



# Lindita Ottarsson



Welcome to episode 145 of Ypsilonsamtaler, the podcast from Kirkelig Dialogsenter in Drammen. My name is Ivar Flaten, and in this episode I talk to Lindita Ottarsson. Lindita was born in Berat, the old, beautiful city in the middle of Albania. She grew up in a home strongly influenced by communism. While studying literature and art, she became acquainted with Thorkell, who came to visit from Iceland. They married and moved to Iceland, where they lived for many years before moving to Drammen. Lindita is a trained singer, she writes and she paints. In recent years, she has become more and more concerned with her Albanian roots, and now leads an Albanian choir in Drammen.

- **My journey has been long, good and exciting through new languages and cultures. Now I feel more and more how important the Albanian roots are, says Lindita.**

*Then I am very happy that Lindita Ottarsson has come here. How has your day been today?*

It has been a very good day. It has started quite early in the morning, because on Monday I start at quarter to seven. But I tend to arrive a little earlier, and have plenty of time in the kindergarten at Konnerud. On Monday we go on a trip, and that trip today was at Løvenjordet .

*Yes, and then it's actually sunny, and the snow seems to be starting to disappear. That's nice.*

I think it was the last day to sledge up there, because it has been quite soft and wet.

*Lindita..., as I said before we started, I googled a bit and found out that Lindita, Google Translate wanted it to have something to do with birth, but it's not, it's dawn.*

Yes, it is. In Albanian, lind, that is to give birth. Dita is day, today's birth, it is like in a way.



*Yes, or dawn, or the start of the day.*

Daggry is it, I think it's a very nice word in Norwegian to describe Lindita.

*And Ottarsson, it's not exactly Albanian.*

No, Ottarsson is an Icelandic name. It's not a surname, because Icelanders don't have surnames, but there is a son of Ottar, so I also became Ottar's "son". The reason was that when we got married in Albania, I had to prove that I was well married and serious, so I said, ok, then I'll take your surname, then I became Ottarsson. I thought I might change back, because my maiden name is Keli, but I can't go back.

*Lindita Keli is your maiden name?*

Yes. Lindita Keli. But I really like Ottarsson.

*But I think we can start from the beginning right away, because again then with my Googling, I didn't know this, but Berat...?*

Berat is my city. Berat, it's a wonderful city.

*Old, very old.*

Very old city, and I was born in Berat and went to school there, and so I think today that it is one of the most beautiful cities there is. When I travel back, I travel not only because I was born there, I have family, but I travel as a tourist and then I see (as someone) who comes from Iceland first, or from Norway. And then you find everything there, you find history, you have suddenly bumped into the Middle Ages, in the narrow streets with cobblestones like that, and there are many days of sunshine.

*Yes, right, this is Albania, and it's south of Tirana, it's roughly in the middle of the country.*

Berat, yes, a little south, it's an hour and a half from Tirana if you drive.

*Not that I'm familiar there, but I looked at the map and saw that it's roughly in the middle, and if it's supposed to be a bit spacious, it's a bit like Drammen in a way, because it's by a river.*

I have often thought that, because there is a river that divides, and I live on the same side as I lived in Albania, on the other side, not on it, where you live on the cold side in the winter. There is not much sun in the winter, I live on the sunny side, I did the same in Berat, and I have often thought that, but Drammen is five times bigger than Berat, and that is why people enjoy themselves so much, because it is somewhat familiar with Drammen. River, two parts, and bridges. And bridges, yes.

There was a very beautiful old stone bridge in Berat I saw.

*And they have closed it to the car a long time ago, so it is not bad for those who walk. Albania, Kosovo, Kosovo-Albanians, so we are talking about old Yugoslavia, Albania is facing the sea, and then we have Kosovo which is in the north-east, which also has a lot of Albanians, and what we have read and see that there has been and is a lot of strife, because, well..., political stuff. How much of this did you experience growing up in Berat?*

Yes, I can tell you that, because now I have many good friends from Kosovo, but when I lived in Albania, there was such a paranoia about everything. I have known some people from Kosovo who lived in my home town, but most of them were a bit like that, we were skeptical because they thought maybe they were spies for the Yugoslavs, or something like that. What can I say, we had to be careful.



*So there was a very clear distinction between Albania and Yugoslavia then, which was the old name?*

Yes, but I'm talking about Kosovo, and Albania was closed, and they couldn't even go to Kosovo, because Kosovo was like going abroad, and we couldn't go there. So I have known when I lived in Albania, so I also remember, when I was in high school and secondary school, then we had three young people who came from Kosovo, they were refugees for political reasons, and we got to be with them when school was but could not visit them.

*So there was skepticism, there was suspicion, a feeling that they could be dangerous, simply?*

Yes, because that's what communism does, it did to create a bit of paranoia.

*I haven't googled this, so I haven't read anything special about the story, but a name sticks in my head, Enver Hoxha . Enver Hoxa , yes, we read it, or Hoxha , we read it, right, at school. And communism, and closed country, as you say. Say a few words about it, what it was like from your point of view as a young girl.*

Have you read Lea Ypi's book , *Fri* ? I recommend it.

