

# Historisk begivenhed i København – En albansk musikskat genoplivet, af Feride Istogu Gillesberg

Indledningen og interviews er på albansk, men nød musikken. Read the English version below the Danish.

3. januar 2021 – En delegation af fantastiske albanske kunstnere fra Tirana, Albanien, gik sammen med en schweizisk-albansk pianist og to danske sangere om at indspille 50 albanske traditionelle sange, der var arrangeret af Lola Gjoka (Aleksi), den første albanske pianist. Lola Gjokas sange er en sammensmeltning af autentiske albanske folkesange og klassisk musik – en kulturskat, som nu efter syv årtier vil gense dagens lys.

Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) 1910-1985, var den første albanske pianist, og spillede en afgørende rolle for at bringe klassisk musik til Albanien. Lola arrangerede 50 albanske sange, baseret på autentiske albanske folkesange, der stadig var levende, som de blev sunget af lokalbefolkningen rundt om i landet. Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) skrev melodierne ned og komponerede derefter klaverakkompagnement til sangene, så det var så tro mod sangenes autenticitet som muligt. Disse sange blev en del af de klassiske koncerter, som hun gav sammen med de første bel canto-operasangere i Albanien.

I 1912 fik Albanien endelig sin uafhængighed efter 500 års brutal besættelse af Det Osmanniske Rige – en uafhængighed, der blev opnået mod alle odds. Da tyrkerne endelig var ude, forsøgte nabolandene alt, hvad de kunne, for at dele Albanien mellem sig, hvilket til dels lykkedes. Da vi endelig fik en nation, var ønsket om at komme ud af den ekstreme politiske, økonomiske og kulturelle tilbagestående levende i Albanien

sjæl og ånd.

### **Hvordan den klassiske musik fandt vej til Albanien**

Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) blev født i Sevastopol på Krim. Hendes forældre var albanske indvandrere. Hendes far elskede at synge albanske folkesange, og han var en passioneret mandolinspiller. Han elskede musik og ønskede, at hans datter skulle have mulighed for at spille klaver, så han købte et klaver til Lola. Da hun var 9 år gammel, begyndte Lola at få klaverundervisning i skolen, og hendes klaverlærer var meget begejstret for Lolas musikalske talent. Lola Gjoka studerede på musikkonservatoriet i Sevastopol og havde et år tilbage, da hendes studier blev afbrudt. I 1932 blev der udstedt et ultimatum i form af en lov til indvandrerne: enten skulle de blive statsborgere i Sovjetunionen eller forlade landet. Familien var for patriotisk til at opgive deres albanske identitet, da de vidste, hvor hårdt det havde været for deres folk at opnå uafhængighed.

Derfor besluttede familien at vende tilbage til Albanien. Lola var 21 år gammel da hun ankom til Albanien som den første albanske pianist. Senere afsluttede hun sin uddannelse i Athen efter at have vundet en klaverkonkurrence i Wien.

Da Lolas familie forlod Krim, tog de klaveret med, da de vidste, at der ikke fandtes klaverer i Albanien. Turen endte tragisk, da Lolas lillebror døde på rejsen. Da de ankom til Korca i Albanien, hjalp gamle venner familien med at slå sig ned, og Lola begyndte at give undervisning til piger og drenge fra mere velhavende familier for at tjene til livets ophold for familien, som havde mistet hele deres opsparing på grund af hyperinflation.

Da Lola kom til Korca, var kimen til en kulturel renæssance allerede blevet lagt af den første albanske lyriske operasanger, Mihal Ciko, som var kommet tilbage fra udlandet i 1920'erne. Han var den første albaner, der studerede i Milano på Giuseppe Verdi-konservatoriet. Mihal skabte stor begejstring, og ikke kun i Albanien. Han deltog i den

internationale folkesangskonkurrence på Fiera di Milano i 1924, hvor han fremførte albanske folkesange. Sange som aldrig var blevet sunget uden for Albanien før. Mihal Cikos fortolkning var så bevægende, at han vandt konkurrencen.

