

Background on the “Fragility of Goodness” concert, February 29 – March 1, 2020
(from the Vox Musica website, www.voxmusica.net)

Music from Bulgaria

When we talk about Bulgaria, we must know that in this small country, located on the Balkan Peninsula in Southeastern Europe, live brave, intelligent and spiritual people who have had a long history of glory and poverty and who have survived centuries of slavery and oppression. Formed as a country in 681 AD Bulgaria was once one of the most powerful countries in the Balkans. In the Middle Ages it had the most glorious period in its history under Tsar Simeon I when the development of literature, arts, and music reached its peak. A period of almost five hundred years of captivity in the Ottoman Empire ruined the Bulgarian cultural and intellectual life. Only Christian monasteries and isolated mountain villages preserved the Bulgarian national values such as the Old Bulgarian literature, church music, folk customs and unique handmade arts.

The wealth of the Bulgarian national folk tradition comes not only from the folk songs but also from the variety of folk dances and folk instruments. The Bulgarian folk song reflects the history and lifestyle of the Bulgarians. It expresses the spirit, soul and emotions of the peoples and the beauty of the Bulgarian landscape. With its simple but extremely expressive musical language, and easy to sing and remember melodies, the folk songs become a part of people’s lives and join every important event in the community. The songs represent not only the ostensible forms of customs or pagan religious beliefs, but they also give the impression of a rich spiritual world, of the musical and poetic talent of the Bulgarians, and of their expansive creative imagination.

Music from Georgia

Georgia has a rich vibrant traditional music. Situated on the border of Europe and Asia, Georgia is also the home of a variety of urban singing styles with a mixture of native polyphony, Middle Eastern monophony and late European harmonic languages. The most distinctive feature of Georgian folk song is that it is polyphonic in its original folk context. Scholars believe Georgian folk song has been polyphonic for many centuries, perhaps even for a millennium or more. The vast majority of these songs are in three voice parts. Georgians are proud of their traditional polyphony, designated by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

Georgian polyphony takes a wide variety of forms and regional varieties. Some songs use ornamented upper parts over a drone bass (e. g. Ts’int’sqaro): these songs are most prevalent in the eastern part of the country. Some polyphony is completely independent, with the three parts singing different melody, rhythm and text at the same time (e. g. Perad shindi): these are typical of the region of Guria in western Georgia. Other songs are homophonic, with text in all three parts generally moving at the same time (e. g. Mok’le shemodzakhili).

The homophonic approach is generally used in Georgian Orthodox liturgical music, a very rich and long-standing musical tradition now being revitalized in churches across Georgia. Like folk songs from the rest of the world, Georgian songs are traditionally connected with events of daily life. There are work songs, laments, lullabies, songs about historical events or figures, ritual songs, healing songs, traveling songs, comic and dance songs. Table songs are a particularly important genre, with the tradition of the supra (feast) with an elaborate series of toasts and songs occupying a central position in Georgian traditional culture.