*Say it one more time.*

This book is called *Fri* , her name is *Lea Ypi* . Albanian, but she is younger than me, but she explains very well growing up in Albania under communism. Now that I was little, I knew nothing. My father was a communist, and then from 1941, and then he was a partisan, if you understand the term partisan. So he was a communist all his life, until he died. And fair man and good man and believed very much in communism. So I.., in a way we saw Hoxha as god, because the religion was completely.., it was forbidden to believe in Allah or in Jesus, the churches and mosques were closed. As I was born into it, I didn't know any better. And then I lived life like others, we are like that, children who were born in the 60s, with many families around and children playing, and didn't think much. But at home of course, I heard a lot about Hoxha and communism, because my father was a very devoted communist, and believed in it. And then later, when I saw that someone from my class who was very gifted and was almost a genius was not allowed to study because of his father, or his brother had tried to escape to other countries. Albania was closed, it was not possible to travel, only those who had a diplomatic visa or something.

*But that's how it is for children, when you grow up in a context, it doesn't ask the basic questions to begin with. Because you live life the way you live it, and that's easy.*

I have thought about it a lot, because when I moved from Albania, everyone asked about communism, but we had lives. I have read many books, and like that, we have lives to tell about. We had good friends, good neighbours, and so in a way the same 60s that have been here, and then other countries, where there was not so much about politics or about communism. But at school, there we had to learn a lot about communism. We had our own subject called, then it was "history of the communist group", as it was called, from the very beginning. And then it's a bit strange, because I've read another book that doesn't agree with the one we've learned. We have learned a completely different thing.

*Yes, because there is one, you call it a kind of revisionism as well. You write the story as it fits, right, in the system. In the system, and history is even rewritten backwards to fit the ideology. Absolutely. So this is known in totalitarian systems then.*

Absolutely, yes it was.



*And what is also part of my childhood learning is that communism is also very hostile to religion . In other words, communism is in a way a total ideology that has no room for faith, religious faith.*

Absolutely, it's kind of built on the French Revolution as I remember it.

*Yes, Laïcité . Laïcité too, that is, a secular society.*

That religion is "opium for the people". So that's . No, but what I have learned from the history there until 1967, the churches were open, also the mosques. But after that they start to close and destroy, so it was completely forbidden. But we knew in the city who was Muslim and who was Orthodox. Because then there is a tradition how everyone who belonged to the Orthodox churches, their name was different from those who were Muslim.

*But I have also heard it said in this series, I spoke to someone else, that it was also in a way good tone not to ask for or dig into a religious background. That is, that you were citizens of the state, you were Albanian, or were part of the community, and how you then believed, or differences within that were toned down, and that should not be talked about.*

In my town there has never been any conflict between Muslim or Christian people. Even if you travel, if one day you travel to Albania, there is a cathedral, or church called Onofri , there was a painter from 1600-1700. He had painted a picture, a picture, where there is a church, two churches, and then something with biblical figures, and in the background there you see a mosque. Yes, exactly. And it doesn't exist, there has always been a good tone between the population.

*But you then experienced in your time that it became sharper, it became more dangerous, you weren't supposed to talk, it was also directly suppressed as a religion, is that how you understand it, from 67-68?*

I can't say because...

*You didn't experience it?*

I didn't experience it, because I didn't come from a family that had strong...

*No, no, right? You were on the right page.*

When you don't know, you don't know. Later you can think about it, you are inside it now and not seeing, so you have the close picture and not seeing. And then children, we had other things to do, other things to experience, and I didn't think about it.

*So you lived in the city so you played in the streets or what was it like?*

I lived in the middle of Berat, I lived in a block, quite a big block with many families and many small children playing outside all day.

*But you were a musical child, weren't you ?*

I know, I was lucky. When I was in first grade at school, a young girl and a man come who want students at the music school, but they have to try to have a test like that first. And so I was one of those who showed that she can sing, we can take you along... I was a group of children who saw a piano for the first time in my life. Oh, you see the piano? No. So I was a bit skeptical, where are we going...

*But then have you seen other instruments?*



Yes, it's like that harmonica and it's because they have a clarinet and they use it. But the piano, I had never come close to a piano before that day. And then they said, okay, she can be with us, because she has hearing and we can... So that was it, that was my journey, and I'm very, very grateful that I started playing the piano as a child. And then I finished eight years, and then I couldn't study any more, that's how it turned out... It's a bit of a misunderstanding, but I'm happy about it, because I studied grammar school, quite a good grammar school, then later I studied some literature and languages . But when I came to Iceland, I studied singing.

*How was ... What happened? Why did you leave Albania?*

Yes, in 92 I met Thorkell, my husband, the Icelander. He came to Albania, became famous, and that's how a very sweet love story began .

*You became lovers*

Clearly. And then we got married in... No, it's actually such a crazy story, when you think about it.

*Yes, but tell me..*

It's a very short time. We got to know each other.

*Thorkell has also told his story, not true, in another episode, but listen.*

Yes, we met, we were in Tirana, the capital. There was something like a workshop about... And then, I think he was very handsome, and then he says... In Iceland, you have nicknames. His name is Thorkell, but I call him Kjele. And my maiden name is Kjele. But it's a bit of Kettle and Kettle. And then I say, my name is Lindita Kjele, and my name is Kjele. And yes, we have a big family here. So yes, there are some things like that that I think back on. Wow, that was "meant to be". And then we met after two months. We traveled to ... to Romania. We took the bus through the Balkans. The first time that I traveled out of Albania.

