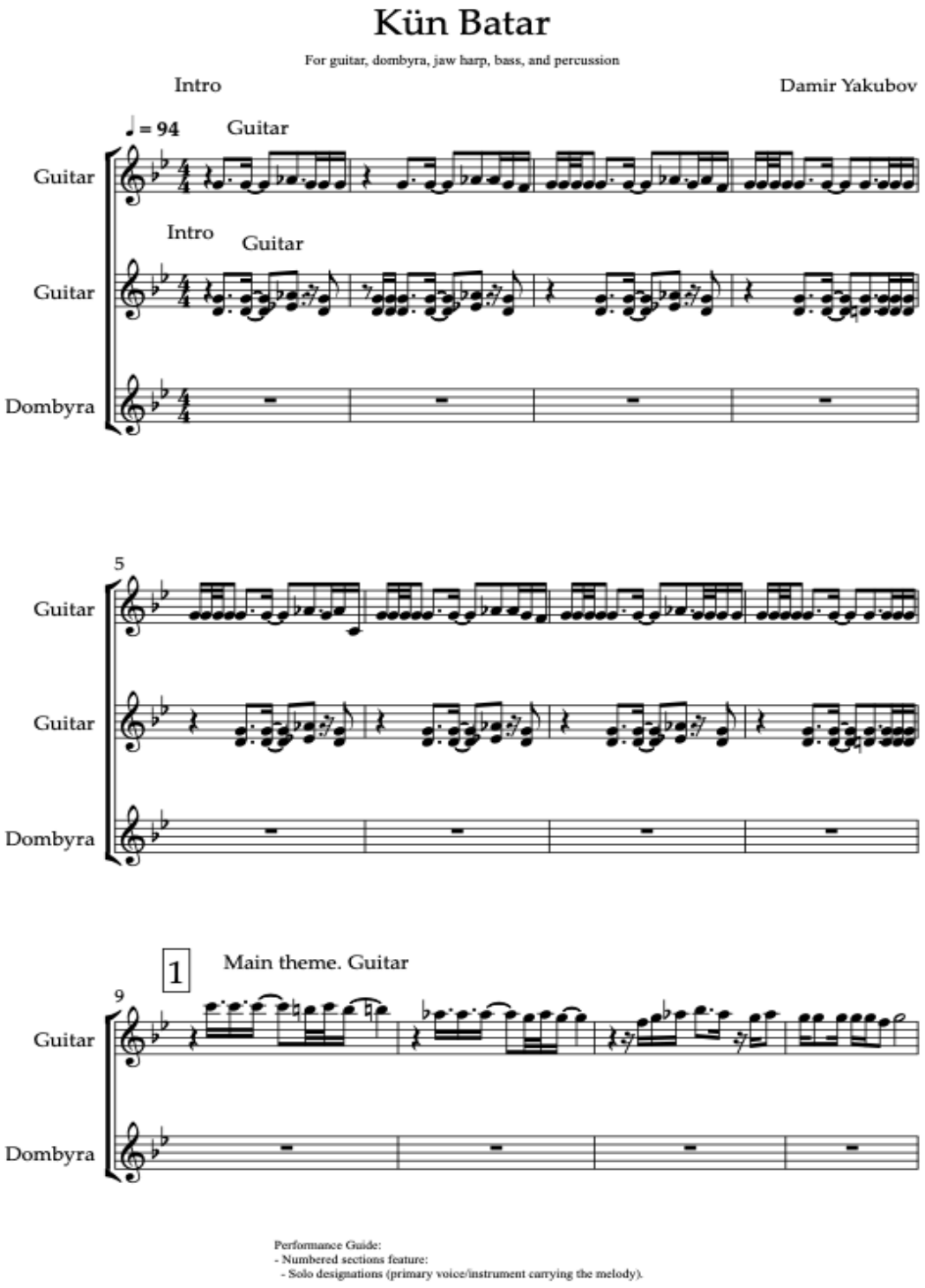
In *Nogai Yurt*, I blended tradition and innovation by reflecting on personal emotional experiences tied to cultural disconnection, leveraging my expertise as a guitarist. I combined traditional Nogai elements with contemporary soundscapes, using advanced guitar techniques and effects to bridge the gap between cultural heritage and modern expression. The *qyl-qobuz*, with its haunting and resonant tone, plays a crucial role in conveying the message of the song, evoking the movement of horses, and symbolizing the nomadic lifestyle. This eerie sound enriches the piece with themes of longing and cultural nostalgia. Additionally, the integration of a solid drum groove and bass line elevates the track to a "commercial" level, making it not only a rich cultural exploration but also a piece that's engaging and enjoyable for listeners.

