

A CENTURY OF COLLECTING AND PRESERVING ESTONIAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC

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Introduction

Why does the title of this article mention “a century”? The answer is that, in 1903, Oskar Kallas published the following in the local news column of *Postimees*, Estonia’s biggest daily newspaper: “We hear that Estonian music lovers are stating a resolve to revive the collecting of Estonian folk tunes. In the coming summer they aim to send out a couple of young musicians—at the eleventh hour—who will write down what the people have maintained till today. It is hoped that there will be collaboration from people, though helping is not as easy here as, for example, in collecting fairy-tales, since the musical alphabet is not as well known as that of letters”.¹ Thus a full century has passed between the time that systematic research into Estonian folk tunes began, and the present day. For a small nation, this has been a long time. This article therefore aims to address the following questions:

- What has the century 1903–2003 been like for Estonian folk music?
- What was known, and to what extent was folk music recorded, prior to that time?
- To what extent are we able to collect folk music and related material today?

Although folk songs and folk tunes had been recorded in earlier times, it was in the eighteenth century that Europe “discovered” folklore as something created by its exotic, smaller nations and lower social strata, thanks to the teachings of the Enlightenment and the romanticists Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried von Herder.² According to these teachings, only people and strata unspoiled by society were capable of creating and, without pretence, of

1. Ülo Tedre. Oskar Kallas folkloristina [Oskar Kallas as a Folklorist], *Oskar Kallas: Artikleid Oskar Kallase elust ja tööst* [Oskar Kallas: Articles about Oskar Kallas’s Life and Works]. Compiled by Krista Aru, edited by Sirje Olesk. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, 1998, 131–188 (here p. 159).

2. Vaike Sarv. Ideest teostuseni: paar aspekti eesti rahvaviisi kogumistööd [From the Idea to its Accomplishment: Some Aspects of Collecting Estonian Folk Melodies], *Paar sammukest XVIII. Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi aastaraamat* [Some Small Steps XVIII. Yearbook of the Estonian Literary Museum]. Edited by Luule Krikmann, Mare Kõiva, Kristi Salve. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, 2001, 151–63 (here p. 151).

perceiving true beauty and art. This concept of idealising common people and their past was a major influence on the emergence of the national awareness of many nations, with a special place reserved for their ancient history and folklore (including traditional music). According to Estonian humanitarian scientists such as Jaan Undusk and others, the influence of Rousseau, and especially Herder, has also been hugely important in the national awareness of Estonian culture.³ Incidentally, the “Volkslieder” folksong anthology published in 1778–79 by J. G. Herder, and which is more commonly known under the title of its second edition of 1807, *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, includes among the folksongs from other nations seven Estonian folksongs in German translation, noted down by the German writer August Wilhelm Hupel. Herder’s concept of folksong reached the first nationalist-educated Estonians (F. R. Faehlmann and Fr. R. Kreutzwald) in the 1830s. Just as happened in many other nations, Estonians used their past and their mental creativity to serve the national movement.

The Collecting of Folklore as Part of the National Movement

Widespread collecting of our own folklore (originally defined using a word that translates as “old heritage”) began in Estonia in 1888 under the leadership of a priest and linguist, Jakob Hurt (1839–1907). In that year he published in newspapers an appeal entitled *Paar palvid Eesti ärksamaile poegadele ja tütardele* [Two requests to the more energetic sons and daughters of Estonia]. The literate folk, carried away by national enthusiasm and having been newspaper readers since the middle of the century, heeded this call and turned Hurt’s appeal into a grand folklore collection exercise, participated in by more than 1,400 people and leading to the writing down of more than 122,000 pages, or 260,000 items, of folklore. Hurt foresaw as a future project the publishing of all collected folklore, which he divided into six broad genres: (1) the old *kannel*⁴ or folk songs; (2) ancient wisdom (proverbs, sayings, and so on); (3) old beliefs; (4) old stories; (5) old customs; and (6) folk tunes. He did not consider himself competent in folk tunes, so did not include them in his collecting instructions. However, while material collected under his guidance is not considered a collection rich in tunes, there are 222 folk tunes from thirty-two collectors among it.⁵ The collectors were mainly teachers and parish clerks, along with some students or educated farmers who had received some teaching in notation and had practised this skill in the local brass band. Two-thirds of Hurt’s collectors sent in one or two tunes with their other material. Some single collectors recorded twenty or more tunes, for example the medical student Hans Lohk (twenty-eight song tunes), the farmer Mihkel Aitsam (thirty-eight instrumental pieces for violin and pipes), and forty-eight from brass band

