

A bit of a digression about Process

This may not be a very exciting story, but I want to share some of how I've been spending my time and allowing my recordings to entertain me lately. I've been to Bulgaria 26 times and counting, and made recordings of some sort on all but the first trip. My first recordings were made in 1978 (on a \$40 Radio Shack recorder), and the most recent were several videos I took last summer. Three of these trips were formal research trips (including one funded by IREX and one by Fulbright) of 3 months apiece, on each of which I recorded about 50 90-minute cassette tapes. The others ranged from a week at the shortest, to a month or more, with correspondingly less recorded material.

This means I have a LOT of recordings!! Now, the three biggie trips (1980-81, 1985, and 1988) are documented to a fare-thee-well: big, fat 3-ring binders stuffed with an inch and a half of pages each. (I would go back to Bulgaria and friends would tell me my Bulgarian was better, and ask me what I'd been doing. "Oh, listening to my tapes," I would say.) These contain complete transcriptions of all the songs plus notes on everything people said that I found potentially interesting (and we didn't stop the tape recorder between songs, mind you — if you do that, you ALWAYS miss things, because usually the singers don't "decide to sing something", tell you about it, and wait till you're ready before they start singing! A song will start in the midst of a conversation, often while people are talking. Or they may sing lightly, and decide to continue; or sometimes they will "try a song out" first (and not want you to record the trial — but we quickly learned to let the tape recorder run, because if it does go well they won't want to repeat it. So you record everything and figure you can pick and choose later!) I've also made a short "index" listing for each session (date, what tape number, names of the singers, and a listing of the songs and interesting discussion points, with very little comment), and lists by first lines for each trip. And a few other forms of lists, depending on what struck me as useful at the time.

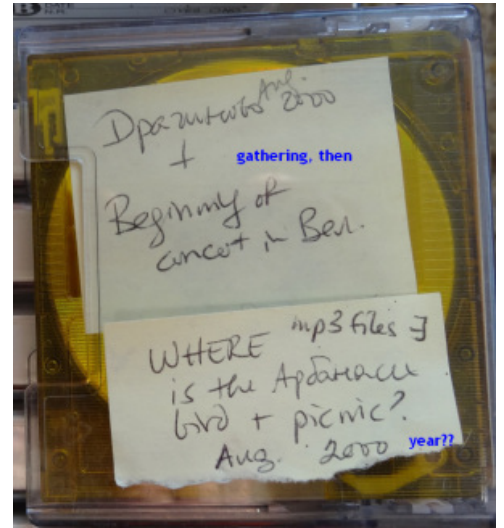
I've been wanting to make a map showing everywhere I've recorded, and also to have a master inventory of everything I've recorded, so I recently started to work on this. But...projects always seem so much simpler when you get the idea, than they do when you start to implement them! For the informal trips I made after about 1990, when I was primarily "visiting with friends" but also recording, I have a very spotty set o' documentation. Some of these are transcribed and indexed as carefully as the big trips, but others...to be painfully honest, there are some I have never actually listened to. All I know about what's on them is the location and possibly the date — whatever I wrote on the label to identify them. Some of them are very neat; others look like this:



and, after all these years, even I can't figure out exactly what that means!

Around 2000 we started using a Sony minidisc recorder. When we came home

from a trip, Dick would usually make computer files from the recordings, and we would erase the discs so we could re-use them. Even later we started using a Zoom recorder, again saving the material to our computer so we could re-use the memory chips. Now, cassette tapes can have labels stuck onto them, but minidisks and (worse yet!) files on the Zoom recorder are much harder to label when you are “in the field”. To complicate matters, I never got into the habit of keeping good external “research notes” in any organized fashion. I’ve never been too good at writing and talking and gathering up equipment, etc., etc., all at the same time! That is merely “difficult to do” on a formal recording trip; when you’re visiting friends and having parties...it becomes downright impossible!



So here I sit, surrounded by piles of sometimes barely-identified objects, trying to identify a variety of objects positively and make a good list of the contents — which for my present purpose means listing location, date, what tape number/disc/whatever it’s on, how many songs I recorded in that place on that date, and a very cursory description of the informants, usually as simple as “8 women born between 1917 and 1942.”

Where am I with it now? In retrospect I would say that, because I already had Lists galore, I breezed through the material up through 1988 (though at the time it seemed pretty slow and painstaking, but then....I was inventing my system as I went along). But then I got to about 1992, and things slowed down and got way more difficult. I’m now up through 2001, with something between sketchy and full info for all the trips since then, and man! but it can take me days to finish listing one trip! (On what date DID I go to X in 2001? Oh, maybe my calendar will tell me....nope, I didn’t make notes in the calendar! In the more recent years of digital cameras, the date on my photos helps...) I guess it’s fair to say that I’m coming down the home stretch, I have 7 or 8 more trips to do, then I can start merging all the trips into one humungous Master File.

The Good News is that, in the course of doing all this, I discovered that I can still make the minidisk machine work. And yes!! I left the sound system set up so that all I have to do to record something is play it (no plugs to chase down and

rearrange)! I made the delightful discovery that no, the fact that my Tablet has a pretty strong magnet in it does NOT seem to have damaged the tapes that have spent under it or piled on top of it (magnets, you know, erase cassette tapes! but evidently this was not strong enough to do damage). And, I've been getting reacquainted with tons o' Good Stuff to post here. Just the other day I played a 90-minute collection of some songs I find particularly beautiful (solo harvest songs, *sedenka* songs, and "table songs" — sung as entertainment at some festive occasion) and found that I wanted to just post ALL OF THEM! Well, bit by bit.

So, if you've gotten this far, thank you for humoring me by reading my rant about what my days have been filled with lately, and now....I think I'll get back to it, so I can finish the List and get to the eventual Map, and have *more beautiful, interesting songs for you!*