

Inta Batsman b. 5/10/65 and Inara Abolins (b. 15/2/39)
Transcript of interview with Judy Caine - 16th February 2019
(N.B. – timecode numbers refer to the audio recording)

Judy Caine: [00:00:02] Okay. This is Judy Caine, and this is an interview for the third phase of Changing Corby the Latvian phase. And it's, what day is it today?

Inta Batsman: [00:00:13] 16th.

Judy Caine: [00:00:14] Thank you. It's the 16th of February 2019 and I'm over at Catthorpe Manor with Inta and Inara?

Inara Abolins: [00:00:24] Yep, perfect.

Judy Caine: [00:00:26] I'm going to get them to introduce themselves in a moment, give me their date of birth on the tape and then they are hopefully going to tell me about all things Latvian and answer some questions to help me understand more. So, first, Inara could I ask you to give me your full name and your date of birth?



Inta and Inara

Inara Abolins: [00:00:44] Yes, my full name is Inara Vizbulite Abolins.

Judy Caine: [00:00:47] And when were you born?

Inara Abolins: [00:00:51] I was born on the 15th of February 1939.

Judy Caine: [00:00:55] So it was your birthday ...

Inara Abolins: [00:00:57] Yesterday - hence the flowers.

Judy Caine: [00:00:59] Well, Happy Birthday for yesterday.

Inara Abolins: [00:01:05] Thank you very much.

Judy Caine: [00:01:06] Inta, I'll come to you in a moment Inta, but Inara could you tell me first of all when you came to England.

Inara Abolins: [00:01:14] I came to England with my parents. I was 10 when we came in 1949, because the Russians had invaded our country and my parents did not want to stay under Russian rule, and besides my father's name was on the list to be sent to Siberia. So, we packed a few bags whatever one could carry, because you know there was hardly any transport on, by actually with horse and cart. We proceeded to go from the north of Latvia right across to the other side, to the port of Lipieja where there were some German ships that were taking refugees across to Germany.

Judy Caine: [00:01:57] Which Part of Germany did you end up in?

Inara Abolins: [00:02:01] Well we, we ended up on the borders of Denmark actually, in Flensburg. I don't know where we stayed in between quite honestly, because when we left Latvia, I was actually five, so I don't really recollect quite a lot of it you know. But our last place was in Flensburg in a displaced persons camp on the borders of Germany in Denmark.

Judy Caine: [00:02:29] How did that make you feel as a five-year old?

Inara Abolins: [00:02:31] As a child really doesn't, it doesn't matter I think what circumstances, as long as you've got, you've got food, and you've got loving parents, and you've got other children, because there was a Latvian school in the camp, and you're just playing around you don't know anything else you know. So, that was that was fine. I mean, you know, I didn't feel deprived at all because everybody was in the same boat. Really.

Judy Caine: [00:02:56] How long were you in the camp for?

Inara Abolins: [00:02:57] We must have been in the camp for a week? We came to England in 1949. So, from 1944 until 49.

Judy Caine: [00:03:08] And which part of England did you come to?

Inara Abolins: [00:03:09] We came to Kent, because initially the English were looking for obviously workers, and my father had been a civil servant and this Army Major needed a cook and a housekeeper and sort of odd jobs man. Well then, my father was totally useless at anything, because he'd been sitting at the desk pushing paper around. But my mother who is very energetic, she not only did her job, but she did his work as well. The first summer of it, my father had to pick cherries and never done anything like that. He went up the ladder after about five minutes, he fell down and broke his ankle, and that was the end of the summer for him.

Judy Caine: [00:03:56] Oh wow, did it heal OK?

Inara Abolins: [00:03:57] He was okay, he was alright, and I had to go immediately to school. I didn't speak a word of English actually. I had a wonderful headmistress called Miss Sahni and she sat me next to a girl who spoke perfect English so that only, I heard the best in the beginning. It was wonderful and the children were absolutely marvellous, because I mean nobody had seen refugees then and in this tiny village of Warehorne in Kent they were absolutely marvellous. I remember we had, we had lunch at school, and I know I dropped some food and this this boy suddenly picked it up. He came from a large family and he was so good you know, and they made me very, very welcome, extremely welcome. And the lovely, lovely village, you know, and they all knew that they had a refugee family, but they were all absolutely marvellous.

Judy Caine: [00:04:51] You might not know the answer to this, but I was speaking to one Latvian gentleman who didn't speak very much English. I didn't really understand, but he said something about needing to work on the land for 2 years?

Inara Abolins: [00:05:07] Yes, you did. I think you had to work for three years as far as I remember you had to sign this contract for three years and you could not move until those three years had expired. After that you were able to move but again you are still limited to that type of work. So, after the three years we - because by that time I was going to go to school in Folkestone - and so we moved nearer to Folkestone so that I could ...

Judy Caine: [00:05:37] ...you were 13 by then?

Inara Abolins: [00:05:37] Yeah, yeah that's right. Yes.

Judy Caine: [00:05:40] Did you stay down in Folkestone?

Inara Abolins: [00:05:40] Yes, yes, I was going to stay and do 'A' levels but then my parents wanted to move to London because there were no Latvians in Kent at all at that time. And I did my advance level typewriting and shorthand in the same year as I did my 'O' levels. So actually, I left school and we moved to London, because of the Latvian community.

Judy Caine: [00:06:05] Which part of London?

Inara Abolins: [00:06:06] Originally, we lived in Putney, yeah.

Judy Caine: [00:06:10] Interesting. So, when you moved into London to, where there were more Latvians, and a bigger Latvian community, how did that affect you. Did you do a lot more Latvian things?

Inara Abolins: [00:06:21] Absolutely yes. Well that was the whole idea obviously my parents wanted me to meet youngsters of my age, you know, and that was at church or else at a youth group, and in the summer, in summer camps. I would go away for the whole of the, well during school time actually, even when we were in Kent. I was sent off to Hereford or wherever. We had this Latvian home there and I spent the whole summer holidays there with Latvian children.