*And there was no problem with that then?*

It was... no, no. For that we had to show ourselves to the people. Then there was a youth conference in Bucharest, in Romania. And we got to know each other, we had 20 hours on the bus, and then we talked, and somehow became very romantic on the bus. Then you see my ring here. The next day when we arrived in Bucharest, we lost each other. There were no telephones at that time. We were going to... he was going to go there and we didn't see each other all day. When he comes back, he says, I bought you a ring. It's in the market ... on the street ... And so I have that, still, that ring. And it's ... and so I take it when I was pregnant, and my fingers swell, then I put it back afterwards. But it is when we got married. Then I have it on me all the time. It's a sweet love story.

*Yes, sweet. But you spoke English to each other then?*

Yes, we spoke English. And yes, my English was ok, not that great, but it got better over time. Because my language is Albanian, I learned French at school. And I was much better in French than in English. But I saw more people who came to Albania, they spoke English. Very few spoke French. And with French it was so much more academic, and we read books, and had... I also had an exam called Aprez Universite , to show that I can be a researcher, or perhaps teach. But it was English back then...

*So have you studied French literature?*

Yes, yes, I have studied general literature, not just French. But we in Albania at that time, we studied to be realist-socialist, and that's nothing more. And the other literature that has been decadent. Not surrealism, not cubism, not anything else, not...

Transcript (Open AI Whisper ), of [Ypsilon Conversations](#), episode 145. Carefully edited by Ivar Flaten - page 5 – Translation from Norwegian to English by Google Translate.



*So it should be straightforward, popular, realistic, edifying, constructive?*

Certainly, as in the Soviet Union, they had the same thing. They were afraid maybe we would become like the others, and have other ideas and others... And then become free in our minds, in a way.

*I am reading Solzhenitsyn again now. And it's pretty incredible. He has such a distant, ironic ... It becomes a kind of comedy in the middle of the tragedy, how he describes these cadres.*

You describe the goulash, how he just...

*Not that one, now I'm reading one called Første Krets, which is from a prison... We could talk a lot about that, but we won't. But that you have an ideology and a policy and an overall view that is so rooted and so strong and carried out with such power, that it is experienced as... For those who then cannot fit into it, or who do not accept it, it will disaster.*

Absolutely. But I was lucky. I was not involved in... As I said, my father fits well in the system that I am. But when I finished my studies, I was chosen to work as a secretary in a ... youth centre. But of course they were under... Under the party. During the party, exactly. But I didn't try to be the same, I tried to be a little different, because I simply didn't like it. I don't know why, but I didn't like it. I can't say I was that wise, and I knew it like that... I can't say. I wasn't, but...

*Gut feeling, intuition...*

I say feeling, gut feeling, it doesn't fit as... Why don't you become a communist? I can't be a communist, because I don't feel... I'm not that perfect, because my thoughts... I run away from class, and I want to be with my friends, I don't want to talk about what the others are doing, I don't want to, and I never, never. Then I saw how the others were, those who worked in the party, there are some people who... Today I develop a bit like that... I can't say that I am an anarchist, but the status that someone has... Because you work in a place, that I don't like You work somewhere, you have that status because... Your job, you get paid for it. It's like that ...

*But Lindita, let's talk about what then could not be talked about, and which Thorkell and you have in common, which is a kind of universalism, the Bahai faith. Yes, it was through the Bahai faith that we got to know each other. So that's what brought you together?*

At the time I was a bit thirsty to find some real advice like that, because everything was... What can I say? Everything fell down, we had nothing to hold on to. Then I thought it fits me pretty well. Then we became...

*Because Thorkell also came... He also has such a wonderful story about how his path has been, right? And that he is a theologian, he is a filmmaker, he thinks a lot. So when he came to Albania, it was also part of this project of figuring things out. For his part?*

Yes, he learned a lot, and that's how his world got bigger, and saw that there are other people and other ways, what is it like to live in communism? And then get to know Albanians and learn the language. He still can, but we don't speak much Albanian at home.

*Ok, conference in Romania, long bus ride, call on the finger, back again, and then...*

Then we come home, and my parents were not alive at that time, then I enter my apartment.. We live together in Albania. If you are not married, then you live with your brother, sister, then I will come in. "Here is my fiancé, and I'm getting married in three months." I was very independent, that they had nothing to say, but it was a bit difficult to talk, because they didn't know English, and they don't know today either. So it was kind of a story. Everyone asked: Huh? - She is going to marry an Icelander, and



he is much younger than her, and then it was... and we got married in February, nobody got married in February in Albania.

*And it was a bit of courage... Because there will be a party, and there will be...*

Yes, everything. And so the wedding itself became a kind of adventure in a way. There are people who talk today about it too, but not me, I forgot.

*So "adventure" because it was so different from the other, or...*

It was very different, we had dances, we had poems, so we had... yes, it's a bit different, how I dressed, what we ate, how people... We broke all those traditions, it was like that...

*But both Thorkell and you are strong people, but you know what you want, and are not too concerned with what others say.*

In a way, I'm not like that... but I've become... Well, of course I thought what other people think about me, but I've always followed my own path. But not so... Thorkell is more direct and says things like that, but I am, but I'm softer on the road. But yeah, that... I've always been a little different. I can't say I'm that typical Albanian, never been. Never been the one.