3. Sarv. *Ideest teostuseni*, 153.

4. The Estonian word for “zither”.

5. Anu Vissel. *Viisid Jakob Hurda kogudes* [Folk Tunes in Jakob Hurt’s Collection. Manuscript], Lecture at the Folklore Section of Estonian Mother Tongue Society, Tartu, March 30, 1989, p. 3. Manuscript in possession of the author.

member Mart Kielas. Notated music was mostly received from the well-off Viljandimaa county in South Estonia, since this county eagerly participated in the national movement. There was also material from western and north-western Estonia, and less from the southern Tartu county. At least twenty-three tunes have been published in folk song publications.⁶

In the same year (1888), Hurt's example was followed by an appeal to note down folk tunes (*Tähtjas palve ja soov* [A plea and wish of importance]) from the journalist, linguist, poet and composer Karl August Hermann (1851–1909).⁷ During the decade that followed he received 2,500 folk tunes from correspondents. These people were members of the rural intelligentsia who had received a modest musical education. Hermann's collection, however, is of relatively little use since it includes a number of authored songs and is lacking in metadata.

The majority of Estonian folk tunes recorded in the nineteenth century carry the seal of a "journeyman's masterpiece" due to a lack of musical literacy among collectors as well as instructors who were well versed in the methodology of collecting folk tunes. In addition to the work of these collectors, tunes were also recorded by professional musicians, for example by the first Estonian female composer Miina Härma, who collected folk tunes while on a scholarship from the Finnish Literary Society in 1894–95. In 1877 Estonian folk music was noted down by the folklorist Aukusti Axel Lähteenkorva (Borenus) who had had a tertiary-level musical education. On his long collection route (covering Võrumaa, Setumaa and Virumaa) he recorded more than 200 folk tunes.⁸

The Beginning of the Systematic Collection of Folk Tunes

Professional collecting of folk tunes started in Estonia only at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was organised by the first doctor of folklore, folklorist and later diplomat of the Estonian Republic, Oskar Kallas (1868–1946). He had the idea of organising a great collecting of folk tunes with the help of Estonian students of Tartu University and of the St Petersburg Conservatory. To cover their travel expenses, events (balls, parties, concerts, auctions) were organised, with the gains transferred to the Folk Tunes Committee of the Estonian Student Society. Collectors were dispatched in pairs, with one person entrusted to record the texts of folk songs and the other the tunes. The collectors were sent first and foremost to regions where few or no tunes had been recorded. To do this they employed the experience of the Finnish folk tune collection campaign (Ilmari Krohn, Armas Launis). The rally for collecting folk tunes took place in 1904–14 and resulted in more than 13,139 folk tunes being

6. Vissel. *Viisid Jakob Hurda kogudes*, 2–4.

7. As a composer Hermann mostly wrote four-voice choral pieces based on Estonian folk tunes. See Udo Kolk. *Eesti rahvamuusika kogumisest* [On the Collecting of the Estonian Folk Music], presented as a lecture at the University of Tartu during the 1990s. The manuscript of the lecture is in the Estonian Literary Museum.

8. Udo Kolk. *Eesti rahvamuusika kogumisest* [On the Collecting of the Estonian Folk Music], presented as a lecture at the University of Tartu during the 1990s, p. 7. The manuscript of the lecture is in the Estonian Literary Museum.

recorded. The expeditions covered nearly all of Estonia (ninety-three parishes and Setumaa out of the total of 105 parishes).⁹ According to Kallas, this work was accomplished by 36 musicians and 38 text writers in 12 years.¹⁰ Most of the tunes were recorded by Peeter Süda, Peeter Penna, Mihkel Pehka, Cyrillus Kreek and Karl Viljak. The expeditions were mostly timed to fall before the hay-making season, since that was vacation time for the collectors. The collectors included also many sponsors of collecting work, such as Karl August Hermann and Aleksander Sprenk-Läte. Many future composers participated in the collecting when they were students: among them were Mart Saar, Juhan Aavik, Peeter Süda, Juhan Sikk, August Kiiss and Cyrillus Kreek. The most prolific collector of folk tunes was a teacher of mathematics and music at the Treffner Gymnasium, Karl Viljak, who on his three collecting expeditions to North Estonia recorded 707 tunes. His by-ear transcriptions are characterised by a phenomenal accuracy: all variations in the tune have been marked down, with regard to relation of tune emphasis and word emphasis, with additional remarks on the singer's performing style and (typological) relations between songs, not to mention the performer's comments.¹¹ The collecting of folk tunes ended in 1916 due to the First World War and consequent restrictions on movement.