Judy Caine: [00:06:55] That was in Hereford?

Inara Abolins: [00:06:56] Yes.

Judy Caine: [00:06:57] I was born in Worcester which is not far away.

Inara Abolins: [00:07:00] Oh really, yes, it's called Almeley, Newport House in Almeley.

Inta Batsman: [00:07:03] Not too far from Kington!

Inara Abolins: [00:07:03] Yeah, yes, from Kington not far. Yeah. So many, many years, and I mean I still have friends that I made then. One fellow sings in the choir, you know, we were together in camp and there's a girl here also that we were Confirmed at the same time and, you know, so one made one's friendships then, really and truly, and they have lasted.

Judy Caine: [00:07:31] So, you mentioned the choir, do you sing in the mixed choir here?

Inara Abolins: [00:07:37] Yes, yes.

Inara Abolins: [00:07:37] Tell me about the mixed choir?

Inara Abolins: [00:07:37] My, my husband formed the Latvian choir here. Straumeni Mixed Voice choir. What year?

Inta Batsman: [00:07:50] Oh, I don't know, '85, '86 I think?

Inara Abolins: [00:07:53] I think it was about '87 probably, about '87.

Inta Batsman: [00:07:56] Yes, I think it was '87.

Inara Abolins: [00:07:57] Yes, because I think it was the first Christmas that we performed. And, so, naturally one had to sing in the choir although we did actually both sing in the London Latvian choir at the time. And, also my husband, when the conductor saw that he was getting on in years and his health wasn't all that good, he actually saw that Ziedonis was able to teach the choir as well and so he became a co-conductor. Then when the conductor died, for a time, Ziedonis conducted the London Latvian choir. But by then we had a lot of, sort of song festivals, all over England and we were always going up and down the motorway coming here to rehearse and so forth. And then in 1990 they were building these houses and we thought well Ziedonis will retire soon you know we'll move up here, which happened. And now of course my husband died last July, and now for how many years have you been conducting the choir?

Inta Batsman: [00:09:01] Yes, well, taking it over permanently about 5 years ago.

Inara Abolins: [00:09:04] 5 years ago, yeah, yeah.

Inta Batsman: [00:09:05] Since the 90s as well.

Inara Abolins: [00:09:05] Yes.

Judy Caine: [00:09:05] OK - I'll give you a break for a minute. Inta, turning to you for a second, it's a convenient point. [Moves microphone]. OK you took over the choir, can you give me the name of the choir, can you spell it out for me?

Inta Batsman: [00:09:25] So it's, Straumeni, which is S T R A U M E (with a line over it) N I.

Judy Caine: [00:09:34] What does that mean?

Inta Batsman: [00:09:36] That is what we gave the name to this manor house, and it's actually it's from a literary book isn't it.

Inara Abolins: [00:09:41] Yes.

Inta Batsman: [00:09:42] So, so that's the Latvian name that we gave to Catthorpe. And so, because we were based here and we were able to rehearse here free of charge, that's what we called ourselves and you'll also note that there is now a Latvian school here that calls itself Straumeni and also a folk dancing group that calls themselves Straumeni.

Judy Caine: [00:09:58] What does it mean though?

Inta Batsman: [00:10:00] It's just a name isn't it?

Inara Abolins: [00:10:02] The name of a house in one of the literary works.

Inta Batsman: [00:10:06] It's a fictional, fictional house.

Judy Caine: [00:10:09] A fictional house?

Inara Abolins: [00:10:09] Well yes, it was, it was actually a house in the country, a country house. And it was called Straumeni and they had a competition to see, you know, what people want to, wanted to call this place, you know. Some people wanted to call it Cat Manor, because there were a load of cats wandering around, and some people wanted all sorts, but this one actually was adopted. So, because it was a well-known work and well-known book in Latvian.

Judy Caine: [00:10:40] So tell me about the mixed choir. I've heard masses about the male voice choir and the steelworks in Corby, and how that started and how it finished. And I understand some of those members, oh, what's his name, Valdis,

Inta Batsman: [00:10:55] Valdis, yes ...

Judy Caine: [00:10:58] I think he's still in the choir, isn't he?

Inta Batsman: [00:10:59] He's, he's just retired actually.

Judy Caine: [00:11:01] Oh, has he?

Inta Batsman: [00:11:01] Yes, only a few months ago.

Inara Abolins: [00:11:03] Coz he's 90 ...

Inta Batsman: [00:11:03] ... yes, he's 90 on Monday. But his daughter still sings in our choir and, they are good family friends of ours actually.

Judy Caine: [00:11:10] Ah, I'm going over to see him on Wednesday

Inta Batsman: [00:11:14] Oh, are you, interesting ...

Inara Abolins: [00:11:14] But remember, he'll be 90 on Monday.

Judy Caine: [00:11:22] Might be handy to take him a little gift then - 90 on Monday.

Inara Abolins: [00:11:25] Yeah that's right. He's having a lunch party tomorrow. Fortunately, we've been invited to.

Judy Caine: [00:11:31] That's here?

Inara Abolins: [00:11:32] Yes.

Judy Caine: [00:11:32] Ah, that explains why. Because, I asked him if he was going to come to this evening [to a cultural evening] and he said no I'll be there on Sunday, that's quite enough. I just assumed he meant for the choir.

Inara Abolins: [00:11:44] His son actually is coming with the family from Latvia, today, so yes that is so. But by that time probably Danis [the son] will have gone home.

Inta Batsman: [00:11:51] Yes, absolutely, unfortunately I think they fly back Tuesday.

Judy Caine: [00:11:54] Yes, anyway.

Inta Batsman: [00:11:54] So mixed choir again, I think you know, I take it from your research you know that choral singing is extremely important to Latvians.

Judy Caine: [00:12:06] Yes you have one or two small choirs.

Inta Batsman: [00:12:07] Yes indeed.