*What is typically Albanian? Give me the stencils..*

I didn't, I wasn't going to... I wasn't going to come out with that. But... who likes traditions like... What can I say... I can... I like traditions. I kind of like traditions, because I think that... you're not being honest with people. So, it's not ... and you live like that a little ... a little prison, I don't know ... You're like ... you don't have much choice. If something comes to you because... because it's your birthday... or something like that... Then you have to go back, because it's... You have to do the same, in a way. You are doing something good, weighty and heavy.

*You get expectations at the same time.*

Yes, strong frameworks and expectations. I want to be kind and good, and so... But... a kind of code that... You have to live by that code. That... I don't know, but I don't like that much... Some traditionally good, but now it's... Yes. Not for me.

*There are social frameworks and requirements, if you have to... ladies have to be like that, people do like that. At a certain age ... in the old days in ... For example, when you were confirmed, then. Only then could the boys wear suits and get hats. Then the boys started wearing hats. Then you could go to parties, then you could drink alcohol. When you were 15, you were confirmed. Confirmation was like... It's just like an example of such a very clear code on a level that you've reached, like when society accepts you as a proper human being, not as a child anymore. It was ... but you also have many such codes as ... which are criticized, and which the authorities are also starting to talk about, right, as unfair. So that there is social pressure, isn't it, where the social pressure becomes harmful, because you are then kept away from the general community, and so on. Sect ... i.e. type of sect problem, for example, or very strong social codes on how to dress, or ... All this is part of this same pattern, where a free soul, or where a person has a strong sense of individuality, right, and who want a lot, often have to fight against these things, because that... maybe those around are a little anxious that it goes too far, or... right, that it becomes dangerous in one way or another.*

Then you lose your identity if that... But there was a certain period in my life when I had to live according to tradition. But when I finished school, I had ... I was independent, then I could live according to my ...



*But did you and Torkell live in Albania after you were married for a while?*

Yes. Not Berat, in another city, in the East... in Albania called Koca. Two or three months later we traveled to ... first to Germany, the Netherlands, and then we came to Iceland. Yes.

*And Iceland it was.*

It was Iceland. Language, climate, work... It was when I was in Albania that I went to the library to look up the facts. It was nothing. And then when I learned...

*Because it wasn't something?*

It was, but it was a bit like that financially... some facts that... some image that was... I knew nothing about Iceland, simply.

*Geyser?*

At that time, 1993, there was Google on it, we could Google... was Google... Now the internet or something like that?.

*No no..*

So I got to know Iceland when I came to Iceland. And it was 13 June 1993. And then it was seven degrees. Then I come from Albania which is very hot. You have all four seasons lightly dressed. Totally shocked. But then eventually you start to love that country, and look at that, the lights... The sun didn't set, and it rained. The colors were strong, and the grass was green. The grass was green and everything. But I thought to myself, where have I come? Where am I now?

*You said in one of these conversations that I found online, in the interview with you, that Iceland has two seasons. It's spring and winter, you said.*

Yes. It's spring, or fall, or winter, or whatever. It happens that the winter can be milder than here in Norway. It does, just in winter. But yes, it only has two. The summer was cold. It was quite cold. So you get used to it eventually, but then it's like that... I didn't know. I didn't know, I was shocked. But you accepted it, and then you found out that it worked anyway. I found it very fascinating. I was tired of Albania, all those problems. People were... What can I say? We had no food at the end. They had to have a voucher to get... There was poverty, there were people who wanted to leave Albania. There was chaos, and people were depressed. So I wanted to... Now I'm going away. The climate did nothing for me. That's how I can stand it. And the language. The first time that I came to... The first time that I came to... to Iceland, to Reykjavik. Then I visited Thorkell's grandmother. She, of course, is coming ... Thorkell's wife is coming from ... We must take ... And that was the news. Because it's like... At seven o'clock you have to sit and watch the news. And those words were so long, I couldn't... Not understand anything. Just... Where am I? Maybe I'll go to the moon or something? And then in addition after that, there will be a video for Björk. And Björk, I love her today, but the time she ran in the forest with such... Such bears, such teddy bears, such... Such human behavior. So I say, I love it today, but it... Is it possible? Where have I come? And then his grandmother. So usually, if you're an old one, you're not, then you're dressed in black, and then you're like... Looks like... She was... Looking beautiful, and make-up, and... It was the grandmother, like that... Yes! Yes, yes...

*So a big transition. It was completely convinced. But you settled down. You realized that you wanted this after all, so this was the point.*

Yes, yes. Of course, I was going to ... And you started studying, and then started singing. I... In Iceland it's like the weather, when you can go out with it, when the weather is not good, you can't go out in





the afternoon, and we didn't have children. So I wanted to fill the day with something else. Then I thought, maybe we should start playing the piano again. But he... the manager said... What can I say... As the music school told me, yes, you can play, but think about something else. Maybe do something else. Then I thought, I can sing. I was happy to sing, I liked classical music. Then there was an audition like that, and the lady who became my teacher for many years, she was from Poland, Alina, she heard me and said, yes, fine, good. Then Schubert sang in Albanian. She said, but if you hear something special, tell me like that, because I don't want to spend money and time. Then she said to me, you have to think. Think. And come autumn, it was in June. So then I started. And those are the new years, then I had my first child, second child, third child while I was studying. I did a lot of other things. Taught Icelandic to Albanians who came from Kosovo. Then worked as an interpreter. Did many things. Worked in a kindergarten for a couple of years.