Lola Gjoka og Mihal slog sig sammen og flere operasangere kom tilbage til Albanien – soprannerne Jorgjia Felice Truja, Tefta Tashko, Maria Kraja, tenoren Kristaq Antoniu og barytonen Kristaq Koco. Kimen til en kulturel renæssance blev dannet, med Lola Gjoka i epicentret.

Den store pianist akkompagnerede alle sangerne i Verdi- og Puccini-arianer, tyske sange og meget mere og albanske folkesange var ligeledes en vigtig del af koncerterne. Tefta Tashko og de andre sangere kom til Lola med sange fra forskellige dele af Albanien, så Lola kunne skrive dem ned og arrangere klaverakkompagnement til dem, med respekt for folkesangenes autenticitet. Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) og Tefta Tashko blev beskrevet som bier, der samlede honning fra alle de forskellige blomster i den albanske have.

Disse sange blev en kulturel skat, der fyldte folkets hjerter med skønhed, kærlighed, optimisme og håb om en bedre fremtid. Dette var starten på en kulturel renæssance i 30'erne og 40'erne, som varede i flere årtier.

I 1970'erne omarbejdede Lola sine sange endnu en gang, og hendes sidste ønske, inden hun døde i 1985, var, at disse sange skulle være tilgængelige for den nye generation. På grund af helbredsproblemer udgav Juki, Lolas eneste barn, først en bog med sin mors 52 sange i 2007, men de blev aldrig indspillet.

Jeg blev først introduceret til nogle af Lola Gjokas (Aleksi) sange af den schweizisk-albanske pianist Ermira Lefort, som kom til Danmark i 2019 for, sammen med mig, at opføre to af Lola Gjokas sange ved koncerten »A Musical Dialogue of Cultures«, arrangeret af Schiller Instituttet, Russisk-Dansk

Dialog og Det Kinesiske Kulturinstitut. Ermira og jeg blev derefter af det danske konsulat i Tirana inviteret til at give en koncert med et dansk-albansk program. På grund af Corona blev koncerten udsat til den 5. juni 2021. Skæbnen ville, at Ermira ikke var i stand til at komme til Tirana, og jeg derfor havde brug for en erstatning. Det blev pianisten Rudina Ciko, og det var virkelig held i uheld.

Da jeg i maj havde mødt Rudina i Tirana, havde hun givet mig bogen med de samlede sange af Lola Gjoka (Aleksi). Det var nogle uger før vores koncert og indimellem havde jeg tid til at kigge på sangene og opdagede, at hver enkelt af dem var både speciel og meget smuk. Efter koncerten i Tirana, på vej tilbage til Danmark, fik jeg den idé, at disse sange burde indspilles. Hver sang var som en perle i en række af perler, der tilsammen udgjorde en smuk halskæde, Folk burde have tilgang til denne skat.

### **Gnisten, der ventede på at blive til rigtig ild**

Jeg besluttede mig for at gøre mit for at få disse sange indspillet. Gennem Rudina Ciko mødte jeg hendes mand, dirigenten Zhani Ciko, søn af den berømte bel canto-sanger Mihal Ciko, Lola Gjokas (Aleksi) veninde. Zhani Ciko var et barn af den kulturelle renæssance og bar den levende arv fra den albanske kulturelle renæssance i sit hjerte og sind. Zhani Ciko organiserede også den første opførelse af Beethovens 9. symfoni i Albaniens historie i 1970'erne.

Da jeg fortalte Zhani idéen om at indspille alle Lola Gjoka (Aleksis) sange, blev han meget begejstret og begyndte straks at arbejde på at realisere den. Zhani organiserede en gruppe af talentfulde sangere, herunder den meget kendte sopran Mariana Leka, sopranen Erlinda Agolli, tenoren Gerald Murraj, barytonen Antonio Zefi og Rudina Ciko, der akkompagnerede på klaver. Sammen med den store pianist Ermira Lefort, den kendte danske tenor Stig Fogh Andersen og mig selv, en dansk-albansk sopran, blev der dannet en gruppe, som kunne realisere ideen. Vi mødtes alle i Danmark for at gennemføre projektet. Takket

være Knud Rasmussen, organist i Virum Kirke, så åbnede Virum Kirke sine døre for os, så vi kunne lave optagelserne der. Og takket være Stig Fogh Andersen, hans søn Ask og Stigs gode veninde Heidrun Beer, så fik vi gennemført optagelserne. Det lykkedes at indspille de 50 sange på mindre end fire dage den 27.-30. december 2021. Vi afsluttede optagelserne med at filme en lille koncert i kirken, da Corona gjorde publikum umuligt.