Inta Batsman: [00:12:08] And, you know, the saying goes that if you get two or three Latvians together, you'll end up with them singing something and often not just in unison but, you know, in parts. So, I mean as Mum explained, they were singing in the London Latvian choir, I did for a little while as well. I started singing in choirs from the age of 11 and it's just really been a way of life. It's just really important, and you know, I can't survive without singing.

Inara Abolins: [00:12:32] Although you do sing in an English choir as well.

Inta Batsman: [00:12:39] I sing in an English choir as well, yes. So, yes, I mean basically as we said my Dad founded the choir here, again he was looking for succession planning and I said, "well who else is going to do it, I suppose I better it". So, you know I started slowly but surely, and I gradually took on more and more until he said right okay, I'm going back to sing second tenors it's all down to you.

Judy Caine: [00:12:59] Second tenors, so how many parts are typically in ...

Inta Batsman: [00:13:00] So, normal soprano, alto, tenor, bases and, you know, split into two normally per voice.

Judy Caine: [00:13:10] So, 8 parts.

Inta Batsman: [00:13:10] Yes, Indeed, indeed. So again, we've gone through times when we've had you know 40 plus. 50 people in the choir. Now, we're about 30-odd, aren't we?

Inara Abolins: [00:13:18] Yep.

Inta Batsman: [00:13:18] It's also slightly cyclical, you tend to get more members when we're preparing for a song festival in Latvia than, you know, you get more people coming. But having said that we've got plenty who come regularly. Also, the lovely thing is that we've got people who like myself, were born here and we've also got people who have come over from Latvia in the last few years and are looking for a choir to join and have joined and we're like a big family really, so you know.

Judy Caine: [00:13:42] You've reminded me there, I forgot to say could you give me your full name and date of birth.

Inta Batsman: [00:13:46] That's OK. So, my full name is Inta Via Batsman. My maiden name of course was Abolins. And I was born on the 5th October 1965 here in the UK.

Judy Caine: [00:13:56] So how Latvian do you feel not being born in Latvia?

Inta Batsman: [00:13:59] Very!

Judy Caine: [00:13:59] Why?

Inta Batsman: [00:14:00] I don't know. It's just, it's just me, I guess.

Judy Caine: [00:14:08] You speak the language?

Inta Batsman: [00:14:09] Yes indeed. I didn't learn to speak English until I started nursery school at about the age of four. So, we always spoke Latvian at home. And I think what Mum says it's, as a child, it's what's normal. You don't question it. You speak Latvian at home so be it, you know. My late

brother's friends had a great phrase for it when he was off doing Latvian things at the weekend, Oh, he's being Latvian this weekend. And then other times he was being English you know, so.

Judy Caine: [00:14:36] So what quintessentially is being Latvian as you put it? What makes Latvian? What is it about Latvian culture and Latvian heritage that is very precious to you, that you feel is very Latvian and that you want to pass on to the next generation?

Inta Batsman: [00:14:53] I think it's got to be related to music hasn't it.

Inara Abolins: [00:14:56] I think so definitely.

Inta Batsman: [00:14:57] Especially the choral music is extremely important. There's also a lovely feeling that, you know, that you're doing something that generations before you have done. It doesn't matter where you are in the world, we'll get together, they'll know the same songs as we do especially a lot of folk songs. You get together and you can sing them ...

Inara Abolins: [00:15:12] Absolutely, yes ...

Inta Batsman: [00:15:12] A sort of unity.

Inara Abolins: [00:15:14] And we're quite patriotic.

Inta Batsman: [00:15:14] Yes, I think we are, and it's a small country so, you know, clearly, you know, we need ...

Inara Abolins: [00:15:21] Although we appreciate being in England.

Inta Batsman: [00:15:24] Oh, totally, totally.

Inara Abolins: [00:15:27] I'm very grateful that ...

Inta Batsman: [00:15:29] It's given us a home, it's given us an education. Absolutely. So, you know, I think we can be part of both.

Inara Abolins: [00:15:35] You can. Yes, absolutely and with no problems. Yeah.

Judy Caine: [00:15:39] So, your folk songs, the Straumeni?

Inta Batsman: [00:15:39] Well done ... yes!

Judy Caine: [00:15:39] My Latvian it's very lacking!

Inta Batsman: [00:15:48] No, it's getting very good.

Judy Caine: [00:15:53] It might do. The Straumeni choir is a mixed choir. Are they mainly classical and choral, from what I understand?

Inta Batsman: [00:16:00] Yes.

Judy Caine: [00:16:00] rather than folk songs?

Inta Batsman: [00:16:02] Yeah, we sing folk songs, but it's normally always in parts and we do tend to stick to Latvian music because, you know, our view is well if we're not gonna sing it, who else will. So, we don't really sing much else. We've done a few in Latin but that have been written by Latvian composers in general. But, you know, so that's, that's really our remit, that we try and stick to Latvian. Latvian stuff.

Judy Caine: [00:16:26] So who's your favourite Latvian composer that the choir sing a lot of?

Inta Batsman: [00:16:29] Oh, God. That's a very difficult question and I have to be diplomatic here I think I would be very difficult to choose.

Inara Abolins: [00:16:35] Helmers Pavasars would be mine.

Internet research:



Helmars Pavasars: Born Latvia, May 19, 1903. Studied music in Latvia and until 1931 was a music teacher and organist in Riga. After that he worked as a musician and taught at music schools in Valmiera and Cēsis. From 1940, lecturer in theoretical subjects at the Latvian Conservatory.

At the end of the Second World War (1944) he worked as a lecturer at the Baltic University in Pineberg. In 1954, he moved to London, worked as an organist and chief conductor of the English Latvian Song Days (1958, 1961, 1967), as well as the 1st European Latvian Song Festival in Hamburg (1964).

In 1990, he took part in the 20th Latvian General Song Festival and received the Honorary Professor of the Latvian Academy of Music.

Died in London on 12th June 1998.

Vocal music: about 80 songs, 4 cantatas and about 40 solo songs.

