

## Vita Kakulis and Agate Terauds

Hugo Terauds (1902-1989), father of Vita Kakulis and husband of Agate Terauds, was born in Latvia in 1902. Following World War II, in the wake of the Soviet occupation of Latvia, Terauds left his home country, eventually settling in Santa Fe where he was a teacher of the deaf until retirement in the late 1960s. In the late 1980s he and his wife moved to the Milwaukee area where their daughter, Vita, had long resided and where there is a substantial Latvian-American population.

Like the Baltic countries in general, Latvia has fostered a strong sense of the worth of folk traditions, a sense that has been especially strong among Latvians in exile. The kokle, a sort of zither resembling the Finnish kantele, has been the symbolic instrument for Latvians, and Latvian-American ensembles typically strum the instruments to accompany folk songs.

Long a woodworker, Terauds was inspired to make kokles by Andrejs Jansons, a virtuoso player who visited Terauds in Santa Fe in 1966. Thereafter, Hugo Terauds began experimenting with the construction of kokles. He made more than thirty in all. Sometimes he made a standard basswood body, but he also tried maple, cherry, and other woods. His soundboards or tops, however, were always from straight-grained pine or Sitka spruce. Terauds numbered his instruments and most differ from one another. Some are inset with amber. Others vary the number of holes--two or three--in the soundboard. Assorted stylized Latvian renderings of stars, flowers, and the sun are cut into the wood, along with delicate scrolls. Since the kokles have long been adapted to ensemble playing, they vary in size and tone. In addition to the standard-sized kokle, Terauds also made a smaller sikalina and a larger basa.

Although Terauds did not live in Wisconsin with the exception of the last year of his life, some argument can be made for his involvement in the region's Latvian culture inasmuch as his daughter Vita and her children all have and play Terauds' kokles. A greater case for a Wisconsin-based kokle-maker can, however, be made for Konstantins Dravnieks of Thiensville who has made instruments for numerous players in Wisconsin, and throughout the United States and Canada. Indeed his kokles are cited on the recordings of kokle ensembles in New York and Chicago.

Supplemental materials: 1) a brochure and photocopied sheet on the kokle provided by Vita Kakulis; 2) taped interview and index; 3) color slides and B&W instruments.

Availability of materials: Kakulis would be willing to loan one of her father's instruments, but suggests that we may well wish to contact Dravnieks instead since his connections with Wisconsin and his national fame within the Latvian community are much more easily established.

Special considerations: Since Terauds made his kokles chiefly to give to family members, he could afford to spend a good deal of time on them and to make them ornate. It may be that Dravnieks, who has had the larger responsibility of supplying whole ensembles, has made a simpler more standard model (or perhaps he has made both simple and ornate models). At any rate, there might be good reason to include instruments by both Terauds and Dravnieks.

TAPE LOG COVER SHEET

Wisconsin Folk Museum/for  
Cedarburg Cultural Center  
Mount Horeb, Wisconsin 53572

Date(s): November 2, 1989

Interviewee: Agate Terauds & Vita Kakulis

Address: [REDACTED]  
Bayside, Wisconsin 53217  
(Kakulis address)

Phone: [REDACTED] (Kakulis)

Equipment Used: Superscope C-202LP

Stereo: no Dolby: no

Tape Brand/Length: Sony HF-60

Amount Used: Side 1: Half  
Side 2: Blank

General Subject: musical instrument  
making

Fieldworker(s): James P. Leary

Recording Location: Terauds home

Other People Present: none

SUMMARY OF RECORDING CONTEXT AND TAPE CONTENTS

Agate Terauds is Vita Kakulis' 85 year old mother. Her recently deceased husband, Hugo, was a maker of Latvian kokles. Although he lived only the last year of his life in Wisconsin, his daughter and her family have lived in the Milwaukee area for more than thirty years and his kokles have likewise been played within the Kakulis family.

The interview took place at Mrs. Terauds' apartment, [REDACTED], Fox Point, WI. Five kokles were present and Mrs. Terauds and Vita had also readied some brochures and photocopied material on the kokle. The interview itself went very poorly. Vita insisted that her mother talk, but Agate was hesitant. In part she was unused to being tape recorded, in part she was self-conscious about her mastery of English, in part she was used to deferring to Vita when discussing Latvian-American culture; finally it was her husband, not she, who made the instruments, and so her comments were second hand. Vita's suggestion that her mother could also play the kokle well also proved untrue, as her playing was hesitant and rusty. Once I turned off the tape recorder the evening was much more relaxed.

## TAPE INDEX

Tape One, Side A

Agate Terauds

1. Announcement.

2. Hugo Terauds born in Latvia, March 17, 1902. Was a teacher of deaf students.

[Lengthy pause as Mrs. Terauds collects her thoughts. She and her daughter, Vita Kakulis, converse in Latvian.]

3. One summer in the 1970s Latvian musicians played at the Santa Fe opera. Among them was Andrejs Jansons with an array of kokles which he left briefly at the Terauds home for safekeeping. Mr. Terauds was a woodworker and took the measurements of the kokles, figuring he could make them. He did research about different woods and strings and got help from Drs. of Physics at Los Alamos. Jansons had also advised Terauds that the best wood is basswood. Nonetheless Mr. Terauds experimented with maple, cherry, and other woods. Soundboard, however, always had to be from pine or Sitka spruce. Spruce ordered from NYC. [Some of this might work for DHD.]

4. Terauds made the instruments at the family home in Santa Fe. Used the deaf school's industrial arts classroom where there were machines for doing rough work. Detailed work was done at home in a workshop, and by hand.

[Vita Kakulis enters into the interview quite a bit hereafter.]

5. Began to make the instruments shortly after Jansons appearance in Santa Fe in 1966.

6. Various kokles have different tones. Big one is the bass, small is soprano, then there is a standard instrument. The small kokle is called sikalina, meaning simply a "small one." The bass is basa.

7. Decorations depend on the individual maker. Dravnieks of Thiensville makes a pretty standard model. Terauds used different woods, carved scrolls, round suns in the soundboard, flowers, and stars.

8. Mrs. Terauds has a kokle which is "not ethnographically correct" because it has metal pegs rather than wooden pegs. Made for Mrs. Terauds after she broke a wrist. It is inset with amber. Hugo Terauds put amber in several of the more than thirty kokles he made.

9. Terauds numbered his kokles by putting holes in the back and, later, Roman numerals.

10. Terauds stopped putting three circles/suns in the soundboard, despite the fact that this is a traditional design, because it weakens the resonance of the soundboard.

11. Mrs. Terauds attempts to play her kokle with a toothpick. She demonstrates several chords. [Maybe a brief edited version would work for DHD.] Mrs.

Terauds tries to play several old folk tunes, but her playing is very tentative.

12. On the kokles importance. Each nation is trying to keep up on their heritage and the kokle is the Latvian heritage. Important not to lose one's folk customs.

13. Mrs. Terauds reckons her voice does nothing, better to take facts from writings. Better to see Mr. Dravnieks in Thiensville who would not be "jittery" when interviewed. Mrs. Terauds and her daughter would not be offended if we include only Dravnieks in the musical instrument exhibition.

End of Session.