Indspilningen af disse 50 sange er en historisk begivenhed, da det aldrig er sket før. Udgivelsen af de samlede sange på en dobbelt-cd vil finde sted i slutningen af februar i år og vil ikke kun være en skat, der atter vil blive en del af den albanske kulturarv, men også en perle, der vil blive indføjet i den europæiske kulturskat.

Må cd'erne så være en inspiration til at holde mange koncerter og kulturelle udvekslinger mellem Albanien og mange andre nationer.

For at bestille kopier af cd'erne kan man kontakte Feride Gillesberg på: [feridegillesberg@gmail.com](mailto:feridegillesberg@gmail.com).

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Earlier article:

Historic Event in Copenhagen – An Albanian Musical Treasure Revived

By Feride Istogu Gillesberg

January 3, 2021 – A delegation of fantastic Albanian artists from Tirana, Albania, joined forces with a Swiss-Albanian pianist, and Danish musicians, to record 50 Albanian traditional songs, arranged by the first Albanian pianist, Lola Gjoka (Aleksi). Lola Gjoka's songs are a fusion of

authentic Albanian folk songs and classical music – a cultural treasure that will now see daylight, after seven decades.

Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) 1910-1985, was the first Albanian pianist, who played a crucial role in bringing classical music to Albania. Lola arranged 50 Albanian songs, based on authentic Albanian folk songs that were still alive, as sung by local people around the nation. Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) wrote down the notes, and composed the piano accompaniment to the songs, as truthful to the authenticity of the songs as possible. These songs became a part of the classical concerts she gave, together with the first bel canto opera singers in Albania.

In 1912, Albania finally got its independence, after 500 years of a brutal occupation by the Ottoman Empire – an independence achieved against all odds. When, finally, the Turks were out, the neighboring countries tried everything they could to divide Albania among them, which partly succeeded. When we finally had a nation, the desire for rising out of extreme backwardness, politically, economically, and culturally, was vividly in the soul and spirit of the people of Albania.

How classical music made its way to Albania

Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) was born in Sevastopol, Crimea. Her parents were Albanian immigrants. Her father loved singing Albanian folk songs, and he was a passionate mandolin player. Lola Gjoka's father loved music and wanted his daughter to have the possibility of playing the piano, so he bought a piano for Lola. When she was 9-years-old, Lola started getting piano lessons at school, and her piano teacher was very excited about Lola's musical talent. Lola Gjoka studied at the music conservatory in Sevastopol. She had one year left, when her studies were disrupted. In 1932, an ultimatum, in the form of a law, was issued to the immigrants: either become Soviet Union nationals, or leave the country. The family was too patriotic to give up their Albanian identity, knowing how hard the achievement of independence had been for their people. So,

the family left to go back to Albania. Lola was 21 years old. She arrived in Albania as the first Albanian pianist. Later, she finished her diploma in Athens, after winning a piano competition in Vienna.

When Lola's family left the Crimea, they took the piano along, since they knew that there were no pianos in Albania. The tour ended tragically, when Lola's little brother died on their journey. Arriving in Korca, Albania, old friends helped the family settle down, and Lola began giving lessons to girls and boys of wealthier families, to make a living for their family, which had lost all their savings due to hyperinflation.

When Lola came to Korca, a seed for a cultural renaissance had already been planted by the first Albanian lyric opera singer, Mihal Ciko, who had come back from abroad in 1920s. He was the first Albanian who studied in Milan at the Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory. Mihal created a lot of excitement, not only in Albania. He took part in the international folk song competition in "Fiera di Milano" in 1924, where he performed Albanian folk songs, songs that had never been sung outside Albania before. Mihal Ciko's interpretation was so moving, that he won the competition.