Inta Batsman: [00:16:35] Yeah, maybe? And I think the other thing is that we try and learn the repertoire's that the choirs in Latvia are rehearsing as well. You know, if there's something new we tend to try and get that music so that again, there's that unity, you know, from here to Latvia that we're all learning the same stuff.

Judy Caine: [00:17:12] Is that so you can take part in this slightly large festival?

Inta Batsman: [00:17:14] Yes, the slightly large festival, yes, absolutely. Yes. Which we both have done and have sung in choirs of, you know, 20,000 which is just an amazing experience.

Judy Caine: [00:17:23] I can't get my head around 20,000.

Inta Batsman: [00:17:24] It's amazing.

Judy Caine: [00:17:25] I went to the Eisteddfods in Wales.

Inara Abolins: [00:17:28] Oh yes.

Judy Caine: [00:17:29] My daughter lives in Wales, has done for years, that was big, but it's not 20,000.

Inara Abolins: [00:17:30] No, no, we've been there too. Yes.

Judy Caine: [00:17:40] Do you try and learn that repertoire specifically so you can take part?

Inta Batsman: [00:17:44] Oh definitely. In the past I mean we've, we've taken part in some festivals in Latvia since 1990. In the beginning because there were only a few people who wished to, it was just a case of learning the songs, you know, and we were more than welcome to take part. For the first time last time they decided that they had to have a competition as well which they have in Latvia. So that only the best choirs get to sing in the large choirs.

Judy Caine: [00:18:08] Is that because they are running out of space?

Inta Batsman: [00:18:10] Indeed ...

Inara Abolins: [00:18:10] The stage has been extended but obviously not as much as it could be.

Inta Batsman: [00:18:19] And obviously now that more Latvians are outside of the UK, outside of Latvia as well, in the UK, Germany, Sweden, whatever, they need something to get the numbers down so the first time this time we have to take part in competitions. We didn't have an appropriate choir to sing, we didn't have enough male, male voices who wanted to take part. So, the guys from our choir who wanted to, joined in with the London Latvia choir and, you know, they took part

Judy Caine: [00:18:48] So is there a competition between the London Latvian choir and the choir here?

Inta Batsman: [00:18:52] No, no ...

Inara Abolins: [00:18:53] No, not at all.

Inta Batsman: [00:18:54] It's all, you know, we're great. I think it's great that there's choirs and there's a few now, there's a new one starting out in Birmingham ...

Inara Abolins: [00:19:01] New ones that have been established since people that have come out recently ...

Inta Batsman: [00:19:09] Indeed but even whilst Latvia was still occupied, we had some festivals here in Europe starting in 60, early 60s, when was it? 63 or something?

Inara Abolins: [00:19:18] 68.

Inta Batsman: [00:19:21] About 68. Something like that. Every four years we had some festivals in the same vein but obviously not as large in various places around Europe.

Inara Abolins: [00:19:32] Mainly in Germany really and Sweden and also here in London, Leicester, Leeds, Bradford.

Inta Batsman: [00:19:40] Leeds, yeah, yeah.

Judy Caine: [00:19:42] So they went on for about 30 years because it was in 1990 when, or 91 when the Russians were ousted.

Inta Batsman: [00:19:44] 1990, yes.

Inara Abolins: [00:19:50] Yes. And then of course we were all delighted that we were able to go and take part in song festivals.

Judy Caine: [00:19:58] I'm very interested in the, the departure of the Russians for the simple reason that 15 years ago I went to Central Asia with a group of musicians and broadcasters predictably doing the same. And we were going around villages in Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Uzbekistan, seeing how the indigenous music had re-emerged after the Russian had gone, but actually they had never actually gone [the songs] they'd just gone underground. But it was really interesting especially as it was along the Silk Road to see commonalities and to see what came back. I'm just wondering in Latvia when the Russians went was there a massive resurgence of Latvian folk songs?

Inara Abolins: [00:20:38] Absolutely, yes, yes. Oh gosh yes. Yes. Well I think the folk song, that sort of tradition carried on even through the 50 years because that was the only way that you could show your ...

Inta Batsman: [00:20:52] Nationality almost ...

Inara Abolins: [00:20:54] Yes ...that was the only thing that really you could do because there were lots of things forbidden that you couldn't, you know. I mean Christmas wasn't celebrated or anything. I mean church, churches, you know, again they were closed. And in that way at least you could carry on with your culture. That wasn't forbidden, was it.

Inta Batsman: [00:21:17] No.

Inara Abolins: [00:21:17] And I think people really enjoyed that. And that's why there were the song festivals of course carried on. Obviously, the repertoire was very different.

Inta Batsman: [00:21:27] Yes, but the song festivals carried on.

Inara Abolins: [00:21:27] But, I had to sing about Lenin and goodness knows what but er ...

Judy Caine: [00:21:30] Where there any sort of resistance songs that you would sing when a group of Latvians got together?

Inta Batsman: [00:21:39] Well, I mean it was risky, I think. Of course, you know, we didn't have a problem here but in Latvia yes, they did. And especially like Put Vejeini it was accepted you know because we couldn't sing our national anthem and so one of the folk songs ...

Inara Abolins: [00:21:56] Yeah. Then, like Put Vejeini, which is a Latvian folk song, a very well-known one, almost became like a national anthem.

Judy Caine: [00:22:04] Can I hear it. Are you going to sing it for me?

Inta Batsman: [00:22:07] Oh I don't know if my voice can bear it. [Inta just getting over nasty cold].

[00:22:07] **They sing PUT VEJEINI in 2 parts for me.**

Inta Batsman: [00:22:28] That's the first verse, there's about six or seven. As in all folk songs it goes on and on and on and on.

Judy Caine: [00:22:35] Thank you ... Inara spells name of song ... Judy says will get words off the internet and will put into the transcription. Inta says will send the music.

