

Agris Krumins b. 15/9/1956

Transcript of interview with Judy Caine - 8th October 2018

(N.B. – timecode numbers refer to the audio recording)

Judy Caine: [00:00:01] This is Judy Caine. It is Monday the 8th of October. And I'm here with Agris as part of the Latvian part of the Changing Corby project and I'm just going to get Agris to give me his full name date of birth just to check the level and ident the tape for me, Agris.

Agris Krumins: [00:00:19] Okay, so it's, the full name is Agris Valdis Krumins and the date of birth is the 15th of the 9th 1956.

Judy Caine: [00:00:31] Thank you. Agris, can you start by telling me when you came to Corby and why you came please.



Agris Krumins: [00:00:38] I came to Corby, I was actually born in Wellingborough, but we lived, my parents already lived in Corby, so actually, I was born, I'm born, and I'd say bred in Corby, almost 60 years ago.

Judy Caine: [00:00:50] Gosh, do you feel at all Latvian then? Even though that's where your family are from?

Agris Krumins: [00:00:55] Yeah. I think very much so. I mean, I certainly, there's a there's a great percentage of me that feels Latvian. I mean, I when I was growing up, I didn't speak any English until, already Scottish, until I was 5 years old, when I went to school. So, we were really protected, if you want to say that, or kept away from the local Scottish community.

Judy Caine: [00:01:22] What is it that makes you feel Latvian, what is the essence of being Latvian?

Agris Krumins: [00:01:33] Yeah, that's really difficult, I think.

Judy Caine: [00:01:39] I know! Did I say this was going to be easy? (both laugh)

Agris Krumins: [00:01:41] No, you didn't, no. Let's start. Firstly, I suppose with the language I think in many ways language defines in many ways how you think, you could argue about that ...

Judy Caine: [00:01:54] ... I agree ...

Agris Krumins: [00:01:54] ...but Language and thought and emotion are very very linked, and as I was growing up, I mean my language up until 5 was clearly only, it was only Latvian, from within two or three weeks I was speaking English at school, and so I grew up in a bilingual society. It was clear that at home or within the community you spoke Latvian, outside the community you spoke English and that was the way it was, and therefore that part of being a Latvian was always intrinsically linked, initially at least, to speaking it. Then there are additional things that come in, you, there are obviously cultural things there. There was a quite a big Latvian society in Corby that was really based around a choir, a folk dancing group a little school - Sunday school, Saturday school actually. So, oh, is that my phone?

Judy Caine: [00:03:11] I Can hear something, I think it might be outside actually?

Agris Krumins: [00:03:19] N o , i t ' s m y p h o n e , I ' l l t u r n i t o f f , l e

Judy Caine: [00:03:26] OK.

Agris Krumins: [00:03:26] Yes. So, so you have, yeah, you have a society which is quite thriving. You know, there was maybe 500 people, five hundred Latvians. And there was a there was a church, there was a church hall, that was the that was the focus of the society.

Judy Caine: [00:03:47] Is there still a focus now on Corby is there still a church hall and church?.

Agris Krumins: [00:03:51] No. No, the church hall really I think went to administration in the 1990s and I can't tell you what year.

Judy Caine: [00:04:05] So where do the Latvian community in Corby congregate now - if anywhere?

Agris Krumins: [00:04:10] I don't know, because I've sort of, I'm no longer sort of a you know a full member of that community any longer. The community has changed completely.

Judy Caine: [00:04:27] How come?

Agris Krumins: [00:04:27] So, if the original community was based around those immigrants who came in after the second world war ...

Judy Caine: [00:04:35] Wasn't there a choir that came over 'en masse'.

Agris Krumins: [00:04:39] Yeah, there was a choir and the story is that the, the conductor of the choir was called Zuika and he came and talked to Stewarts and Lloyds, at that time as it was, and said oh you know I'd like a job and I have these qualifications - he was a scientist I think - I have these qualifications. They said yeah, we're very interested. He said, but I have a choir that wants to come too, will you take them all? And Stewarts and Lloyds said yes. So, they all came, and I think they originally started and lived in the barracks at, between Weldon and Brigstock, and then they slowly moved to take houses in Corby. My parents didn't do that.