In 1912, the first audio recordings of Estonian folk music appeared. They were made by a Helsinki University student of music and philology, Armas Otto Väisänen (1890–1969). Of his eighteen collecting expeditions, six were to Estonia.¹² In Estonia he recorded folk tunes mainly in Võrumaa and Setumaa.¹³ In 1912–14 and 1922 Armas Otto Väisänen recorded 1,580 Estonian folk tunes and instrumental pieces, and took more than 200 photos.¹⁴ The first Estonian phonographer of folk tunes was Cyrillus Kreek in 1914.¹⁵

Thus ends the period when folk tunes are collected on someone's personal initiative. The collecting events described next were based on institutional initiatives.

9. Tedre. Oskar Kallas folkloristina, 176.

10. Oskar Kallas. Virolaisten kansansävelmään keräyksestä [On the Collecting of Estonian Folk Melodies], *Kalevalaseuran Vuosikirja 1* [Yearbook of the Kalevala Society, 1]. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1921, 122.

11. Anu Vissel. ERA rahvaviisikartoteek uurimismaterjali lähtena [The Folk Music Card File as the First Step of the Research], *Kogumisest uurimiseni: artikleid Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiivi 75. aastapäevaks* [From collecting to research: articles for the 75th Anniversary of the Estonian Folklore Archives]. Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiivi Toimetused 10 [Commentationes Archivi Traditionum Popularium Estoniae, 10]. Compiled by Mall Hiemäe, edited by Mall Hiemäe, Kanni Labi. Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv, 2002, 191–203 (here p. 194).

12. Erkki Pekkilä. Hiljainen haltioituminen: A. O. Väisänen tutkielmia kansanmusiikista [The Silent Exaltation: A. O. Väisänen's Studies on Folk Music], *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 527*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1990, 11.

13. In the process of collecting he learned the Setu dialect, and even published articles in it.

14. Tedre. Oskar Kallas folkloristina, 173.

15. Vaike Sarv. Rahvaviiside kogumisest Eestis 19. sajandi lõpus ja 20. sajandi alguses [Collecting Folk Melodies in Estonia at the End of the 19th and Beginning of 20th Century], *Rahvuslikkuse idee ja eesti muusika 20. sajandi algupool* [Idea of Nationalism and Estonian Music in the Early 20th Century]. Compiled by Urve Lippus. Eesti Muusikaloo Toimetised 6 [Publications in Estonian Music History, 6]. Tallinn: Eesti Keele Sihtasutus, 2002, 270–315 (here p. 286).



FIGURE 1. Oskar Kallas.