Internet research:

Inta Batsman sent the music - translation of words taken from Internet:

PŪT, VĒJIŅI
Latviešu tautas dziesma

ANDREJS JURJĀNS
(1856-1922)

Mērent
Sopr.
Alti
Ten.
Basi

1. Pūt, vē - - ji - - ņi, dzen lai - - vi- ņu,
2. Kur- zem - - nie - - ce man so - - lī- ja
3. So- līt so - - la, bet ne - - de- va,
4. Teic' man' lie - - lu dzē- rā - - ji- ņu,
5. Ku- ņu kro - - gu es iz - - dzē- ru,
6. Pats par sa - - vu nau- du dzē- ru,
7. Pūt, vē - - - ji - - ņi, dzen lai - - vi- ņu,

1. Aiz - dzen ma- ni kur - ze - - mā.
2. Sav' mei- - ti- ņu ma - - lē - - jīņ!
3. Teic' man' lie- lu dzē - - rā - - jīņ!
4. Ku - - me - - li- ņa skrē - - jē - - jīņ!
5. Kam no - - skrē- ju ku - - me - - liņ'ž?
6. Pats skrēj' sa- vu ku - - me - - liņ'.
7. Aiz - dzen ma- ni kur - ze - - mā!

1. Put, vejeni, dzen laivinu, aizdzen mani Kurzeme.
Blow wind, sail my boat, sail me to Kurzeme.
2. Kurzemniece man solija, sav' meitinu malejin.
A woman from Kurzeme, promised me her daughter as a bride.
3. Solit sola, bet nedeva, teic man' lielu dzerajin'.
Promised, but didn't fulfil that promise, calling me a drunkard.
4. Teic man' lielu dzerajinu, kumelina skrejejin.
She called me a drunkard and a horse-racer.
5. Kuru krogu es izdzeru, kam noskreju kumelin'?
Where is the tavern in which I drank too much, whose horse did I run down?
6. Pats par savu naudu dzeru, pats skrej' savu kumelin'.
I drink for my own money, and ride my own horse.
7. Put, vejeni, dzen laivinu, aizdzen mani Kurzeme.
Blow wind, sail my boat, sail me to Kurzeme.

Judy Caine: [00:22:49] And I what does that [Put Vejeini] mean?

Inta Batsman: [00:22:52] 'Blow Wind Blow.'

Judy Caine: [00:22:53] Oh, how lovely ...

Inara Abolins: [00:22:53] Yes. Blow my boat to a certain part of Latvia.

Judy Caine: [00:23:02] Well you've certainly got a river where boats could be blown down quite well haven't you...

Inara Abolins: [00:23:04] Absolutely Yes, it goes all the way through...

Judy Caine: [00:23:06] And I've promptly forgotten the name of the river...

Inta Batsman: [00:23:10] It's Daugava ...

Judy Caine: [00:23:11] Thank you very much, I knew you'd know. That's what's called trying not to make an idiot of yourself. Thank you.

OK. Tell me what is integral with the songs you've mentioned. We've mentioned briefly the dance. Tell me about the dance and the costume if there's anything ...

Inta Batsman: [00:23:27] I think the costumes as well I mean. Originally every sort of town or area Latvia had its own costumes. So, you know where you came from that was the costume that you wore. But being here in the UK especially sort of you know my mother's generation when they first came over, they picked the ones that were more colourful, lots of embroidery, that they particularly liked you know and made them themselves.

Inara Abolins: [00:23:52] Yes because there is no other way you know if you wanted a national costume you jolly well went and, went to John Lewis look for material that was the right colour and you know you collected the beads and Soho, in these little shops, and made it a made your own costume.

Judy Caine: [00:24:10] Do they still do that because people seemed obsessed with being all the same, like little soldiers ...

Inara Abolins: [00:24:15] Yeah, yeah. Now I think, folk dancing groups perhaps it is it's more essential, because it's more visual, visually it's better if they all look the same. If you're making patterns and so forth it's not so easy.

Inta Batsman: [00:24:25] In the choir it's not so important.

Inara Abolins: [00:24:28] No, in our choir we have a right mixture, so whatever. I mean you made yours and you're making another one.

Inta Batsman: [00:24:36] Yes, I'm starting to make another one.

Inara Abolins: [00:24:36] And then the first ones like this and then the first ones when we first went back to Latvia in 1990, we actually bought some. But then you couldn't sort of have what you wanted it was whatever they had obviously. And they were very, very cheap compared to what they are now in one of these posh shops that only deals with national costumes of so many hundreds.

Judy Caine: [00:25:06] Yes. So, what do the choir wear, because I haven't yet got to see them?

Inta Batsman: [00:25:10] OK, so, I mean we do, we have I'm just a normal uniform of black and colourful scarves and stuff. But for example, something like the 18th of November we would always wear national costume because it's our national day.

Judy Caine: [00:25:21] When you say National Costume what has become the 'standard' national costume now. Because there's many.

Inta Batsman: [00:25:29] So again it is it's just whichever area people are from, whatever they've got.

Inara Abolins: [00:25:33] So, it's a long skirt, blouse sometimes with a bottle jacket, or a shawl, some girls have beautiful little crowns.

Inta Batsman: [00:25:41] Although as soon as you're married that's out the window ...

Judy Caine: [00:25:44] ... can you explain that to me because I've seen some of the pictures, some have got hats, some have got garlands, what's the deal with that?

Inta Batsman: [00:25:46] Yes, indeed. So, ladies who are available can wear crowns and they're mostly like we said with pearls or stuff or with a little metal band. But actually, when you get married there is a tradition on the cusp of the night of your marriage to the next day and your new mother in law presents you with your little cap or bonnet ...

Inara Abolins: [00:26:15] ...which are disgusting ... (all laugh)

Inta Batsman: [00:26:16] ... and you're off the market.



Inara Abolins: [00:26:20] Fortunately, when it's the song festivals, one is allowed because we make our own sort of wreaths or crowns from fresh flowers, well usually, actually from wildflowers, that's the traditional thing and even the married ladies can wear these and they look much better than these silly bonnets.

[00:26:44] Bit of general chatter here about why just because you get married you have to look ugly. Lots of laughing and Inara decided it was definitely an idea that was invented by a man ...