Judy Caine: [00:05:24] How did your parents come over?

Agris Krumins: [00:05:26] So, my parents came down from the north. My father had worked up in the mines in northern England. My mother worked as a seamstress in Bradford, and they came down because Corby was expanding. So, there was a huge amount of bricklaying work or building work that was available. That's why my father came, and my mother came to work in Aquascutum as a seamstress.

Judy Caine: [00:05:57] It's now no longer there either, is it, went a couple of years ago! So, did your parents come to England after the second world war?

Agris Krumins: [00:06:07] Yeah. My parents came from the displaced persons camps in Germany after the Second World War.

Judy Caine: [00:06:18] Are they still alive.

Agris Krumins: [00:06:19] My mother is, she still alive. In fact, she still, I mean she's in her 90s, and still travels to Latvia every year.

Judy Caine: [00:06:28] Do you get back to Latvia much?

Agris Krumins: [00:06:29] Yes, I'm going next week.

Judy Caine: [00:06:33] Which part of Latvia are your family from?

Agris Krumins: [00:06:36] Because my parents, my mother was, her parents were in the Latvian army, they were actually, she was from the north herself. But she was born in the east and lived in the West. So she was, she had really come from all over Latvia, I suppose. My father comes from the north, the north east.

Judy Caine: [00:07:04] So, neither from Riga? The Capital?

Agris Krumins: [00:07:09] Riga's the capital, yeah.

Judy Caine: [00:07:10] And if you've got a map it's sort of in the middle at the top?

Agris Krumins: [00:07:14] Yeah that's right yeah. So, it's very central, like a horseshoe.

Judy Caine: [00:07:20] So, if you had to, what I'm particularly interested to learn about Latvia is the culture, whatever that may be. Are Latvians big on music, on dance, on film, literature, theatre, food, costume. Can you give me any idea of, for this project, where I should be looking at to learn more about Latvian culture, whatever you define that to be?

Agris Krumins: [00:07:55] Yes Latvians are actually big on all those things, but they might not be known for it. Probably the easiest way to start from is to say that there is a sort of very deep set and ingrained sense of an aural culture that Latvians carry, and they might be losing it now. But they've carried it for many years. Latvian as a language really wasn't codified until the mid-19th century. So, they literally, there are aspects, the musical aspects were carried in by people's voices by people's memories from generation to generation. And you've got to realize that one of the reasons why that was the case was that Latvia since the Crusades the northern Crusades had been occupied by the ...

Judy Caine: [00:08:53] ...Russians ...

Agris Krumins: [00:08:53] ...Germans. No, no, no. The Germans.

Judy Caine: [00:08:55] Oh, the Germans.

Agris Krumins: [00:08:56] Yes. It was the Baltic Germans who had really occupied it, and they were there since 1205, you can argue about the date, but it's around the beginning of the 13th century, all the way until the collapse of Tzarist Russia in 1917.

Judy Caine: [00:09:16] The Russian revolution.

Agris Krumins: [00:09:16] Yes. And the Baltic Germans controlled the political and the social and economic life of all the three Baltic states, or the Baltic areas at that time. The Latvians, you could argue, actually maybe didn't even exist until the 19th century; because there was various different parts to that, to those people who spoke something similar to Latvian. But. They spoke it and they weren't allowed really to put it down. My family were only given names, given names by the local aristocrats in the late 19th century. Because at that point in the late 19th century the German barons, together with the Russian Tzar, decided that maybe it would be politically wise that the local Latvians, who were the great majority of, of the inhabitants, that they actually could own land. Without, if you have to own land you need a name, and so most Latvians were given names, given surnames, so that they would have the legal, the ability, the legal ability to actually own land and that happened in the sort of mid, mid-19th century. So, so there is this this element, this clear element of a culture that exists but is not really recognized. It's a peasant culture, it has a very complicated ideological structure in terms of a whole series of different gods that exist. They take care of various different parts of the lived environment in which Latvians inhabited. And most of it was codified through four-line Dainas. Dainas are a folk song which is a very very similar meter to, very similar regular meter which codifies ideas, ways of living and they were beginning, they were, they were kept alive by the aural tradition and then collected in the late 19th century by one man who put them in, I think there's a million Dainas who put them in and put them into a wardrobe and collected them in a wardrobe.

