



DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF CHANTS BY CONTEMPORARY GEORGIAN COMPOSERS AS REVEALED THROUGH VARIATIONS IN PERFORMANCE

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Chants represent strictly religious art. Church songs are holy treasures of the Georgian people. The interest of composers in church music increased greatly in the 20th-21st centuries. Many composers not only use religious themes for their works, but compose chants. Various composers, however, contradict the canons regarding chanting, as described by the hymnographers. Often, contemporary composers focus on a free style, sometimes European musical systems influence particular passages of their work, or entire compositions, and sometimes their church music is quite close to the style of mediaeval Georgian chants; some contemporary Georgian composers try to maintain the sound of traditional Georgian chants. Several years ago, a collection of papers about Byzantine Studies in Georgia was published; the publication included several chants by contemporary composers. The contemporary Georgian Church does not acknowledge new chants composed by composers of the 20th and 21st centuries, and therefore, this publication is important for research. For my paper I chose chants by the Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia Illa II, Nodar Mamisashvili, Maka Virsaladze and Eka Chabashvili. They are analysed against the background of contemporary music composition techniques and thought.

The paper aims to introduce contemporary Georgian church music, presenting new works by several Georgian composers and their opinions about these pieces; analysing the confluence of contemporary and traditional art; and researching the principles for appearing of the Georgian gene in church music by contemporary composers through compositional technique and/or performing styles.

The famous Georgian composer Nodar Mamishashvili, in his article “When all roads lead to the temple,” writes that

Chants are indeed the necessity of a spiritual culture. The Holy Fathers understood the genius of divine information and they created such immortal forms of musical modules, which contain the potential of permanent development and the possibility for each nation, in its originality and uniqueness, to find the source of spiritual salvation with the help of these modules – for example, the ‘horizontal harmony’ of the monodic melodies in Byzantine and Syrian chants.

I believe that these words are also applicable to the authors of new church music.

Nodar Mamisashvili’s chants are distinguished by proper knowledge of the canonical rules of Georgian Chant, since he is a church music scholar. It should be noted that in the last part of his work *The Time Perspective* he uses a collage of two fragments from the chant “Dges sagmrtoman

madlma”, notated by Mamia Patarava. (*Georgian Church and Salkhino chants, Gurian scale*, Tbilisi, 2003. Georgian Chant Centre of the Patriarchate).

According to Mamisashvili,

Sometimes listeners to Georgian folk songs and chants are under the impression that these songs are too similar to each other. But in fact, chants differ from folk songs by 27 important issues of expression: singing on sounding consonants, singing on consonants without pitch using tone colour (by adding a complex tone), special forms of crossing of voices (one of the voices has to be performed as echo, which is the resonance of another contrapuntal voice), modulation within modes, etc.

For Nodar Mamisashvili the genre of the church hymn is a manifestation of spirituality, prayer expressed in musical language. The performing style of Mamisashvili’s church hymns is close to the authentic style of ancient Georgian chants. The musical system and compositional technique used by the composer for his church hymns naturally lead to authentic performing style, but his piece “Jamta gadasakhedi” (“Review of the Ages”) has also been performed in the style of European music.

His Holiness and Beatitude, Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II says,

God gave grace to all nations, but the Georgians were awarded His exclusive trait – His great love – reflected in our ancient folk songs and hymns. Georgian chant is the love of God, and the Georgian folk song is the love of one’s neighbour, expressed in the sound of music.... It can be said that the old Georgian chant is the protector of Georgian church traditions. At the same time, Georgian church songs are polyphonic, which makes them unique among ancient and the mediaeval Orthodox hymns.

Some contemporary Georgian chants have been composed using compositional techniques of European polyphonic chants and based on Latin texts. These chants do not use the textures, harmony (with different musical tuning systems) or follow other canonical rules of Georgian chant. Therefore, these chants have a European music character and they are performed in European style, which is very far from the style of Georgian singing. Similar compositions can also be found among Patriarch Ilia II’s hymns. It should be noted that he is the only author whose chants are performed in the church. We can conclude that the spirituality permeating his songs is much more important than preservation of the old models.

According to another Georgian composer Maka Virsaladze,

if we consider nationality as not only a detail on the surface of a composer’s work, but as genetically encoded information, a unity of characteristics in the collective unconscious (such as systems of thinking, temperament, archetype, etc.), in this case the author’s nationality is included in the deeper level of his/her work. But there are, of course, works in which particular ideas are connected precisely with some national details (for example, folk harmony or intonation) and here, we can see nationality both on the surface, as well as in the deeper level. In this case my music also includes characteristic features of Georgian music.