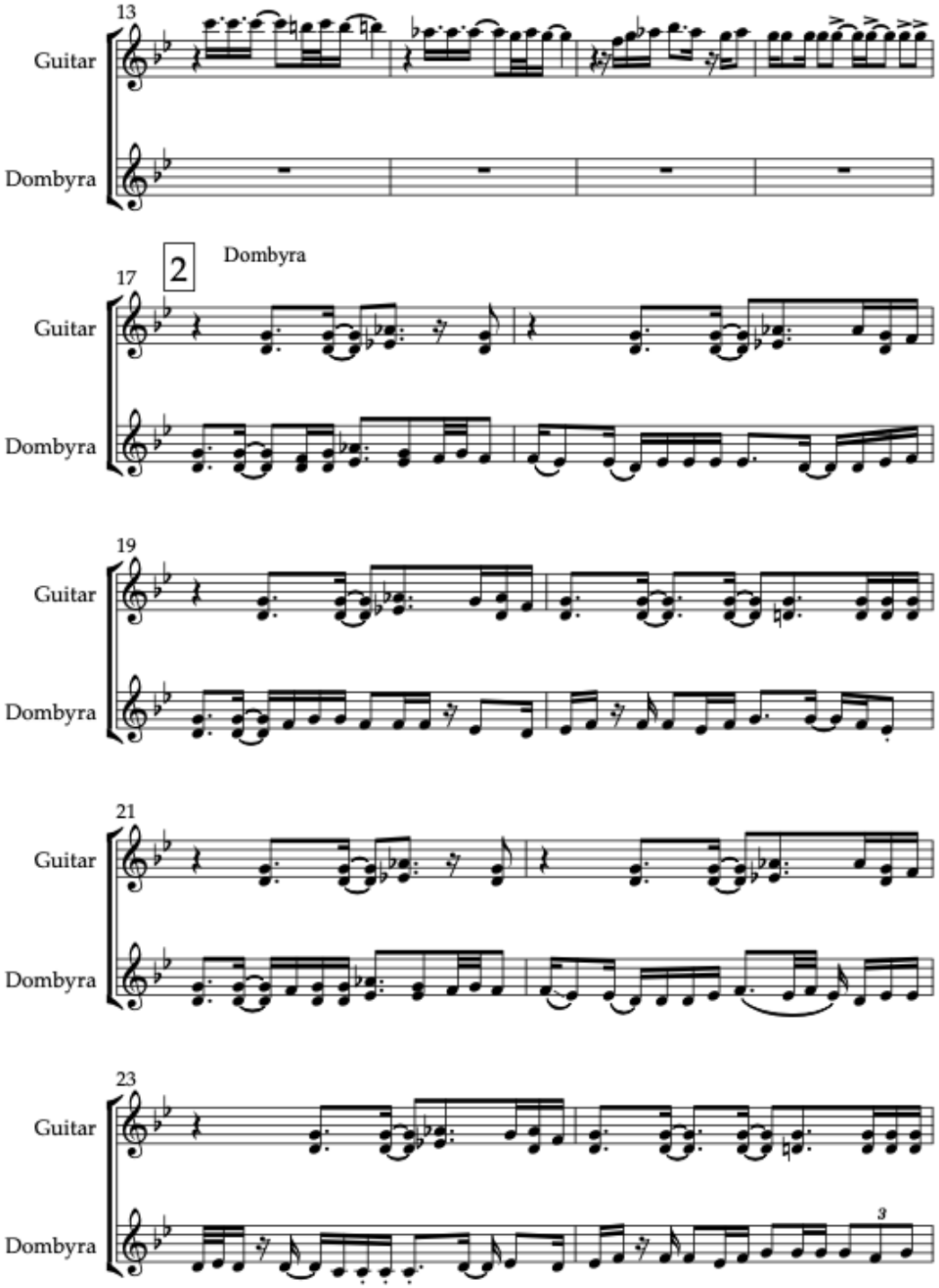
The song's structure reveals a rich interplay of contradictions, as eight bars and an asymmetric arrangement of notes, stresses, and syllables create a rhythmic dialogue between the lyrics and music. Onomatopoeia inherent in Nogai texts, allowed the stresses to emerge organically from the words, rooted in the philosophy of *Barmaq*, where rhythm follows the natural flow of language. I incorporated minimal modifications to preserve the couplet format while enhancing the rhythmic texture of