Judy Caine: [00:12:10] Did he record them on a was cylinder type thing or did he transcribe them?

Agris Krumins: [00:12:13] I think later on they did do, but initially it was a matter of just going round and writing them down and that's what they did. And so you have this huge poetic tradition. Which is, it is very difficult to actually tell when it was created, maybe it's not even necessary, but it's certainly been carried on and maybe changed over time and changed back. But, but it was something by that the, the life of these people was governed. It wasn't governed by anything else, it was governed by these. So, you have the whole, because they were peasants, they were, basically, it was agriculture and the sowing seasons would be the way

that you, the attitude, the reaping, the harvests - that was all part of the of the life-cycle that these Dainas, these folk songs interpreted.

[00:13:21] So therefore that's, that's a very very, that's a very salient point in terms of how then Latvian Literature develops. Because clearly in the late 19th century suddenly there's an explosion of people who are very interested in developing a Latvian identity, a Latvian culture, a written Latvian culture. And suddenly there's poetry and writing and both music written down and becomes a political tool in developing a consciousness and a political action, certainly early in the 20th century.

Judy Caine: [00:14:09] It's absolutely fascinating, it reminds me a little bit of, I spent some time in Central Asia, 18 years ago now, after the Russians had left. We were going around Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan, all the 'stans' to see how the indigenous music and the indigenous culture was re-emerging after the Russians had left and they all said well we kept them alive orally and it was in their heads. And it was terrible that when these older people were dying, they were losing, it was like a library being burned because it was in their heads. And one gentleman, whose name escapes me, in particular had started to write all this down, was hurriedly going round. And even though I don't speak Russian apart from hello, how are you, thank you, we could go into a village and talk with music. I had my flute, I play a Turkic tune, they'd recognize it from the Silk Road, and they'd all join in. When the interpreter racked up, we almost didn't need him, you know, we were there.

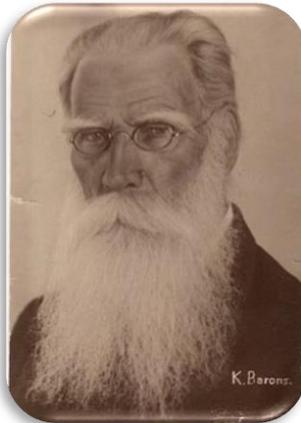
Agris Krumins: [00:15:17] That's right. Yeah. So, I don't think, I mean there are, there is, certainly in the Baltics still some kind of tradition, but most of it now has been recorded in some form.

Judy Caine: [00:15:31] Who was the first person to, you mentioned these Dainas and this collection of a million, to record them?

Agris Krumins: [00:15:36] He was a guy, the guy's named Krisjanis Barons.

Judy Caine: [00:15:40] I'm going to get you to write that down again in a minute(spelling above correct)

Internet research:



K r i š j ā n (1835 - 1923) is well known as the "father of the Dainas". Between 1894-1915 he published Latvju Dainas (LD), six volumes.

At the time when Barons was working on the edition, the traditional singing had, to a large extent, already been lost. He noted in his introduction to LD that "the old ladies, our purest source of folk songs, become more and more rare with each day".

Whilst not the original author of any of the Dainas he created the classification system of LD, arranging the texts and introducing the notion of song type. Barons also edited some texts, in order to restore their possible older and better form. In recognition of the Barons' labours and the historical value of the Dainu skapis, the work was inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2001.

His portrait appeared on the 100-lat banknote prior to the Lat being replaced by the Euro in 2014, his being the only human face of an actual person on modern Latvian currency.

Judy Caine: [00:15:45] What about food. What can you tell me about Latvian Cuisine? What's it like?

Agris Krumins: [00:15:55] Hum, it's very, well, what would I say?

Judy Caine: [00:16:01] What's your national dish?