I asked the composer what she thought about the idea of including contemporary church hymns in the liturgical cycle? Her answer was,

It is hard to be responsible for the fate of Georgian chant. At first glance, it is good when the Church supports the development of the professional music, but in Georgia we have a different case. The conditions in the Georgian Orthodox Church were much worse than of European Catholic and Protestant churches. As you know, European church has always been a sphere for the development of professional music, but not the Georgian Church, which has been struggling for centuries to preserve its national identity. Thus, it is natural that the Georgian Church retained a conservative position in relation to chant, and it holds a similar position today. Old Georgian church hymns have only one space for their performance, which is in the church. We should not forget this, if we do not want to lose this unique branch of Georgian music. Thus, the idea of the coexistence of church hymns by contemporary composer and the old repertoire must be implemented very carefully. I think that composers cannot create church hymns using only the old canonical rules. If the songs are composed for church services, the composer has to preserve some fundamental forms of ancient chants in combination with modernity. In any case, it is difficult to take the responsibility of talking about this. I personally, while composing “Holy God”, did not think about whether it would be performed in the church or not. On the one hand, I would not dare to think of such a thing. On the other, it gave to me the freedom to do what I wanted and not to think about rules of ancient Georgian chants. However the chords and the general mood of my work, I think, are connected with Georgian hymns.

Maka Virsaladze’s church hymns reveal sound characteristics typical of modern European music as well as Georgian chants (in terms of harmony and intonation). We can also find

characteristics of European thinking and compositional techniques, including imitation and the use of clusters; perhaps this freedom of which she spoke.

The performing technique of Virsaladze's church hymns is very interesting, because it is based on modern choral performance style, but at same time she makes use of some details of ancient Georgian chanting. In her work is manifest a musical thinking entirely of the 21st century; she composes these hymns respecting tradition, but without losing a feeling for her own time. This she achieves by adding to modern compositional techniques, such as clusters, chords and intonations typical of Georgian traditional chant.

It is my belief that very often the intonation of Georgian chants depends on the literary text. The Georgian language is the strongest manifestation of Georgian national identity. However, if we compose modern Georgian chants using contemporary compositional techniques (for example, aleatoricism, pointillism, minimalism, etc.), this foundation will be destroyed. It threatens the integrity of the music model, despite Georgian intonation being present; in this sense, Maka Virsaladze carefully chooses her techniques to achieve her goal.

It is very important to remember that the Georgian Orthodox musical language, together with national values and musical thinking rooted in Georgian folk music, appeared in Georgian church music many centuries ago. In general, church music is radically different from the language of named authors who compose church hymns. If Georgian composers' style is maintained even in their works based on religious themes, they retain the values of Georgian church music in those hymns. In this way composers show respect towards Georgian chants and their values. This is why Georgian Orthodox chants still sound Orthodox. Thus, in spite of various waves of globalization, the identity of ancient Georgian chants is not lost and I believe that new church hymns will also not lose these characteristics.

I composed seven hymns to the Virgin based on the above-mentioned principles. Two of them are included in the collection. Despite these principles, I found some relations with harmony and sound of archaic music in my work.

In order to achieve a sound identical with that of ancient Georgian chants, I tried to use compositional techniques typical of traditional Georgian Orthodox church music. A composition technique that I use also stems from a particular type of Georgian archaic musical thinking, which is based on the construction of polyphonic layers; but the difference between them is the principle of the distribution of musical material in time and space. In Georgian traditional music musical time is concentrated and it flows through several layers of musical space (this is the basis of Georgian polyphonic thought). This means that musical materials are often constructed on a single pulse and polyphony is attained by layers of musical material in several spaces. Layers of multi-tempo pulses located in single- or multi-music space are characteristic of 21st- century compositional techniques, which are generally not found in Georgian chants.

The archaic harmony typical of my hymns changes the traditional sound of Georgian chants, but as I use Georgian verbal sources for musical intonation and texture, I manage to keep the characteristics of these traditional chants. Interpretation is important, because it can offer radically different versions of the sound, depend on the style of singing, articulation and other nuances of the performance, appropriate for the Georgian or the European manner of performance. Variability in performance is an inseparable part of both the traditional chants, and my music.

Thus, we have modern hymns filled with love of God and spirituality, with reverence for the principles of traditional chants. In fact, each composer maintains the models and principles of Georgian Orthodox Church chants; However, through a deep analysis of contemporary church hymns, I was able to differentiate some individual attitudes of composers to the principles mentioned above. This approach proves that the main principles of Georgian church chant is maintained in spite of differences in the styles of the composers.

As for problems related to performance, it is very hard to define this, as it is difficult to imagine how traditional Georgian Orthodox chants sounded back in the 10th-13th centuries, or how this manner was maintained in the 16th-18th centuries. Although the musical system, intonation, harmonic structure and musical form can play the role of an impulse for performers, the question is, does the performance manner remain the same after the music was composed and performed for the first time? If one look back, one can see a long chain of interpretations connected with time and individual approaches. In fact, this idea is provided by extant frescos and iconography, where the canons of church art are protected, but the manner is diverse and sometimes radically divergent. But why this does not apply to the church music, the sound of which might also depend on changing times?

Finally, I would like to ask this question: Is it worthwhile for contemporary composers to compose church hymns, while their function in the life of the Church is undefined?

And, to speak frankly, why does the Orthodox Church of the 20th-21st century neglect contemporary church music while all progressive ideas in other fields, whether art, architecture, media and other technologies have been accepted?

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