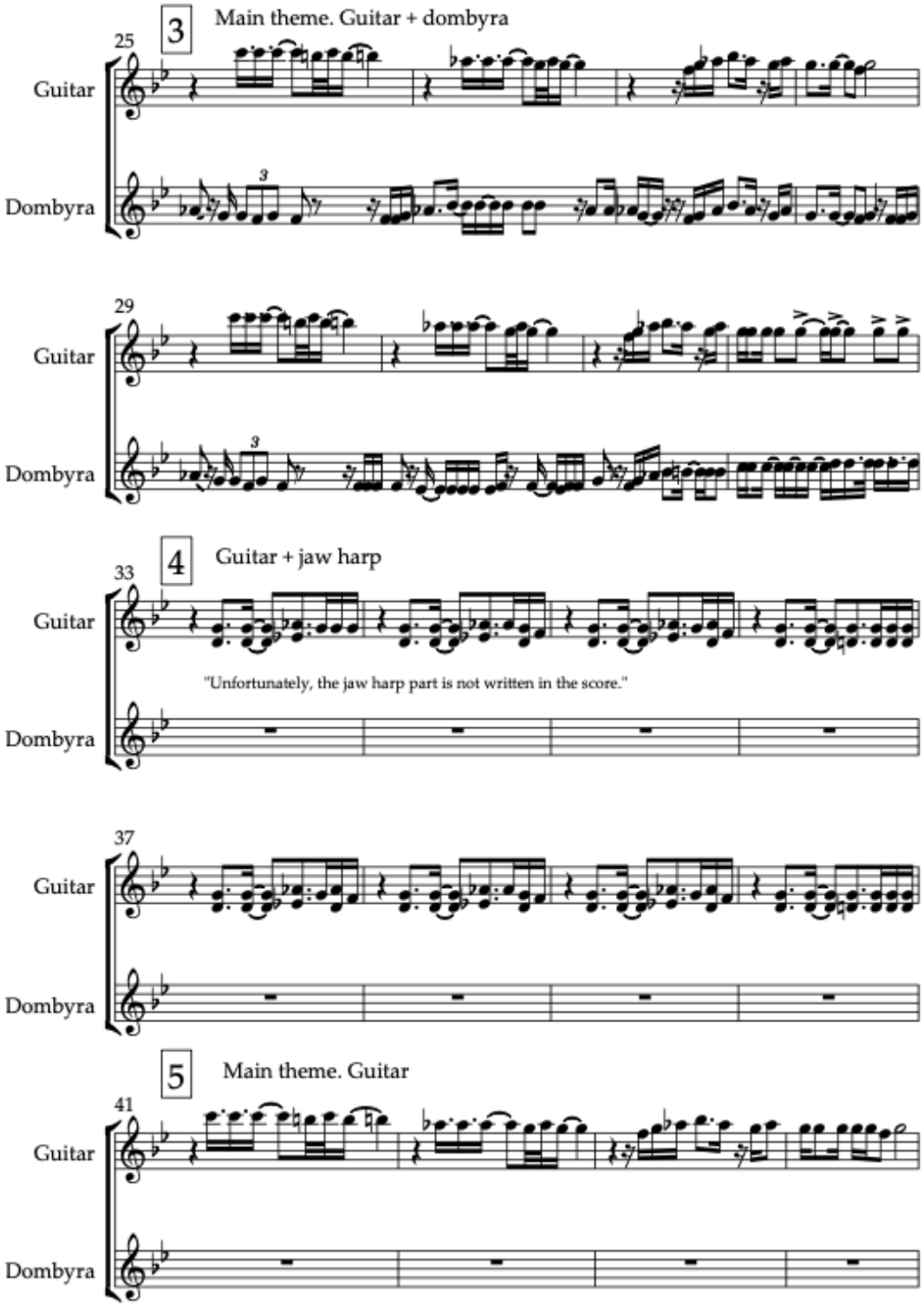
the piece. Repetition is a fundamental rhetorical technique used to emphasize key elements, create a sense of coherence, and reinforce the thematic content of the music. By repeating certain phrases or motifs, I aimed to maintain the traditional structure of the couplets, which is central to the Nogai musical form, while also enriching the rhythmic dimension of the composition.