Agris Krumins: [00:16:02] I suppose pork actually, pork and stewed cabbage. But, the cabbage, when I say stewed cabbage actually it's Sauerkraut. So, it's pickled cabbage then we heat it with pork and with a beer. But there's a, there's a lot of other things, things which are common to a lot of Eastern Europe called Piragi, in

Polish they are called Pirogi, which is a pastry which has bacon in the centre. There are, different regions will have different types of cuisine. So, the eastern region which was a predominantly Catholic area and some degree of Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, has very very specific Easter dishes, called Paskha. The, the West, again, has maybe a lot more fish. Herring, Herring is a big big thing.

Internet research:

Pirogi are bread rolls that are traditionally filled with bacon and onions, and which originate from the Baltic state of Latvia. They are usually made for special occasions and celebrations, and baked in large batches.



Paskha — is a pyramid-shaped confection that is served for Easter in Eastern Orthodox homes of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine and also in Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Similar in taste to a cheesecake but without the crust.



Judy Caine: [00:17:21] Do they fish for Herring in the Baltic Sea.

Agris Krumins: [00:17:23] Yeah. But less and less fished. Parts of the Baltic Sea's v a are now dead. They don't have anything.

Judy Caine: [00:17:34] Oh, that's sad.

Agris Krumins: [00:17:34] Yeah. So that they can't fish there. They are having to go further and further into the Atlantic, so there's going to be a big halt.

Judy Caine: [00:17:44] How did you cook the herrings - were they smoked?

Agris Krumins: [00:17:46] Ah, the most wonderful herrings were made my mother in law who would wrap them in newspaper and put them at the bottom of an Aga and leave them there until the newspaper had completely charred and you'd then take them out and you have this, and you'd eat it with sour cream, and it was the most delicious meal that I've ever had. Wonderful.

Judy Caine: [00:18:10] Wow, I've never heard of it being cooked like that before, that sounds lovely. Glad it's not jellied eels - I hate jellied eels.

Agris Krumins: [00:18:19] No no no, they are not jellied eels, but they smoke eels, eels are smoked and they, they also have elvers which are small, more small eels you know.

Judy Caine: [00:18:34] Oh, yes, of course.

Agris Krumins: [00:18:37] And, are a very acquired taste, I have to say.

Judy Caine: [00:18:42] I'm not an eel fan I have to say but I do absolutely love fish. OK, what about sweet things, do you have any deserts, a particular passion of mine. As you can tell.

Agris Krumins: [00:18:55] Yeah. Yeah. I mean they have a wonderful apple pie dish, that they've got, apple tart really that that is made. But the one thing that I always found very difficult, was that Latvians have, do not really understand why, and they would always drink sweet wine with anything so they would have a meal and it would be with sweet wine interspersed with vodka.

Judy Caine: [00:19:31] Right. Do you make your own wine?

Agris Krumins: [00:19:34] There's a lot of, I don't make my own wine, but yeah but yeah, they do. Also, at one point, there's an area in Kurzeme which was the most northerly point in Europe which actually had vines and apparently in the 19th century it was a wine producer. They did try and re-establish it, but I don't think with any great success.

Judy Caine: [00:20:06] It strikes me because you're way up there, your pretty high up, sort of looking across to Sweden, you're pretty high up, it strikes me that it would be too cold to make it?

Agris Krumins: [00:20:16] Well it was, you know I think it wasn't a good one. I mean but they certainly were vines there I saw them myself.

Judy Caine: [00:20:25] I wasn't doubting it, I'm just saying I'm surprised.

Agris Krumins: [00:20:27] No, no, but I'm just actually reading, there's an island of Finland, which actually also grows vines, which is further north, and they have a vine culture, which I don't think they make wine from but some kind of condiment.

Judy Caine: [00:20:46] That's interesting. OK. What about dance. Can you tell me anything about dance?

Agris Krumins: [00:20:53] Yeah. I mean dance again like, very much like singing and the culture, comes from an oral tradition, if you can call dance an oral tradition, but all dances that were danced for various ritual purposes, so you would have dances to celebrate changing the seasons and especially, you can say especially midsummer. Maybe come back to midsummer.

