

Editor's Column

We have decided to begin this collection on improvised *bertsolaritza* with two very different, yet at the same time complementary, points of view. In the first article, John Miles Foley offers his vision—or to put it another way, his experience—of one of the highpoints of modern-day *bertsolaritza*: the finals of the Basque National Bertsolari Championships 2005. This account reflects the most visible and spectacular part of a performance that, as Foley himself so rightly states, cannot be fully understood solely on the basis of what happened or what was said on that particular day in that particular event. Much like an iceberg, the hidden part that supports and gives meaning to this festive tradition is much larger and runs far deeper than its visible counterpart. The second article deals precisely with one of the basic pillars of this hidden part, outlining the conclusions of a sociological study carried out over recent years with the aim of exploring, in greater depth, the structure of the *bertsolaritza* audience, followed by an assessment of the phenomenon and expectations for the future. We believe that these two perspectives offer anyone striving to understand the phenomenon of sung improvisation in the Basque language an unbeatable insight into the matter at hand.

In subsequent articles we aim to explore those aspects that, in our opinion, constitute the key characteristics of present-day improvised *bertsolaritza*. The third article analyzes the sociocultural characteristics of *bertsolaritza*, located within the context of the community that sustains it—the Basque community. The fourth article aims to describe the ecology of Basque oral poetry, offering a brief overview of the genres that it contains.

The fifth and sixth articles deal with the vital task of transmitting the art of *bertsolaritza*. The first of these outlines the current situation of the *bertso-eskolak*, or *bertsolaritza* schools, while the following one explores the place that both improvised *bertsolaritza* and oral poetry in general should occupy in the Basque school curriculum. The seventh article is a summary of the history of improvised *bertsolaritza*, arranged in accordance with the parameters of the genre itself. In the next contribution, Andoni Egaña, winner of the last four national championships, offers a phenomenological insight into the process of creating improvised bertsos.

With the principal aspects of the phenomenon outlined in previous articles, the ninth article in this collection proposes the establishment of a theoretical framework specifically for improvised *bertsolaritza* and discusses some of the proposals regarding the establishment of this framework to date. Finally, we have included interviews with three *bertsolaris*, one each from the older, middle, and younger generations: Joxe Agirre, Andoni Egaña, and Maialen Lujanbio.

The Association of Friends of Bertsolaritza is extremely grateful to John Foley, not only for his trust and confidence in inviting us to compile this collection, but also for the enthusiasm with which he has received all our initiatives and for his always interesting criticisms and suggestions.

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