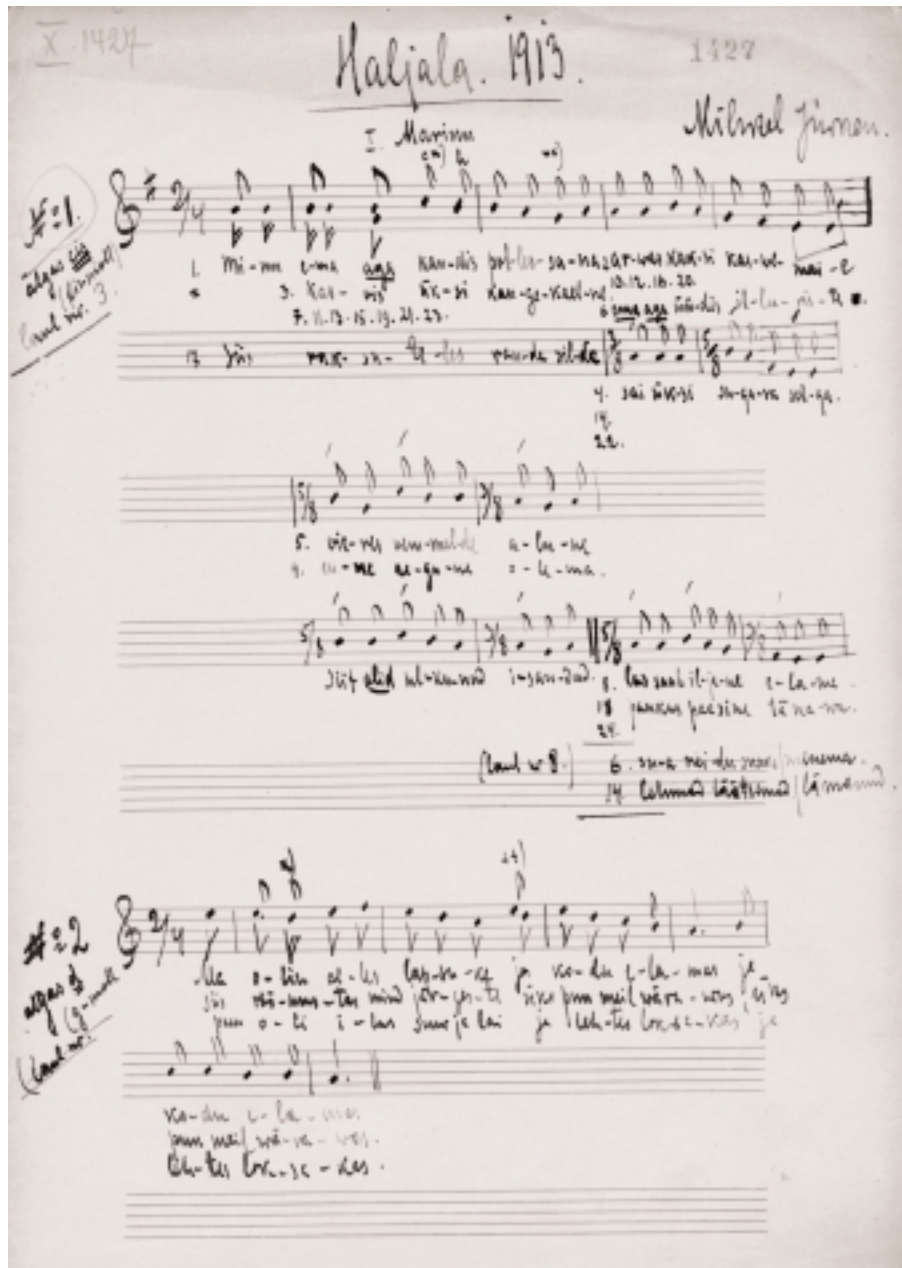


FIGURE 2. Karl Viljak's notations.

Systematic Collecting of Estonian Folk Tunes on the Initiative of Archives: the Period prior to the Second World War

In 1927, the Estonian Folklore Archives [EFA] was founded by the Estonian National Museum as the central folklore archive and research institution of Estonia.¹⁶ From Helsinki were received several Estonian collections of folk melodies and other material. While establishing the archive, the best European archives, especially those of northern Europe, were taken as models. Oskar Loorits, the first director of EFA as well as founder of its internal structure, was greatly helped by Prof. Walter Anderson of Tartu University who was also the chairman of the Archive Board. He had personally visited the world's major folklore archives.¹⁷

From the establishment of the archive, the aim was to arrange and systematise the material so that it would be easy to find the relevant material from no matter which angle. A comprehensive system of indices and card files was soon established. Students and other qualified personnel were used to set up this system.¹⁸ The same system was still in use at the time computers appeared in our work in the early 1990s. This way of working applies also to folk music material, and several generations of researchers have poured their efforts into the effective classification of folk music. It may seem curious, but at the time the EFA was established the first systematic classification of runo songs was already in existence.¹⁹ This had been done by the Finnish musicologist and composer Armas Launis, who had systematised Estonian folk tunes in his dissertation *Art, Entstehung und Verbreitung der estnischen-finnischen Runenmelodien* (1913). This classification²⁰ was based on the classical musical features of 2,700 runo tunes, and thus did not take into account the peculiarities of folk music or convey sufficient information (type, performer, fond reference, time of recording, etc.) on the folk tunes themselves. It was from this basis that Herbert Tampere (1909–77) began his work with Estonian runo tunes. One of his jobs was copying Estonian runo tunes and instrumental pieces to card files and classifying them by adapting Launis's system to folk music. One innovation was the division of runo tunes into two styles—the older, or recitative, and newer, or more song-like style. Older recitative folk tunes include tunes with the ambitus of a third or a fourth, while more song-like folk tunes have an ambitus of a fifth or more. Unlike Launis, Tampere did not divide the tunes' card file into five melody types, but categorised them on the basis of a hierarchy of