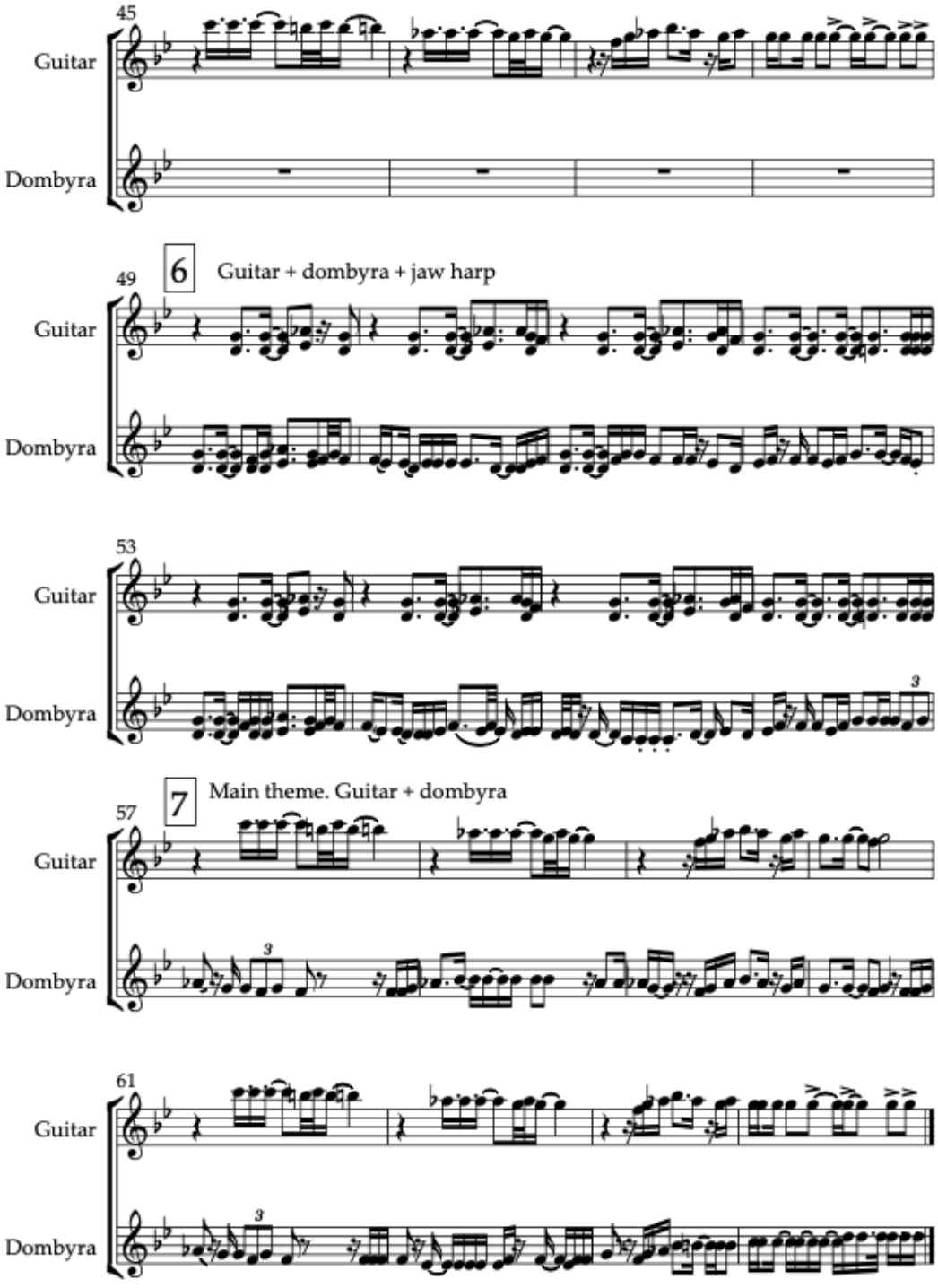
The calculated layering of the *dombyra* and guitar in $BARMAQ$ tuning -D#, alongside percussion, establishes a vibrant sonic landscape that honours the traditional sound, inviting movement, and evoking the spirit of traditional dances like Uzun Biev - Togerek.