Judy Caine: [00:27:02] What can you tell me about midsummer because you have a midsummer thing don't you and I understand the ladies do one thing and the guys do something else. It's all very jolly and I don't really know much about it.

Inta Batsman: [00:27:13] So again there's a lot of singing and there's a song competition ...

Inara Abolins: [00:27:17] Yes, special songs just for midsummer.

Inta Batsman: [00:27:18] Yes, I guess there's about four or five traditional tunes. And it's a case of a competition between the men and the girls, who knows more songs, you know. And then again, it's the traditions like at the house, often you can go around various you know homesteads singing and that, and the Lady and the Lord of the manor as it were, will greet you with the homemade beer and homemade cheese with caraway seeds.

Internet research:



Jāņi (John) cheese is a Latvian sour milk cheese, traditionally eaten on Jāņi, the Latvian celebration of the summer solstice. Its basic ingredients are raw quark and fresh milk, but other products may be used as well. Traditionally, caraway seeds are added during cooking as a spice

Inara Abolins: [00:27:48] And all the 'Johns' wear wreaths or crowns of oak leaves. That's the tradition for the men because it's St. John's Day and you know Oak is a strong, strong tree - manly.

Judy Caine: [00:28:07] Ah, they do that in England too the May day celebrations - the 'Green Man'.

Inta Batsman: [00:28:12] Of course, absolutely yes, it's very similar to that.

Inara Abolins: [00:28:12] And again the girls, at midsummer, have flower wreaths or crowns or whatever they're called.



Inta Batsman: [00:28:21] Yes indeed. And then there's competitions of jumping over the bonfires ...

Judy Caine: [00:28:25] ... jumping over?

Inta Batsman: [00:28:28] Over the bonfire yes.

Judy Caine: [00:28:29] Small one, I hope.

Inara Abolins: [00:28:30] Well yes, it varies, and it depends how much beer they've had.

Inta Batsman: [00:28:41] And of course there's also a lovely, lovely legend about the Fern. The Fern only flowers once a year and that is on the night of the 23rd to the 24th.

Judy Caine: [00:28:50] A Fern?

Inara Abolins: [00:28:51] Yes.

Judy Caine: [00:28:51] I didn't know Fern's flowered?

Inta Batsman: [00:28:51] Well, there you are, only that one night (laughs) and of course to go and look for that flower, it's normally a young lady and a young man who go looking for that flower. So, let's just say that there's normally a population explosion in March. (all laugh).

Inara Abolins: [00:29:12] And, you must not go to bed on an on Midsummer Night because otherwise you won't see the sun rising up in the morning and you will sleep all summer.

Inta Batsman: [00:29:26] Yes.

Judy Caine: [00:29:28] Wow. Gosh, Summer Solstice celebrated in style, indeed. Makes Stonehenge look a little boring.

Inta Batsman: [00:29:33] Well it is a Pagan festival. But I mean, I remember my father saying, and again it was, it was a reason to have a break from the farm work, my father grew up on a farm. And he said you know on the 23rd they would make flower wreaths for the cows even.

Inara Abolins: [00:29:54] Oh yes. Cows.

Inta Batsman: [00:29:55] We put them on the cows you know. And it was just such a celebration you know, and obviously then they would go and enjoy their home brewed beer and you know. would have a day off.

Judy Caine: [00:30:06] Is there a national flower?

Inta Batsman: [00:30:08] I believe there is, but I don't know, I don't think I could tell you what it is. You'll have to Google it.

Internet research:



The **Pipene or Daisy** (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) known in the UK as the Oxeye Daisy, is the **national flower of Latvia**. Pipenes or Daisies, the attractive white flowers are scented and waxy and grow in the wild. In Latvian conditions, the common or wild daisy blossoms from June till September. Daisies are a very popular flower and are often used in flower arrangements or given as gifts.

Inara Abolins: [00:30:13] Probably a cornflower maybe.

Inta Batsman: [00:30:15] Maybe a cornflower?

Judy Caine: [00:30:17] I just wondered because you talked about the garlands and I just wondered if they must have poppies in or they must have whatever ...?

Inta Batsman: [00:30:19] Yes. I mean there's certain traditions. Of late I've seen it, like that they say they say you must have cornflowers for this, and Rosemary for this, and what have you. But I don't think is really, you know, it's what's available really.

Inara Abolins: [00:30:36] I think so yes.

Judy Caine: [00:30:38] If I mentioned drink and food in passing, is there a traditional feast for midsummer, that you always have pork or you always have X Y Z, or there's always a cake made? Are there any food traditions associated with midsummer or Christmas or is there a national dish you can tell me about?

Inara Abolins: [00:30:58] Well I think any like Christmas or Easter there are certain things which are traditional like Piragi, which is a yeast dough with bacon and onions. I mean, normally whenever there is a celebration of some sort. There will be Piragi wouldn't there.

Inta Batsman: [00:31:18] There would be yeah.

Inara Abolins: [00:31:19] And another tradition is Galerts, which is pork in aspic, which you absolutely hate.

Inta Batsman: [00:31:26] Yes. Yes.

Judy Caine: [00:31:28] In aspic, that's quite sweet isn't it?

Inara Abolins: [00:31:31] No, no, no, well gelatine, yes.

Judy Caine: [00:31:33] Oh yes of course.

Inara Abolins: [00:31:34] Gelatine yes. But yes, but that is traditional.

Inta Batsman: [00:31:40] But you know for midsummer I think it just ...

Inara Abolins: [00:31:42] No, for midsummer it's really just cheese and beer.

Judy Caine: [00:31:46] What sort of cheese? Goat's cheese, cows' cheese?

Inara Abolins: [00:31:49] No, generally it was cheese that was made at home.

Inta Batsman: [00:31:53] Basically it's just a big yellowy cheese. Not an awful lot of flavour to is, slightly salty.

Inara Abolins: [00:31:59] Cows' milk, yes.

Judy Caine: [00:31:59] So quite a soft cheese then?