*Because you were going to finance the study too? Yes, I did not take out loans while studying. Maybe buy some food? Pay rent?*

You know, when I think back, I was so happy. I was the kind of little girl who should, first row, and like that hear everything. I was so thirsty, thirsty, thirsty, to learn about music.

*How old were you when you started your studies?*

31. Yes. For the 32 then...

*Because this is a point. That is a point in itself. Nothing about just your person, but having to start a course of study, when you are an adult. There are many people who are a little anxious about it. You go to school when you're young, and then you become something, and then maybe it's not quite what you enjoy. But then there are many who are anxious to take the step out and do something else. I did it like that when I turned 50. I took theology and became a priest when I was 50 years old. I had a career doing many other things before that. But that experience of being, as you say, hungry to learn something new, and go into something else, and fill both the head and the heart, it's incredibly fascinating. We must encourage people...*

I was such a sponge. It's all that... But I've often thought about it, because I've been fond of school . Never tired of school. I started from the age of 16 until I finished university. A lot of people say, oh, I'm so sorry. No, with that experience, going to school because you want to go, you want to learn, that's completely different. Then I studied, I didn't know I could sing. Started with a small voice, and then my voice became until one time I was scared of my own voice. Then I started to sing the big arias, and stand on the stage, which makes me like that and I want to follow well about myself. Stand on stage and it...

*You have to say a little more about that, Lindita, how to find the voice. Because you say, you could sing. You have been singing all along, like to sing, have a good ear. But what happened? You say the voice gets loud. What happened?*

I was musical, liked melodies, and saw a small voice. But I had a very good teacher, I think she is one of the best in Iceland, Alina Dobik . She saw me, she showed how my voice should sound in five years or so.

*Is it just like exercising muscles?*

Absolutely, yes. You have to listen like that, you have to become confident with your breathing, with everything, you have to become confident, and come how... It takes time, it takes years, it takes a lot, and so on. But after, what should I say, after four years, then I start to... I became a coloratura. I could go up very high, all those years to...



*Queen of the night?*

Not quite there, but...

*Just so people know what coloratura is.*

I was missing an F up there, yeah. But I have other ares added from Leo Delib , you can find on YouTube a video that deals with it. Aria that was very top, they were very nice, but I got a bit tired of singing just like that scale up and down, I wanted such a meaningful aria that tells something, like the text and tells something. But out of nowhere, I was like... That... That's a singer.

*But did you ever think about following a solo career as an opera soloist?*

Yes, I thought, when I got here, I thought wow, now Norway is going to be bigger, and so on. But then I had to sacrifice my children, and have to sacrifice family life, and then I thought, no, I'd better work in the nursery, and then I'll be a freelance singer. And I have done that alongside...

*Because I think it must be a very, very dramatic choice, because an incredible amount is required, and you have to sing in different opera houses around Europe, or wherever, and learn new repertoires, and...*

I've met people who are... yes, they have a nice career as a singer, but in the end, they end up lonely, without children, and without... No, I had a family, I had a life, and so on , and it stayed next to everything. So, no, now I've sung much more often here, I've sung often in Fjell church, and I remember that very well, and I'll tell you something. In many... in all the churches, so sometimes I fell asleep like that when the priest preached, or something like that, but not when you... Not when you... I managed to keep you awake. Yes, you did, absolutely. It was so good. And that church that is so open, and so, I know, it was something that I listened to everything that you said. Not because I'm your guest here, but I've often thought that, it's very interesting to feel... You keep it alive. It's like that...

*But there was something almost like that with the song, that if you have something to say, if you want to convey something, and concentrate on it, and manage to get people's attention on it, then I think most of it is done. One can recite the most beautiful things, and it can be done correctly, and it is theologically correct, and it is musically correct and so on. It is not certain that it communicates for that.*

No, it doesn't touch.

*So it has something to do with communication, I think. Yes absolutely.*

And then when you talk to people, right to people, you have a message they hear.

*I understand that was a course too, I can say a little about that too, because preaching is a... So, homiletics, having to convey a text from the Bible through a reflection, through the sermon, is a separate subject after all , right? And it is taken very seriously, because you have to put things out correctly, it has to be theologically correct and so on. But then we had the opportunity to go on a course, and we have a fairly new priest there, which is about giving the sermon without a script. How do you preach without a script? And what struck me, and which made me get such an immediate feeling that this was right, and where I started to test it out, was in connection with funerals. Because what characterizes a funeral, or a burial, is that everyone knows why it is there. Right? It is a very existentially saturated situation, where a loved one has passed away, and where you have to also think through your own, because you are reminded that life is... there is a day it will end. And then you also have that kind of repertoire of themes, biblical themes and the like, because it is not a long-*



winded speech, but the combination of speaking about a life that has passed away from a memorial speech, and then reflecting on someone biblical themes in that connection, makes it much freer, and I discovered very quickly that people sat straight in the back and were very focused when they managed to weave themselves together in a way that was meaningful. And that is actually also the reason why we have this podcast. For these memorial speeches, coming into a family and talking to relatives of a person who has passed away, about the life that has been. So I thought, why should we wait? Why can't I have a conversation with people while they can still tell themselves?

You keep on preaching, don't you?