Appendix V


Kün Batar
For guitar, dombyra, jaw harp, bass, and percussion
Intro
Damir Yakubov
♩= 94
Guitar
Guitar
Intro
Guitar
Guitar
Dombyra
5
Guitar
Guitar
Dombyra
1
Main theme. Guitar
9
Guitar
Dombyra
Performance Guide:
- Numbered sections feature:
- Solo designations (primary voice/instrument carrying the melody).


13
Guitar
Dombyra
2
Dombyra
17
Guitar
Dombyra
19
Guitar
Dombyra
21
Guitar
Dombyra
23
Guitar
Dombyra
3


3
Main theme. Guitar + dombyra
25
Guitar
Dombyra
29
Guitar
Dombyra
4
Guitar + jaw harp
33
Guitar
"Unfortunately, the jaw harp part is not written in the score."
Dombyra
37
Guitar
Dombyra
5
Main theme. Guitar
41
Guitar
Dombyra


45
Guitar
Dombyra
49
6
Guitar + dombyra + jaw harp
Guitar
Dombyra
53
Guitar
Dombyra
3
57
7
Main theme. Guitar + dombyra
Guitar
Dombyra
3
61
Guitar
Dombyra
3

Appendix VI

Pronunciation Guide

This guide contains a collection of cultural, musical, and traditional terms, along with their phonetic representations and meanings, organized in two columns for clarity.

Term	**[Phonetic]**	**Meaning**
Dombyra	*[dombira]*	*a two-stringed lute*
Edige	*[ædi:ge}*	*a name*
Yasaq	*[iasak]*	*law*
Yan	*[ian]*	soul
Yurt	*[yu:rt]*	a dwelling
Yiir	*[i:r]*	a song
Yiraw	*[irau:]*	a singer
Aul	*[au:l]*	a village
Ak	*[ak]*	white
Aksak	*[aksak]*	limping
Argamak	*[argama:k]*	a racing horse
Aqsaqal	*[aksakal]*	a white-bearded man
Bakhshy	*[bakßi:]*	a shaman
Küishi	*[ku:ißi]*	Singer of tales

Koishy	*[koishi:].*	Shepard
Kyzgyš Kus	*[kizgiß ku:s]*	A lapwing
Lašyn Kus	*[laßin ku:s]*	Falcon
Mangyt	*[mangit]*	An alternative name for Nogai
Moyin	*[moi:n]*	neck
Uzun	*[u:zu:n]*	long
Söz	*[söz]*	a word
Shöl	*[ßöl]*	Steppe
Shertu	*[ßertu]*	to pick (picking technique)
Til	*[tl']*	language
Tolgaw	*[tolga:u]*	a reflective song
Tökpe	*[tökpe]*	to pour (strumming technique)
Qambaq	*[kambak]*	camelthorn
Qyl-qobuz	*[kil-kobu:z]*	a nomadic lute
Ustaz	*[u:sta:z]*	a master musician