Judy Caine: [00:21:24] Y e s , I w a n t t o t a l k a b o u t m i d s u m m e r b e c a u

Agris Krumins: [00:21:27] I was just thinking was a special dance for midsummer, I'm not sure that there is. But, so, dance, folk dancing is, was a big identifying part of Latvian culture and suddenly in Corby, if we go back to Corby, that was one of the main focuses. There was a dance group and they had been going for, it doesn't exist, the original dance troupe doesn't exist, it's actually now been recreated by the new wave of immigrants who have come in and in fact I think they actually meet in the village in the Corby Old Village Church Hall. On a Thursday, I think. They asked me if I could find a place and I that's where I found. I think they do meet, I don't know if it's this, I don't know how many there are. But ...

Judy Caine: [00:22:27] I'll check that out.

Agris Krumins: [00:22:31] Yeah, so dance, dance, folk dancing is, was a big element ...

Judy Caine: [00:22:36] ... and is this still a traditional costume (Judy points to a couple of images below on a research sheet she had with her)...

Internet research:



Agris Krumins: [00:22:39] Yes, right.

Agris Krumins: [00:22:44] I mean there's, there's a big, there's not a debate, but there's a big debate in my mind about whether you call it, you called it traditional, which I think is probably much more appropriate than to say it's a national costume.

Judy Caine: [00:23:01] It's a big place...

Agris Krumins: [00:23:02] Yeah, but there's not very many Latvians, there's four and a half Latvians, or ethnic Latvians. Each area or each town or each locality will have its own very distinct traditional costume. So, it's very very localized. Even though they might call it as a national dress it's not there's not, nothing national about it. It is very local.

Judy Caine: [00:23:33] You seem to have quite different hats as well?

Agris Krumins: [00:23:35] Yes. Well okay. There's a there is a difference. This is the central one which is this is called a Vainags and that's worn by girls who are not married. These others are called Aube and it's worn by Married women.

Internet research:



Vainags



Aube

Judy Caine: [00:23:59] Just for the tape we're looking at images on a sheet I printed out girl in the centre and next to her under the flag. But I'll do that and the transcription. (images inserted above).

Right. And what about instruments. There seems to be, again we're looking at my picture here, a whole gamut of instruments here.

Agris Krumins: [00:24:19] Okay.

Judy Caine: [00:24:19] There's an accordion I guess, and Zithers?

Agris Krumins: [00:24:23] No. I mean this, this is similar to a zither, but it's called a Kokles, very similar to what the Finns call a Kantele. It's a strung instrument which is plucked.



Kokles group at Cattothorpe mannor event 16th Feb 2019

Photo © Judy Caine

Judy Caine: [00:24:51] So it's not hammered?

Agris Krumins: [00:24:53] No it's not hammered, it's plucked. There were various different interpretations of, of how it should be played. When I was growing up, I was taught to play with a little stick. So, you did this. But in fact, the correct way of doing it is to actually pluck each string and you get a much more complex rhythm and much more developed musical lines by actually being able to replicate individually.

Judy Caine: [00:25:27] Do you know any players locally of Kokles?

Agris Krumins: [00:25:32] No I don't know, I don't know anybody who plays it. No not that I know of. I mean I do know players but not locally.

Judy Caine: [00:25:42] And what about the accordion?

Agris Krumins: [00:25:46] Well that's now, it is certainly an accordion and in fact most folk dancing groups would actually be using an accordion as their main sort of main instrument.

Judy Caine: [00:26:00] So is that a German influence?

Agris Krumins: [00:26:02] Well yeah. I mean, so, well we come to another factor. That the rise of Latvian national consciousness was actually really created by a German, a German philosopher called Herder. He, he really created the spark. He really identified the Latvians as being something quite different, and quite specific, and quite interesting. And from that, from that, his work on the Latvians, he wasn't an anthropologist, but it was basically anthropological work, he allowed, he gave them a space to work to develop. As they developed, as they changed, they took on much more a European Vogue and they introduced things like the accordion. So, the accordion becomes the way something that is used by folk groups. And yes, it has a German root, but I don't think it's a German, I don't think you see it, quite clearly is not necessarily a German instrument.