16. Jaan Tamm. Contemporary Developments at the Estonian Folklore Archives' Sound Collections, *Music Archiving in the World*. Paper Presented at the Conference on the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv. Edited by Gabriele Berlin and Artur Simon. VWB – Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 2002, 453–457 (here p. 453).

17. Anu Vissel. The Estonian Folklore Archives and the Folklore Movement in Contemporary Estonia, *Proceedings of the Workshop and Conference on Regional Audio-Visual Archives*. AVA – 90. Dalarna Research Council. Falun, Sweden July 5–11, 1990, 161–167 (here p. 162).

18. Anu Vissel. The Estonian Folklore Archives and the Folklore Movement in Contemporary Estonia (here p. 162).

19. Vissel. ERA rahvaviisikartoteek, 197.

20. Launis's research was published under the title *Eesti runoviisid* [Estonian Runic Tunes] in 1930.

single musical features.²¹ Tampere grouped runo song tunes according to their function, such as work tunes, (calendar and family) ritual, children's game, lyric and lyric-epic songs. Additionally, the tunes are subdivided into, for example, "tunes of work songs: herding, harvest and other tunes". In the musical classification he has used Launis's system (tune form, its relation to song text, scale, etc.). Tampere represented an ethnological branch of research that required an ethnomusicologist to use a systematic approach to folk songs, to study both their musical and textual aspects and their performance styles in various interrelations.²² He employed the same principle in collecting folklore and music in the pre-war period as well as after the Second World War until the end of his life.

Folk tunes were also being collected in Tallinn. In the 1930s, the leader in this activity was the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum (TMM).²³ One of its founders and heads was August Pulst, a painter *cum* musician. In the final years of the Estonian Republic, 1936–38, Pulst and Tampere carried out the recording of Estonian folk tunes in Tallinn. They invited singers and musicians from all over Estonia, and in addition to Estonians they recorded Izhorian and Livonian singers. Altogether more than 700 songs and instrumental pieces were recorded onto disc.

The Collecting and Maintaining of Traditional Music in the Soviet Period

Soviet occupation and war disrupted the former organisation of life and work. Many folklorists emigrated, while some were jailed for a short time, accused of bourgeois nationalism. In time, repression and other pressures eased, and the collecting of and research into Estonian traditional music continued with both older, experienced collectors (such as Tampere) and younger people such as Ingrid Rüütel, Udo Kolk, Anatoli Garšnek and many others. Folk music as a field of science not relevant to Soviet ideology did not suffer under the same pressure as did, for example, folk belief. Tartu remained the centre for research into and collecting of folk music. The EFA was renamed the Folklore Department of the Literary Museum. Folk music was also collected by the Chair of Estonian Literature and Folklore at Tartu University. Each year, folklorists of the Literary Museum undertook expeditions to collect folklore and folk music, work that was greatly helped by new technical advances. In 1953 the tape recorder came into use, in 1956 the film camera, and in 1988 the video camera. From that time, folk tunes did not need to be written down only as aural transcriptions. However, in the beginning only the best singers and

21. Anu Vissel. ERA rahvaviisikartoteek, 199.

22. Ingrid Rüütel. Herbert Tampere elust ja muusikalisest tegevusest [Herbert Tampere's Life and Musical Activities], *Muusikalisi lehekülgi* IV [Musical Pages IV]. Compiled by Ene Taru. Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1987, 121–131 (here p. 127).

23. Udo Kolk. *Eesti rahvamuusika kogumisest* [On the Collecting of the Estonian Folk Music], presented as a lecture at the University of Tartu during the 1990s. The manuscript of the lecture is in the Estonian Literary Museum, p. 7.



