

**Two Meetings with
Grigol Robakidze and Kita Chkhenkeli**

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Abstract: The article deals with hitherto unknown details of the author's meeting in Geneva and Lausanne in 1961 with two eminent Georgian figures: Grigol Robakidze and Kita Chkhenkeli.

Key words: *Grigol Robakidze, Kita Chkhenkeli*

In September 1961 the tour of the Georgian Folk Dance Company (directed by I. Sukhishvili and N. Ramishvili) proved especially exciting and interesting for me: in Geneva I met Grigol Robakidze, and at Lausanne Kita Chkhenkeli.

Our tour in Geneva was coming to an end. In two days we were moving to Lausanne. I was told by the boy dancers that all our concerts, and even rehearsals, were attended by Grigol Robakidze. They took this fact as a matter of course, for during our tours of Europe Georgians, enthusiastic over our company's success, often came to see us after the concert. However, tears welled up into their eyes when speaking about Georgia and their relations. I remember how angry I was with the boys for not telling me about Grigol Robakidze visiting the concerts. They assured me that he would surely come on the following day, for it was our last performance. Really, the next day, following the concert, dear Nino and I were told that Grigol was waiting for us... above average height, a thin man (you would not take him for a man over eighty), in a grey gabardine overcoat, with black glossy combed hair and astonishingly cold gimlet-eyes (I even thought that the boys' story about tears in

those eyes must have been an optical illusion). Upon greeting us, I was surprised that he made no mention of the dance and concerts, he must have thought the fortnight “spent” by him in the theatre with our company was sufficient proof of his enthusiasm. We told him that the next morning we were leaving for Lausanne. He promised to see us off at the pier (we were to cross Lake Lemman). Then, all of a sudden he said that he was writing an article in response to one published by French journalists on Georgia. He said, two French journalists had travelled to Georgia and written many good things, but had concluded their impressions thus: “The Georgians, like the residents of Cannebierre Street in Marseilles (most French anecdotes are said to have been invented by them), believe that the world begins and ends in Georgia”. This conclusion made by the French journalists had got Dear Grigol’s goat and he had decided to write a reply.

The Company had a very tight schedule (turned into a law by Dear Nino): a coach waited for us, supper at the hotel and all went to their rooms without delay (“visiting” one another was forbidden). This regulation allowed no “correction”. We took leave of Dear Grigol in the hope of meeting at the pier in the morning ... But next morning a Georgian woman with a Red Cross cap handed me a garland sent by Dear Grigol, saying: “He felt very ill and failed to come. The lady told us also that she was the only legal spouse of Shalva Dadiani (for she was wedded only to him).

At Lausanne Mr. Kita Chkhenkeli arrived for the concert from Zurich, accompanied by his pupils – Kartvelologists Leah Flury, Jolanda Marchev and Ruth Neukomm. These ladies spoke for a long time about Dear Kita’s scholarly contribution. (Many foreigners had studied Georgian with the help of Chkhenkeli’s “Introduction to the Georgian Language”). We were told that Kita had just begun work on the comprehensive Georgian-German Dictionary (he had time to compile six fascicles: the remaining twenty were completed in 1974 under the direction of J. Marchev.). These ladies charmed us with their attitude to Georgia and Georgian culture. We learnt that twice a month they arranged Georgian evening parties, introducing

specimens of Georgian poetry to the guests and treating them to Georgian dishes made by them. Our meeting with the Zurich ladies was crowned with their fine declamation of verses of Baratashvili and Besiki.

From Lausanne we went to Brussels. After several highly successful concerts, the impresario arranged a meeting of the Company with European journalists. We were told that this meeting (in the halls of one of the oldest palaces and most beautiful gardens of Belgium) was attended by 2000 persons. Here too, like in the whole world, the spectators and authors of newspaper articles were astonished with a unique characteristic of Georgian folk dance – the astounding difference between the dancing parts of male and female: a spiritual young man dancing on his tiptoes doesn't touch the girl even with his finger; the female is gentle, lilting, serene; a spectator in the wings was interested whether we had castors on our shoes, for they thought such movement unimaginable without castors while dancing.

During this meeting, I was visited by Mr. David Berekashvili, a well-known engineer residing in Brussels. He said he had received a letter from his friend Griogol Robakidze. He read the passage in the letter intended for me. I remember the first phrase by heart (how can I forget it!). "Brother David, after the last concert of the Georgian Company, a maiden – Rusudan Enukidze – came up to me with tender affection". In brief, Dear Grigol's query was couched in these words "Owing to her age, this girl cannot have read my books. Following my departure from Georgia all my books were burnt. Then what caused her becoming interested in my person? Please ask her and let me know", I told David that my father, an engineer by profession, was a great lover of literature – a great admirer of Grigol Robakidze (I do not know whether he would remain the same after reading "Hitler" and "Mussolini", I really do not know!). He knew "The Snake Slough" almost by heart. He often read for me passages. I also remember father's words that after leaving Georgia, Grigol Robakidze had written an article in which he considered Georgia a country taken over by cripples and fools - for

the Bolsheviks had exterminated the able-bodied and reasonable population. This was the principal reason for leaving his homeland. This can doubtless explain why he was excited and teary-eyed at the concerts of the Company where he witnessed the ovation with which the foreign audience greeted the skill of the healthy and handsome youth of his compatriots.

David Berekashvili wrote back to Grigol Robakidze, and soon received a letter from him, with a request to Rusudan to convey his kind regards to Mr. Vano E nukidze.

Returning to Tbilisi, I shouted from the window of the train to my father: "Daddy! Grigol Robakidze has sent you his best regards". He answered: "Dear Grigol is dead". Before his death, bedridden, he had time to write the article, "Georgian Gene Expanding in Dance".

Kita Chkhenkeli died within a year at the age of 68.