Judy Caine: [00:27:23] OK, I'm just trying to get my head round it, it's a huge topic. I was talking to some young children at a school - I go in and talk about all sorts of stuff - and this was about English music. I'd gone in with my flutes and asked if any of them knew which was the only truly English invented instrument. Oh, it's this miss, it's that miss, you know ... it's the concertina. They didn't believe me, but it's true.

Agris Krumins: [00:27:54] Yeah. Yeah. The button at the bottom.

Judy Caine: [00:27:56] Yeah, the Squeeze Box, as opposed to that much bigger thing.

Agris Krumins: [00:27:58] Yeah, which is a sort of ivory thing actually.

Judy Caine: [00:28:03] Indeed. Yeah. Okay. How are we doing? I'm very aware you've got to be somewhere else. How about your passion film? As a filmmaker?

Agris Krumins: [00:28:16] Well, I mean we, we just dabble at it really.

Judy Caine: [00:28:19] Who are the great Latvian directors?

Agris Krumins: [00:28:28] Latvian film is actually quite old, it's almost, there was almost we could call Latvian Hollywood in the early part of the 20th century. It's not really recognized, and it hasn't really escaped from its geographical boundaries. But, in the, after the Second World War when the film really becomes a huge unifying force, globally I mean, with America really to be going full speed ahead with its technology. In Latvia, as in the Soviet Union, because Latvia by that time had been occupied and incorporated into the Soviet Union, film was really something very important to the Soviets, but it was something that was very controlled. So, there is very little, there is a film school, but there's very little art films. Most Latvians really developed a passion for documentary filmmaking. And they in fact created what was called their own which was called 'the Riga School of Documentary Filmmaking' which was poetical documentaries. Poetically in the sense, not that they were about poetry, but that basically that you could say through image, and music, and occasionally words, you could say things that you could not say literally. So, it was a way of trying to escape the censor and

create an identity with a nation that was occupied and/or sent to Siberia, or any of those things. So, so film really develops as a very distinct path.

Internet research:

Riga School of Poetic Documentary Cinema <http://www.latfilma.lv>

The Riga School of Poetic Documentary Cinema came into being back in early 1960's when Uldis Brauns started working at the Riga Film Studio. One of the School's key principles was to follow the forgotten attitude of Dziga Vertov to the documentary film as a material for art.

This School pays special attention to the visual language of the film, thus creating a peculiar - poetic - manner of the documentary. Herz Frank and Uldis Brauns worked together while creating the films "The White Bells" (1961) and "235 000 000" (1967).

Herz Frank was the scriptwriter for both films, acting as a director, Herz Frank chose another path of action that was more philosophical than poetic, highlighting the drama in the relationship between a human being and the surrounding world, The artistic phenomenon of the Riga School of Poetic Cinema has significantly influenced the development of the Latvian cinema and strengthened the position of Latvian documentary films in the context of world cinema.

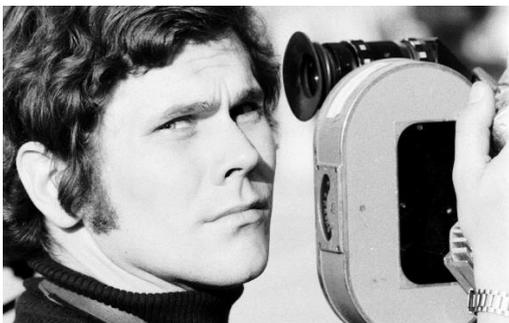
Agris Krumins: [00:30:44] I suppose the most important Latvian documentary filmmaker is a guy called Juris Podnieks, who was, who came really to the fore towards the end of the collapse of the Soviet Union. But he was, he had made a very important film which was actually just recently shown in the regional cinema in London apparently called 'Is It Easy To Be Young' which was about the alternative youth movement in music in Latvia. But it became a sort of classical Soviet cinema in a protest movement.

Judy Caine: [00:31:33] Was this in the early nineties.

Agris Krumins: [00:31:34] This is, no, this is early 80s. So, it's a movement. Yeah. The Soviet Union of course changed. There were various times when there were some freedoms and that, in the early 80s, the sort of middle early, early to middle 80s there was a certain opening up. Gorbachev was about to come into power and there was a certain look looking abroad, and he was part of that process. And then he [Juris Podnieks] was in fact taken up by Central Television and he made a big series called 'Hello Do You Hear Us'. Which was for ITV in the UK, but it was about, it was to be about the Soviet Union. But it turned out to be about the collapse of the Soviet Union. I suppose that he probably is the most well-known, the most prolific of Latvian film directors.