Yes, but then, don't preach, maybe a little preachy, but my point is just to take part in a, in a person's life, a life story that you try to compress very much then, in a funeral. But spending a whole hour, like we do now. But just to complete it, then the experience that it is possible to say something very meaningful and nice in such a setting, made that, yes, but it is clear that it must also be possible in a slightly larger sermon.

Yes, but that's how the sermon is, how you feel being seen. That you saw people there. And I was one of them, I'm not Kristin, but I heard everything. So I was waiting for you to sing those solos, but I heard it.

Okay, where were we? We were in contact with your soloist, meaning that you worked with singing and so on, but you had the children, and then you came here to Norway, and you have established yourself here as a soloist a bit, and now in kindergarten. But you also need to tell me a little about both your photography and your writing.

Yes, the writing was when it came in 2014. It was like that, I'm on my way home. When I came here to Norway, I said that I've come from Iceland, but in Albanian, but people didn't have the patience for me to hear the last one, originally Albanian. Because when I sang with a choir, it was adult people, then I heard after a couple of years, I started singing in Albanian, but Lindita, how in the world do you know Albanian? But I said, Albanian originally. But you said you were Icelandic. I come from Iceland, but maybe I felt more Icelandic at the time, maybe that was the truth, but now I feel more that I have come to my roots symbolically by singing in Albanian and making a music album, and I have also established an Albanian choir here in Drammen.

Yes, but you also say that at home, in the family, you have spoken Icelandic as a main language.

We speak Icelandic at home, yes.

Because the child has grown, meaning they were born in Iceland and have attended an Icelandic school.

The oldest, for it was nine years.

So you choose to speak a language that is Thorkell's language, really.

As I can.

As you can, and as the children have also learned. But you are multilingual, then.

We are.

You speak a little English, you say you have learned French, you read French literature, you are Albanian, Icelandic now, Norwegian. So language, what's the deal with language? Because language, it is through language that we think, isn't it? And I also notice that when you speak another language, you somehow become a slightly different person.



It certainly is. That's why I had to learn Icelandic, because at the beginning I spoke in English. When I started speaking Icelandic, I went into the roots, then I saw people where they were, or got to know the country, precisely through the language. The same here with the Norwegian language. It's another you can speak English, it's a bit like that you take care of how you formulate, what you say, a bit like that. But it comes naturally when you speak your own language. I don't know if it's Norwegian, but Norwegian, I speak Icelandic at home, and I have some communication with my friends in Albanian. But also, it's Norwegian. When I say Norwegian, I use it at work, and with colleagues, and then with those who are not Albanian, or not Icelandic. It is Norwegian.

*Do you read a lot in Norwegian? Do you read literature?*

I read a lot, yes, yes. But lately I've started to use a lot of that kind of audio .

*Yes, audiobook.*

Audiobook, yes, I have that. The last thing that I, it was Norsk Knausgård, almost all his books.

*Yes, fabulous.*

I love it. So, yes ! And I heard.

*I have an approximately one meter Knausgård, from the first...*

Oh, it's like that. Is it possible? And then others. Vigdis.

*Vigdis Hjort..*

But I hear a lot. I, now love Annie Hearnux is now. She who won the Nobel Prize, because I discovered her before she won the prize. And then I have read various podcasts . No, not on one , but such books, such self-development. Now right now I am teaming up with Jay Shetty . He who is, *How to sing like a monk* . And it's very nice. Then I finished, it was a sweet book that Shirley Kemp , Martin Kemp , they wrote together. Shirley who was Wham, and who was in the same band with George Michael.

*Wow , Wham, wow . Yes, Wham.*

Okay. Spandau, and great life. Very, very beautiful book.

No, when you ask, it's because, in my .. language there are two things, one is that you hear the language surrounded by language, so that you can, if you're going to learn German, you have to hear German around you, right? To be able to intonate correctly, to be able to hear yourself in the language. But then you have to read to get vocabulary, and thoughts, right? Literature is what gives, which creates language in a way then. And that's why I think that reading the language that you want to become good at is quite important.

I have read a lot, and then heard something. Now I use it a lot, I can move. It's a bit boring to sit and sit. I have to move and do other things, while listening to books. But behind the fact that I write in Albanian, it is 2014, then suddenly I had to express myself in Albanian. Then I write all those memoirs in a way, from the very beginning, when I remember it to myself, now it was four years on that block where we lived. Me and my sister playing on the playground. Then other things. Because I think, there are many who are negative towards, because it has been that communist country, there are many negative, they tear down everything that has been, but it was a good part, because it is life itself. You can do n't throw the baby with dirty water. That is my explanation. I have it, you can't throw me, me and my friend who played, that there were other things than communism, everyone has their life to tell. It wasn't long ago that I saw a film, it was about girls who had no parents and  
[Transcript \(Open AI Whisper \)](#), of [Ypsilon Conversations](#), episode 145. Carefully edited by Ivar Flaten - page 12 – Translation from Norwegian to English by Google Translate.



lived in a monastery. And they, the nuns there, they were quite strong, they were quite strict with them, and they got a strong sense of guilt, which is not good, they were not free, but it was no different than growing up in communism. In other countries there are some other things, in other countries.