FIGURE 3. Herbert Tampere and August Pulst recording Estonian Folk Singers and Musicians at the end of the 1930s.

musicians were recorded, and only instrumental pieces were saved on tape. Later, so-called “academic taping” was abandoned, and the tape also caught contextual information. Folk music was collected not only by professional folklorists, but also by students at Tartu University and the Tallinn Conservatory, and, to a lesser extent, by voluntary archive collaborators. The runo tune card file was supplemented by a card file for newer, rhymed folk song melodies. The tunes of newer folk songs were systematised by Ingrid Rüütel in the preparatory works for her dissertation.²⁴ The EFA also became the central archive for folk music of Finno-Ugric peoples of the Soviet Union who did not have their own folklore archive. For decades, this work was led by Ingrid Rüütel.

In 1978, a department of folk music was established within the Institute of the Estonian Language. Ingrid Rüütel became head of this new department. The department maintained a close connection with the archive, although its priorities lay in publishing and researching folk music. Closest attention was paid to regions where the old folk song had been best maintained: in the Setu region (investigated by Sarv), Kihnu Island (Rüütel, Vissel) and some of their neighbouring parishes. The department did not establish its own archive but continually submitted materials collected to the EFA. At the end of the 1970s,

24. Rüütel, *Eesti uuema rahvalaulu kujunemine* [Emergence of the newer Estonian Folk Song]. Tartu, 1970.

the systematics of runo tunes became the field of research for Ingrid Rüütel. To replace the former classification she aimed to compile a typology of runo tunes. This work is supplemented by an electronic database of notations, of both by-ear and (selectively) recorded songs (Rüütel, Haugas 1990). From the middle of the 1990s the research focus has been on acoustic studies (Taive Särg, Triinu Ojamaa) and Samoyedic music (Triinu Ojamaa). Today, this structural unit is known as the Ethnomusicology Department of the Estonian Literary Museum.

The Work Continues

The role of the EFA as the central archive of Estonian folklore has been maintained up to the present day, and the folklore of kindred peoples and ethnic minorities in Estonia has been collected throughout the years as well. The EFA folklore collections today include the material, including sound recordings, collected by all and any institutions related to folklore. Its collections grow significantly every year. At the beginning of 2000 the EFA contained twenty-three folklore collections in manuscript totalling 1,328,308 pages, a photo collection of 19,013 photographs and a sound archive including 108,077 individual pieces and 264 video tapes and films. Since the 1950s the archives have employed at least one permanent technical engineer whose responsibilities include the maintenance of the sound archive's recording devices and the technical arrangement of recorded material.²⁵ Today, a significant proportion of the EFA sound archive has been rendered digital and is available via the intranet of the Literary Museum. New collected material is added in digital format.

Conclusion

The past century of collecting folk music has been, on the one hand, successful, in that folk music has been continuously and systematically collected, maintained for future generations and for researchers, and made available for the public via publications, records, CDs, video films and studies. On the other hand, the situation is sad, since old music styles have practically disappeared. But this cannot be helped. An ethnomusicologist, as any other researcher of folk culture, must have an eye and ear for everything new, and there is much to be done here. We have continued to monitor innovative processes in regions where the old folk culture was maintained longer than elsewhere (for example in Setu and Kihnu Island), observing expressions of the secondary folk music tradition and the tradition of singing in social groups.

25. Tamm. *Contemporary Developments*, 453.



FIGURE 4. Ingrid Rüütel recording Kihnu singers at Weddings in 1985.

Anu Vissel died unexpectedly during 2005. Formerly Senior Researcher at the Department of Ethnomusicology of the Estonian Literary Museum, and researcher at the Centre for Cultural History and Folklore Studies in Estonia, she was born in Nõo, Tartumaa. A student of folklore at Tartu University between 1971 and 1977, she produced, as the first large-scale results of her research work, the series *Eesti karjaselaulud* [Estonian Herding Songs], of which volumes I–IV were published between 1982 and 1992.²⁶ In 2004 she defended her dissertation *Lastepärimus muutuvast ühiskonnas* [Children's Lore in the Changing World] at Tartu University. A member of numerous international and local organisations (UNESCO CID, Folklore Fellows, Estonian Academic Folklore Society, etc.), Anu Vissel was one of the most knowledgeable experts on Estonian folk dances, and at the time of her death was planning to move into this neglected research area.

26. Anu Vissel, *Eesti karjaselaulud* [Estonian Herding Songs] I–IV. *Ars musicae popularis* 4, 7, 9, 11. Tallinn: Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia, 1982–1992.

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