Judy Caine: [00:32:45] Oh, I shall have to check his work out.

Internet research:



Juris Podnieks (December 5, 1950, Riga – June 23, 1992, K u l d i District) was a Latvian film director and producer.

He graduated from the Soviet VGIK film school in 1975 after which he started working at the Riga Film Studio. He became a director in 1979 and gained international recognition with his movie *'Is It Easy to Be Young?'*. The film with dialogue in both Latvian and Russian was an exploration of Soviet youth, in which Podnieks talked to youngsters later convicted for criminal actions. The movie broke box-office records in the Soviet Union.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, Podnieks cooperated with British TV to give a first-hand insight on the events in the Soviet Union. Later, his *'Stormland'* was an account of folk festivals in these countries when national songs which had been banned by the Soviet regime for 50 years, were sung by massed choirs.

Four of his films received the Lielais Kristaps prize as the best documentary of the year.

Juris Podnieks drowned on 23 June 1992 while scuba-diving in a lake in Courland.

Judy Caine: [00:32:49] Okay. I'm really really aware you've got to be somewhere else in 15 minutes. Is there anything you're burning to tell me right now before I ask you for a list of spellings? I may have to come and talk to you again, I could talk to you all day. If you'd be willing to talk to me.

Agris Krumins: [00:33:04] I'm very willing to talk to you. I don't have a problem.

Agris Krumins: [00:33:13] I mean, in terms of Latvian culture, I don't think that I see this as one single Latvian culture. It has different strengths. And sometimes we sort of amalgamate them all together and really, they are very different. Because, there is a debate among some Latvians whether the sort of, very state sponsored, let's say, sounds nefarious but it's probably not, movement of the Latvian Song Festival which happens every four years.

Judy Caine: [00:34:03] In July isn't it, oh you've not told me about the summer festival yet.

Agris Krumins: [00:34:05] Well I'll tell you about it. But, about this, [the Latvian Song Festival] you have this but below that there's a there's a 'roots' based folk culture which is looking not to have the stylized nature to give it, to recreate a much more authentic feel to the to the way that folk culture actually is reproduced. And there is a there's quite a big rubbing up against each other, a conflict, a sort of conflict with these two sort of cultural worlds.

Judy Caine: [00:34:47] I think it's like that everywhere don't you? Because in England you've got clog dancers in the north, you've got whaling songs, there's traditional farming folk songs. There's not one British culture.

Agris Krumins: [00:34:58] No, yes, yeah, that's right...

Judy Caine: [00:34:58] In any country there's this and that and I think it's, it's almost insulting just to think of one dance, or one music, or one 'something' to represent a whole country. Which is why I'm trying to be really careful not to do that, to be honest. But I'm still very much at the research stage here. None of us know, really, how the Latvian part of this is going to pan out.

Agris Krumins: [00:35:24] No, I mean

Judy Caine: [00:35:24] I'm trying to get a little bit of head of the game here because we're not officially starting that part of the project till January. But I want to hit the ground running, you know what it's like, it takes too long otherwise.

Agris Krumins: [00:35:37] Yeah. I'm very happy to talk further about it. But about midsummer, Okay. Midsummer actually in Latvia doesn't happen at Midsummer.

Judy Caine: [00:35:48] So it's not the summer solstice.

Agris Krumins: [00:35:50] They celebrate the summer solstice, but they don't celebrate it on the 23rd June and that goes back to a historical thing and I'm trying to remember when it was. It goes back to the conflict between the Catholic Church and paganism. The Catholic Church, which was really established from the German crusades, realized that in the Baltics paganism was very strong and if the Lithuanians, who actually nominally became Catholics because they had a big coalition Commonwealth with the Poles, they became Catholic.

Judy Caine: [00:36:40] Ah, yes, Lithuania was part of Poland at one time wasn't it.