*You have to find out, and in each context you will be influenced by the surrounding culture. I have also talked a lot about it growing up in a rather strict..., with grandparents, very strict, religiously strict grandparents, and what kind of framework it set, and how much resistance we had to use to break out of it. Because you protest and realize that this is not me, I have to figure this out myself. So it's like that, I think, it's the abuses that have made communism, in a way, perceived as grotesque. That people who are oppositional had no opportunities... in all such repressive...*

And those who had been against it, they ended up in prison, and it wasn't.

*Unfortunately, that's what happens now too. In the dictatorships in a way.*

But one appreciates it for life today, that I have gone through the strong regime, and now I have more freedom.

*I think we can follow that theme a little more, because you have already put a lot of words into it, but that movement from being Albanian, and noticing that you have to break a little out of those frameworks, you become a separate individual, that is, the relationship between the community, as you just said, there's a lot of positives in that, but you have to find your own voice in a way. But then that voice must also suddenly be created in an even new setting. So what is happening to Lindita in the current movement? Is it romantic to talk about it having a core, an individual core, that you are always the same? Or how is one affected and changed through that journey?*

It is nice that you have asked me in a way. I think I was always a dreamer, with my feet on the ground. It was also a dream for me to get to know Iceland, and I always like to learn something new. In a way, I saw that I had no more future in Albania, now I will concentrate on, and especially the first two years were a bit like Albania and Iceland, with Albania in mind and then Iceland. So after I visited Albania, I said, no, here I am. Now I stay in Iceland, concentrate on languages, and that's it. But I was gone for a while, because I was gone like Lindita from Albania. I just became Lindita trying to adapt to the language of society. I enjoyed a lot of good things, I was in that process for many years, for many, many years. And I've been lucky because I lived in Iceland, because people are quite, what can I say, they accept you. They have a language, they have an expression of. As they said, "it'll come, it'll work out." And it's like, no, it'll be fine. Yes, then, yes, it's just you getting to, but the language is a bit difficult, but then it came, it came, everything came. And then that experience with music, and like that, something that I wanted, I didn't have that, I didn't have that in Albania. In many ways I liked the Lindita who lived in, who lived in Iceland.

*Hold on to it, that is, the Lindita who lived in Iceland. And again I ask, does it have anything to do with the language? An example, my eldest daughter moved to Greece, she learned Greek, worked in restaurants, and when she speaks Greek, she is completely different. The body language, the gestures, all that is in a way, the Greek, very expressive. My brother is a musician, quite quiet, really modest, but he lived in the US for many years, and when he speaks American to his friends, he comes across as a hero, not in a negative way, but he becomes a completely different person, through language, through the way he expresses himself. I'm not saying that you become a different person, but in the same way that the way you speak to the children in kindergarten is different from if you speak to your friends in some film club or literary context. Or now. We constantly adapt to settings, and we are intelligent in the way that we do what is right, based on how we understand the situation. But I am*



*concerned with how the language, that is, how the Icelandic, when you enter, the Lindita who became Icelandic, and who liked herself as an Icelander. This may be a bit too broad, but I think it...*

That's a very good point, that's nice, and then I have to define myself. But I liked that in that process, I threw myself into that depth. I did, and then I learned to swim, I did the same. So I threw myself into it. Then I met a lot of positivity in Iceland. They supported me. So everything that I did, yes, you speak well, I liked it, or I thought to myself, here is my life, I am moving forward. Such one way tickets. And then the marriage. It's not like you... And so many good things happened when the children were born there, and so... What can I say? Maybe it was the Lindita who was more herself than in Albania.

*And this is no psychology session at all. But I think it's interesting from the point of view of what we're talking about identity, about identity politics as well. What is acceptable? How different can one be and still be part of a community? Being welcomed in Iceland, being embraced, getting into it, learning the language properly, and then coming back here to Norway, where we have had, and to some extent have, and to a greater extent now than before, a kind of dark undertone of skepticism, or xenophobia even, and how many, far too many voices, have come forward and say that, for example, Islam is dangerous, or foreigners, we have something, we have enough, we must take care of the Norwegian, the Norwegian is important, we must not lose the Norwegian. Such thoughts and such ideas. I leave it a bit open to you, but you have made quite a journey from Albania, via Iceland towards Norway, and have again got a sort of, as you say, party back to Albania, both with your music, folk tunes, the songs.*

It is a kind of circle, as the anthropologist says, you leave home and come back, which I will not. But you see, I, when I lived in Iceland, I never felt like a foreigner. No. Never, I don't know, maybe it's me with people around me, but we mirror how we feel. I was a little one who tried to adapt and be quite positive about culture and things, and Iceland gave me quite a lot, also the music and work, and I, yes, very grateful, when I moved to Norway, then I said, I am Albanian, I have Iceland in my heart, I do today, but here in Norway I am Lindita. Now you say Norwegian, I'm not, I don't know what Norwegian is, as you asked me, I know typically Albanian, but here I have come as I have found myself directly. I love being in Drammen, and I love to, and I don't look after I have traveled so far, and I had to start all over again to establish myself.