Inta Batsman: [00:32:01] Yeah, it's sliceable, but ...

Inara Abolins: [00:32:03] Difficult to make it in this country because of course all the milk is pasteurized ...

Judy Caine: [00:32:09] Oh yes, it's really hard. There is one place I know of, not far from here actually on the Lutterworth road towards Boughton Ashby, there is a farm and you can buy unpasteurized milk.

Inara Abolins: [00:32:19] Then you could actually, yes, you could actually easily.



Piragi

Inta Batsman: [00:32:25] Worth remembering. And then I think again for Christmas time it's gingerbread cookies, that's very traditional ...

Inara Abolins: [00:32:30] Oh, yes, it is, but then that also is in a lot of the North European countries.

Judy Caine: [00:32:49] What about drink. What's the national drink in Latvia?

Inta Batsman: [00:32:54] Well I think beer is very popular. Again, since Latvian independence there have been an awful lot of micro-breweries that have sprung up again. Especially sort of like a light lager beer, absolutely fantastic.

Inara Abolins: [00:33:07] And you can get it all in the Polish shops here now.



Inta Batsman: [00:33:11] Vodka is also a traditional, often brewed at home. 'Stolichnaya' is actually Latvian.

Judy Caine: [00:33:20] What's actually Latvian?

Inta Batsman: [00:33:21] 'Stolichnaya', although it's always been marketed as a Russian premium vodka, it's actually Latvian. (Writes the name down for Judy).

Inara Abolins: [00:33:29] And then there is a special drink called the Riga Black Balzams.

Inta Batsman: [00:33:36] Of course. Yeah.

Inara Abolins: [00:33:38] And that is made from I don't know how many different herbs and the recipe is unknown. Nobody will give the secret away, it's a secret recipe, and it's absolutely dark black. On its own it's horrible, it's very bitter. But if one has an upset stomach or something or even a hangover it's absolutely marvellous stuff, absolutely lovely stuff. But we don't like it as it is, straight. No, we mix it with the vodka or with fruit syrup and then it's like a nice liqueur.

Inta Batsman: [00:34:20] But again during the Soviet occupation my grandmother would send great big vats to my father who has a stomach ulcer, you know, and uh we got it through customs a few times saying it was medicine and then unfortunately customs measured the alcoholic content and said "Oh, no it's not!".

Judy Caine: [00:34:37] What is this alcoholic content?

Inara Abolins: [00:34:39] 40%, I think it is quite high.

Judy Caine: [00:34:43] Well, it could still be medicine, just because it's got alcohol in it, I mean come on? (All laugh)

There's another drink I'd like to ask you about I don't know what it's called, and again it was this wonderful elderly gentleman who I was just chatting to on the tube, and he was telling me about fermented milk?

Inta Batsman: [00:35:02] Oh. So that will be more like Kefirs.

Inara Abolins: [00:35:03] Kefirs, is very fashionable here now.

Inta Batsman: [00:35:08] It is now, it's becoming very popular.

Inara Abolins: [00:35:09] In all supermarkets you can get a type of Kefirs, it's not quite, quite the authentic ...

Inta Batsman: [00:35:17] ... it's like a gloopy milk ...

Inara Abolins: [00:35:21] ...yes, it's like a sort of milk that's gone off bit. (Inara goes off to get Judy some to taste).

Judy Caine: [00:35:22] Is it cows' milk, goats' milk?

Inta Batsman: [00:35:22] Cows, and as Mum says that's becoming very fashionable now. I think it is because of Poles and Slovaks and they all know a version of it.

Judy Caine: [00:35:41] And what's it called again?

Inta Batsman: [00:35:43] Kefirs - K.E.F.I.R.S.

Judy Caine: [00:35:53] OK, what have I forgotten. I mean we could talk all day.

Inta Batsman: [00:35:57] Absolutely.

Judy Caine: [00:35:57] But, in just a sort of an hour encapsulation of all things cultural. We've touched briefly on some of the songs, some of the traditions. Is there a folk song that you all sing at the beginning of something or at the end of something? The reason I ask this is at this Latvian weekend we're doing which, unfortunately you're not going to be able to come to, I'd like to, if there is a song you always start a celebration with or finish with, I'd like that to be one of the songs that the choir.

Inta Batsman: [00:36:31] In which case it needs to Put Vejeini. That's often the last one that's done - the one we sang for you. That's definitely one and it is one that would normally be sung at the end. Especially like at the end of the song festival, then the audience join in and everybody sings it together.

Judy Caine: [00:36:48] So that would be very appropriate.

Inta Batsman: [00:36:49] Indeed.

Judy Caine: [00:36:50] Sounds wonderful.

[00:36:53] And do you have a national anthem that you now sing?

Inta Batsman: [00:36:55] We do. Yes absolutely. Absolutely. God Bless Latvia.

Internet research:

Inta sent the music and translation of words from internet:

LATVIJAS VALSTS HIMNA

Dievs, svētī Latviju!

Baumapu Kārlis
(1835 - 1905),
mūzika un vārdi

Maestoso ♩ = 69

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass

Dievs, svē - ti Lat - vi - ju, mūs' dār - go tē - vi - ju,
svē - ti jel Lat - vi - ju, ak, svē - ti jel to! to!
Kur lat - vju mei - tas zied, kur lat - vju dē - li dzied, laid mums tur
lai - mē diet, mūs' Lat - vi - jā! Lat - vi - jā!

Dievs, svētī Latviju,
Mūs' dārgo tēviju,
Svētī jel Latviju,
Ak, svētī jel to!

God bless Latvia,
Our beloved fatherland,
Do bless Latvia,
Oh, do bless it!

Kur latvju meitas zied,
Kur latvju dēli dzied,
Laid mums tur laimē diet,
Mūs' Latvijā!

Where the Latvian daughters bloom,
Where the Latvian sons sing,
Let us dance in happiness there.
In our Latvia!

Judy Caine: [00:36:59] God Bless Latvia, and that presumably you couldn't sing when the Russians were occupying so that's when you sang this one [Put Vejeini] instead?