Agris Krumins: [00:36:41] Well parts of Latvia in fact were part of Poland too.

Judy Caine: [00:36:47] Really.

Agris Krumins: [00:36:47] At one point yeah.

Judy Caine: [00:36:47] Gosh, I didn't know that.

Agris Krumins: [00:36:49] The eastern part, and that's why, that's why they are still Catholic, in fact, so they were part of Poland.

Agris Krumins: [00:36:59] So the church decided that how do you, you've got to try and manage this, these pagans in some sort of way. So, so what they did was they banned the summer solstice. They renamed it the Festival of St. John, so it was regarded as Saint John the Baptist's birthday and that was, then you're allowed to celebrate that. That actually happened in various forms later on because the Communist, when the Soviets came to power, the communist government came to power, they too did not like these pagan cultures. They didn't like also the Catholic version of it either. So, they banned everything for a while. But people carried on these traditions. The tradition was very powerful of, in the summer solstice, and even though now they celebrate it and it is, it's the only as I say, the only pagan celebration that is actually a state holiday in Europe. They have, they have a two-day holiday to be able to celebrate it and then get over it, because most Latvians at that time on the celebration of midsummer, let's call it St. John's Festival will go back to their lands where they have come from. So, most Latvians have some connection to a farm somewhere, and you see them, they actually on the on the twenty third they will be leaving. There's huge traffic jams going out of Riga going back in all directions to celebrate it and then two days later they'll be all coming back and there'll be huge traffic jams getting back in. Takes them hours to get in, and they go back and there's a whole set of rituals and things you should do. The girls go out to collect wildflowers and grasses and they make these garlands.

Judy Caine: [00:39:39] Hence that. [Judy's points to one of her research pictures]

Internet research:



Agris Krumins: [00:39:40] Yes. Yes, it's very very similar. And you're meant to do it on, I think the morning of the 23rd, that's when the ...

Judy Caine: [00:39:54] Midsummer Eve.

Agris Krumins: [00:39:55] Yeah, Midsummer Eve, that's when the, the culture, that's when the biological culture had its greatest power, its greatest force, its greatest healing powers. Because they will also gather these grasses, and these seeds, and these flowers, and they will use them also as in all sorts of things - I'm trying to think of the English word for it - in all sorts of teas.

Judy Caine: [00:40:25] Ah, OK.

Agris Krumins: [00:40:25] So as health drinks. And that's, that's, you'd also build a huge fire and then you put a fire on top of a pole which, there is an English word for it.

Judy Caine: [00:40:41] Like a Beacon.

Agris Krumins: [00:40:41] Like a beacon, yeah, but I think it's another word. And the idea was that you light the whole of the landscape you can see. Because Latvia is really quite flat, it's a bit like Northamptonshire, (both laugh). It's, it's quite flat. It's quite flat and rolling but, these beacons would be where people are celebrating from each farmstead. So, the whole, the idea was that you would be able to see where these

beacons are, and you would actually go and visit those people who are celebrating. Because the celebration really took off, it was the idea that you would not sleep at all the Midsummer's Eve, you would be up all night. You would drink, eat and there was one very important 'Right' that is, was seen, obviously the church would see with difficulty, it was the one night when marital vows were abrogated, and it didn't matter. So, there was, there was a lot of argument.

Judy Caine: [00:41:57] The church would not like that.

Agris Krumins: [00:41:57] The church would not like that. And you know, what happened, happened and it was what happened. So, there is, you know, there's a whole series of things happening underneath.

Judy Caine: [00:42:15] I don't think we'll be able to have that as part of the 'sharing' - that might be taking things a little too far?

[00:42:16] (both laugh)

Agris Krumins: [00:42:23] Yeah. There's a huge amount of folk tunes linked to sing songs which are which are sung on the Yaan Night.

Judy Caine: [00:42:35] You're going to have to do some spelling for me (pushes pad over to him).

Agris Krumins: [00:42:39] In fact I've got actually a piece of work I've written about Yaan. which I'll actually e-mail.

Judy Caine: [00:42:50] I'd love to read it. We are going to have to stop because you need to be somewhere. Let me, thank you very much first, and then I'll turn this off.