Lola Gjoka and Mihal joined forces. More opera singers came back to Albania – the sopranos Jorgjia Felice Truja, Tefta Tashko, Maria Kraja, tenor Kristaq Antoniu, and baritone Kristaq Koco. The seed of a cultural renaissance was formed, with Lola Gjoka in the epicenter.

The great pianist accompanied all the singers in Verdi and Puccini arias, German Lieder, and much more. Albanian folk songs were an important part of the concerts. Many traditional Albanian folk songs were written down by Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) who arranged piano accompaniments, carefully keeping the authenticity of the old folk songs. Tefta Tashko and the other singers would come to her with songs from different parts of Albania, so Lola could write them down and arrange piano

accompaniments. Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) and Tefta Tashko were described as bees that collected the honey from all the different flowers in the Albanian garden.

These songs became a cultural treasure that filled the hearts of the people with beauty, love, optimism and hope for a better future. This was the start of a cultural renaissance in the 30s and 40s, that lasted for several decades.

In the 1970s, Lola reworked her songs once again. Her last wish before she died in 1985, was to have these songs available for the new generation. Due to health problems, Lola's only child, Juki, first published a book of her mother's 52 songs in 2007, but they were never recorded.

I was first introduced to some songs by Lola Gjoka (Aleksi) by the Swiss-Albanian pianist Ermira Lefort, who came to Denmark in 2019 to perform two of Lola Gjoka's songs with me at the concert, "A Musical Dialogue of Cultures," organized by the Schiller Institute, Russian-Danish Dialogue, and the Chinese Cultural Center. Ermira and I were invited by the Danish consul in Tirana to give a concert with a Danish-Albanian program. Due to corona, the concert was postponed to June 5, 2021. As destiny played out, Ermira was not able to come to Tirana, and I needed a replacement. The pianist Rudina Ciko was her replacement, a blessing in disguise.

When I met Rudina in May in Tirana, she had given me the book with the collected songs of Lola Gjoka (Aleksi), some weeks before our concert. In between, I had the time to look through the collected songs, and discovered that each of them was very special and beautiful. After the concert in Tirana, on my way back to Denmark, I was thinking that these songs ought to be recorded. Each song is like a pearl in the row of a treasure necklace, and people should have access to this treasure.

The spark that waited to be transformed into fire

I decided to do my part to get these songs recorded. Through



Rudina Ciko, I met her husband, the conductor Zhani Ciko, the son of the famous bel canto singer Mihal Ciko, Lola Gjoka (Aleksi's) friend. Zhani Ciko was a child of the cultural renaissance, and carries the living heritage of the Albanian cultural renaissance in his heart and mind. Zhani Ciko also organized the first performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony in the history of Albania, in 1970s.

When I spoke to Zhani about the idea of recording all of Lola Gjoka (Aleksi's) songs, he became very excited. He immediately began working on realizing this idea. Zhani organized a group of great singers, including the very well-known soprano Mariana Leka, soprano Erlinda Agolli, tenor Gerald Murraj, baritone Antonio Zefi and Rudina Ciko playing the piano. Together with the great pianist Ermira Lefort, Stig Fogh Andersen, a very well-known Danish tenor, and myself, a Danish-Albanian soprano, a group was formed that could realize the idea. We all met in Denmark to carry out the project.

Thanks to Knud Rasmussen, the organist at Virum Church, the church opened their doors for us to make the recordings there. And thanks to Stig Fogh Andersen, his son Ask, and his good friend Heidrun Beer, we were able to make the recordings. Thanks to all the musicians, we succeeded in recording the fifty songs in less than four days (December 27- 30, 2021).

We concluded by holding a little concert.

This recording is an historical event, as it has never been done before. Publishing Lola Gjoka (Aleksi's) collected songs on a double CD in the spring of this year will not only be a treasure that will be given back to the Albanian cultural heritage, but, also, be a pearl to be added to the European cultural treasure.

May the CDs be an inspiration for many concerts and cultural exchanges between Albania and many nations.

To order the CDs, contact Feride Gillesberg at:

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