Inta Batsman: [00:37:05] Indeed.

Judy Caine: [00:37:05] So that sort of became an unofficial National Anthem did it?

Inta Batsman: [00:37:08] Exactly.

Judy Caine: [00:37:09] Okay. Oh my gosh - Inara hands Judy some Kefirs to try. Oh, it's rather like buttermilk!

Inara Abolins: [00:37:19] It is, yes, but a bit thicker than buttermilk.

Inta Batsman: [00:37:24] Yeah.

Judy Caine: [00:37:25] Hmm, I could drink large quantities of that!

Inta Batsman: [00:37:25] Could you, I find it a bit of a challenge! But er.

Judy Caine: [00:37:29] No that's, well I was brought up on a farm and I never had a pasteurized milk, we made our own butter, own cheese, own cream, everything. Thank you, whatever the equivalent of cheers is?

Inta Batsman: [00:37:40] Prieka! (in happiness)

Judy Caine: [00:37:40] Prieka! Thank you, that's nice. So, what was the national anthem of Latvia called.

Inta Batsman: [00:37:54] Dievs, Sveti Latviju , which is 'God Bless Latvia' basically.

Judy Caine: [00:37:55] Are you up to singing a verse of that?

Judy Caine: [00:37:55] We can do that, can't we ...

Inara Abolins: [00:37:55] ... yeah.

Judy Caine: [00:37:55] That would be lovely, thank you.

[00:37:55] Inta and Inara sing.

Inta Batsman: [00:38:40] It's a shortened version of course.

Judy Caine: [00:38:41] Bravo, thank you very much.

Judy Caine: [00:38:47] What else would you like to tell me about?

Inta Batsman: [00:38:49] What else can we tell you about?

Inara Abolins: [00:38:52] Talking about the drinks, there is another one called Rugusbienis, which again is unpasteurized milk which, when it does go off a bit, it forms little sort of almost lumps. We've never had Rugusbienis anyway and that is a very healthy drink again. And then in the spring the silver birch trees are tapped for their sap, which looks like water. I don't know how you make the hole actually, but again you've got to know how to do it and you put a tap in and a bucket and it just drips, drips, drips and that is a very refreshing drink.

Judy Caine: [00:39:40] You can drink it?

Inara Abolins: [00:39:41] Yes you can drink it. Yes.

Inta Batsman: [00:39:42] That's becoming quite popular as well, I think Sainsbury's do something.

Judy Caine: [00:39:51] Oh, it sounds much more romantic going into a Latvian Forest and tapping the tree, never mind Sainsbury's. Really! You've ruined my vision there. Thank you very much. What's is supposed to be good for. Does it have medicinal health qualities?

Inta Batsman: [00:40:07] Oh I think so just ...

Inara Abolins: [00:40:07] ... it's just really a refreshing drink really. Especially in the summer you know when people kept it in cellars and so forth where it was very cold, and it was just a very refreshing drink.

Judy Caine: [00:40:22] What about the younger Latvians, your choir, do you have many younger members, are there many younger people who are interested?

Inta Batsman: [00:40:30] Yeah, we do. I think the younger ones that have come over from Latvia, I think our youngest is what mid-twenties (brief discussion with Inara and established there is one young lady who is 17 but mostly mid-twenties are the younger age).

Judy Caine: [00:40:45] You don't have to answer this, and it may not be easy to answer. The younger people who came from Latvia, the second wave of Latvians, who came after 2004 when the borders opened. Is there a big difference between those people who came over and the people who came over in the 40s?

The reason I ask this is people like yourself who came over here via refugee camps had been in effect escaping, you had to come out, and you weren't under Russian rule until they took over in the Second World War again. But the younger people who've come over in 2004 for different reasons economic reasons, they were under communist rule for a long time, and I just wonder if there's a difference.

Inta Batsman: [00:41:47] Yes, I think, I think there is and there is a different attitude, and like you say they're here for different reasons but in actual fact a lot of the time that's the whole point. Like with the choir that unites us that you know we want to be there to sing and to be with Latvians and do Latvian things.

Inara Abolins: [00:42:04] And they have shown that they do need it and that they want to come and sing because initially I think when they first came over, they were obviously earning money and they didn't look for anything else. They were anxious to earn. But now when they've been here you know a few years and they start looking around to see is there a Latvian choir or is there a Latvian folk dancing group and they join.

Inta Batsman: [00:42:28] And then that's what unites us, you know, then you don't find much difference actually. And that's how all the Latvian schools as well, I mean, I went to a Latvian Sunday school as a child in London. That one is still going strong. There's been various ones up and down the country who have ceased being. And now, you know, new schools are opening up because there are more pockets of communities, to educate their children.

Judy Caine: [00:42:55] Yes. I'm hoping to speak to Miks [runs the Latvian Supplementary School at Catthorpe Manor], next week.

Inara Abolins: [00:42:58] Oh yes. It's one of the new arrivals. Yeah.

Judy Caine: [00:43:01] He runs the Sunday school?

Inara Abolins: [00:43:01] Yeah, yes, he does and he's also the Welfare Fund, the Straumeni Welfare Fund Chairman.

Inta Batsman: [00:43:14] And you know, the whole point is, if it wasn't for these guys who've come in, a lot of things would've ceased being you know. Because unfortunately a lot of my generation has been lost to the UK and they don't want to take part in Latvian stuff you know. So, obviously, you know, my parents' generation is unfortunately dying out. So, you know, thank goodness that we have got some fresh blood.

Inara Abolins: [00:43:36] That's right. And that's what fantastic.

Judy Caine: [00:43:40] Well I have asked all of the questions I wanted to ask. Is there anything else you wanted to tell me?

Inara Abolins: [00:43:46] I can't think of anything really and truly. I think we've practically covered it.

Inta Batsman: [00:43:53] Yeah, I think so.

Judy Caine: [00:43:53] Well, thank you very much. Judy Ends Interview.