*And you haven't experienced the cold shoulder, or that skepticism, have you?*

No, and once I was very surprised, we were at a party with work, and then we had some substitutes who were not Norwegian, and then someone said to me, we have to keep it together, we. Who are we? We are you. Then I was a bit shocked, because I didn't think, we all thought together, not me and you, and because we are foreign. I can experience today, if I talk to Albanians, it's a completely different language, everything flows, right? Also if I'm in a group with Norwegians, or with Icelanders, you see a difference in how Norwegians communicate with each other, also the Icelanders who are more open, wild in a way, and the Albanians who have their own, of course I do, or suit everyone, but I've never experienced it, not at work, not anywhere, and not that I'm foreign. When I go and meet, oh, your name is Lindita, such a great name, are you from Spain? Because Lindita ... No, I'm Albanian, so good, no, haven't experienced anything, no. But maybe I don't expect that, that I feel that something sees me.

*You don't look for it, you don't take it in.*

Right, it's kind of like a circle, if you feel like they're going to see you, with everything that we do.

*But it has to do with the look, if you go and look for some skepticism, you see someone who just pulls back a little, or you think, yes, yes, yes.*



I don't take it, because I, I take it as the children, okay, that person has a bit, I can't say that she has problems with herself, but it's a bit like that restraint . When I came from Albania to Iceland, and said, oh, because Albania is such a great country, you can tell, because it has been closed, as they did, then I come to Norway, so, Oh, Iceland, oh, so exotic it is, I want to go there, I love, love Reykjavik, Reykjavik, Reykjavik and Heitapottur . But like that, then there is one, of course, then it becomes so exotic in a way, I've seen a spot, so, I can't experience anything negative like that.

*In this podcast we have, I have mentioned many times the relationship between the big we, i.e. the community, which is very diverse, where both individually and as a group we are very different, but that we have a link there, at the same time we also have these close the communities, and religion is one such example, that you have a congregation, you mentioned Fjell congregation, it is a setting where you get together and get to know each other, and cultivate a specific thing, experience, religious experience, i.e. the universal, the feeling that we are a country, that we are a people, that we are different, but at the same time one.*

And it was a big help, I got that.

*Yes, but I think that it is a starting point for the question that I want to ask you, or that thought, then, that the journey you have made, around, right, from Albania, Iceland, Norway, and so starting to search again now with the record that we talked about, which are Albanian songs, traditional, with, yes, and then you say that you have established an Albanian group. Which group is it?*

There are people who have lived for many years here in Drammen over 40, not everyone has sung before, and they have left, we were very active before corona, so it has become a little something, a little, sometimes we get together , but we only sing Albanian songs.

Yeah, so it's a choir?

*There is a choir, and some of them never sang in a choir, but we got quite far with it, because it is a community, and there is harmony, and we had a very good time together, it is such a quality time together, singing in Albanian .*

*Are you talking about the lyrics?*

The lyrics are the most important thing, we mostly love songs, folk songs like that, which everyone can sing, from different areas in Albania or Kosovo.

*No, because one needs these tight communities, in one way or another. I've also started singing in choirs now, I've sung for many years in a vocal group, but I've started now in the cantory, in Jørn Fevang, in Bragernes, which we just sang... Are you a tenor? Yes. So we just sang Vivaldi's Gloria, for example, and will now start with, continue with the Messiah again, we will see until the autumn.*

Handel ?

*Yes. So the community we have there is of course musical, but at the same time it becomes, of course, a little more than that, than getting to know people. So I think there is an interesting point, what kind of identity or connections you have. You are a singer, you lead that group of yours, I am also a singer in a Choir, but I am also a theologian, right? I am also interested in, that is, I can list a whole lot of identities that are my mix, or that become my distinctive feature. So I think it's interesting to feel it just a little more, right? This identity, what kind, who are we? Really, right? It asks, yes, where are you from? But it can't really ask, yes, who are you?*

It's better, who are you? Yes, absolutely, who are you? Yes, you say, who are you? I dreamed that I had been a night terror. Then I tried to...



*Nightmare?*

Yes, it was a nightmare, but a bit like something came to my feet, or something like that I woke up, and couldn't be quite close to me, but then I felt like I was talking to someone like that in Albanian, "who are you?" So you just come to like, "Who are you?" But then I stand up there, like yes, my throat was a bit like that, a bit of a cold, a bit like that. But I experienced that quite strongly.

*Big question, then.*

Big question. Who are you? In Albanian, because people say someone, ask me, do you dream in Albanian, or Norwegian, or Icelandic? I say, I don't know, but that, nightmare, the morning, like three in the morning, it was in Albanian. It sounded like it was kind of closed like, "Who are you?" In Albanian, "Kosje ti".

*And maybe that's what we should use our lives for, to find out who we are.*

That's what I'm looking for, I build my identity, I travel a lot, and throw away things that I don't need, and be satisfied, and like that « self compassion », which is very important, I cannot give to others if I have not filled myself.

*We're coming to the end here, so I'll ask the big question, what inspires you the most? What gives you the strength to move forward? Power, inspiration?*

Art gives me, and my family. But art, and the latest thing I've started, is painting.. colors. I will have an exhibition in Berat, on the 27th of May, with my watercolors. There is another one, which I had in Skodra , in Northern Albania, I couldn't paint before corona, nothing, it's just mixed colors like that, like children in kindergarten. Then I developed my own style.

*Not an exhibition here?*

Maybe later, I haven't thought about it. But I have a lot of paintings at home, which are... No, maybe later. I have to get them from Albania . They are still there.

*Lindita, our class is over, quite simply. This has been a great pleasure. Thank you very much for taking the time.*

Thank you.

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