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NODAR MAMISASHVILI'S PASSION AS AN EXAMPLE OF MIXING OLD AND NEW ELEMENTS IN 20TH-CENTURY GEORGIAN SACRED MUSIC

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The contemporary Georgian composer Nodar Mamisashvili, as the author of the musical system of three -phase composition, the man who calculated the formula of the Georgian church bell alloys and their acoustic features, and who took a great interest in various branches of science and their synthesis, occupies a special place in Georgian musical space on account of his originality and versatility.

This paper deals with the transformation of the idea of passion in Nodar Mamisashvili's choral composition *Gancdani* ("Passion"). I shall compare Mamisashvili's work both with the European Passion and the Georgian analogue of the Passion, the so-called *Shekhvetiliani* (Holy Friday Hymn Book), though the paper is not targeted at a detailed discussion of the European and Georgian Passion *per se*.

Nodar Mamisashvili's musical system, three-phase composition, is an example of European rational thinking arising from Georgian national soil, which can be seen in different manifestations of the system: in the regular principles of the construction of the vertical and horizontal proceeding logically from one another, for instance the shifting and production of segments, the smallest parts of the system, are based on regular mechanisms. It should be noted that chords can be developed from segmental groups in any direction, that is, retaining the intervallic composition characteristic of "Georgian chords," or by means of transformation into "European chords" or vice-versa. For instance, the group of second-degree segments is based on chords widespread in Georgian folk music (chords with the fourth and fifth degrees, or second and fifth degrees). It is possible to develop and spread the chords in the direction of European harmony, i.e. towards the triads or heptachords. As to the group of fourth-degree segments, they are triads, and the continuation of the chords of this group may lead to chords in wide use in Georgian folk music. (Here I should also mention that in spite of its belonging to Europe, it is a well-known fact that from the viewpoint of musical language in general, Georgian musical art, including Georgian sacred music, differs greatly from western European musical traditions).

Though the present paper does not aim to discuss the abovementioned system, I will touch upon it in the context of the cyclic work *Passione* (as the author spells it in the Latin alphabet). I should also emphasize that the fusion of western European musical traditions with the

principles of Georgian musical thought is not mere chance in Nodar Mamisashvili's creative work; it is part of principles of his compositional system.

Why did Nodar Mamisashvili become interested in the idea of the Passion? And why and how was this idea transformed in his creative work?

The Georgian public is aware of Nodar Mamisashvili's deep interest in religious themes. He is the maker of Georgian church bells, having devised the alloy formula of the Holy Trinity Cathedral bells and calculated their acoustics. He works on Georgian (and not only Georgian) hymns as a researcher and composer. Therefore, his great interest in the idea of the Passion cannot be perceived as a casual phenomenon.

As it is usually known, the Passion is a musical composition based on the Gospel text, which tells the story of the betrayal of Christ, His capture and crucifixion. Historically, the Passion genre has passed through various stages of development and as a result there are psalmodic, responsorial, motet, chorale and oratorio types. There are also some in the Bachian style in which the features of Passions of various types are fused.

In the 1990s, Manana Khvtisiashvili, a Georgian musicologist, discovered a Georgian analogue of the Passion, the so-called Shekhvetiliani. It is interesting to compare this with the basic concept and characteristics of Nodar Mamisashvili's.

As Khvtisiashvili notes in her work "The First Results of Research into the Georgian Passion" that the "'Markhvan-Shekhvetiliani' (Lent – Holy Friday Chant Book) is a choral cycle formed of 70 chants. The cycle is named 'Lent – Holy Friday Chants'; Good Friday Matins should be served based on the twelve Gospels". It is also accompanied by the commentary of Rajden Khundadze (1845-1929), a clergyman who contributed a great deal to traditional Georgian sacred music. In his commentary he writes that at the turn of the twentieth century, Philimon Khoridae (1829-1911, beatified by the Georgian Orthodox Church, an opera singer who worked very hard for Georgian sacred music) recorded it from Anton Dumbadze (1824-1907) a conductor and chanter, and that today there is nobody who can perform these hymns. Other sources also prove that the chants mentioned above were sung at Holy Friday matins, representing of the "Holy and life-giving Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ," that is, it tells us about the Passion and Crucifixion of the Redeemer, by which it represents the idea of the subject of the European Passion settings, and indicates the essence of the Georgian musical genre, which is substantiated by the etymology of the word "shelhvetiliani". Dictionaries of the old Georgian language and the context in which the above word is used in old Georgian church literature convince one that the word "khuetai" denotes suffering and passion. The earliest time this word is attested is the tenth century, although the musicologist Manana Khvtisiashvili suggests that the word must have appeared earlier. As to its structure, Shekhvetiliani includes the chapters corresponding to Golgotha, excerpted from all four Gospels and the chants too are distributed among the twelve readings. The readings were neither chanted nor simply read, but were characterized by the raising and lowering of the main tone by a small interval. Here we may draw a parallel with the European passion of the psalmodic type, in which recitation occurs on the axial tone. Concerning the "Shekhvetiliani" *per se*, I will only add that, like the European Passion of all types, the subject matter of the Georgian Passion is based on the Gospels, a movement from sorrow to joy, from despair to ecstasy common to all Christians. But in its compositional structure and modal-melodic elements it differs greatly from its European analogue.

I shall now return to the main subject of my paper, Nodar Mamisashvili and his *Passion*. Mamisashvili's choral work *Passion*, and also his choral poem *And He illuminated the whole World*, upon which I shall touch later, was composed before the discovery of the Georgian analogue of the Passion, "Shekhvetiliani". In addition, as Mamisashvili notes in his interview, even if he had known about the existence of the "Shekhvetiliani", it would never have been his goal and

wish to make use of its elements; and in his three-phase system, which refers to his general organization of compositional, textural and harmonic aspects, as well as a chordal vocabulary familiar in European art music, he often uses chords and chord progressions characteristic of Georgian traditional sacred music, which merge very well with the former.

It is interesting to see how the composer substantiates the absence of the components traditionally characteristic of all types of Passion, even the absence of the narrator, the forgiveness of the Redeemer, the story of Christ's Crucifixion, presenting the Passion as he does in a different light, i.e. a transformation of the genre.

As Mamisashvili puts it, transformation is one of the most important features of the Christian religion. As soon as man begins to practice the true faith, the so-called transformation occurs in him; man cannot remain as he used to be. He tries to better himself, and if the attempts are successful he is transformed. The same is the case in art: the artist's goal cannot be a direct copy with a slight change in this or that form or genre; on the contrary, he must try to be transformed in his composition and accordingly transform the forms and genres in keeping with both national character and individuality. This is Mamisashvili's thinking in connection with the Passion. How, then, does he transform it?

In Mamisashvili's *Passione* cycle there are no strongly pronounced stages of narration. What is present is the depiction of a single theme, a single condition in different aspects. For the author himself, this type of cyclical work is reminiscent of Claude Monet's series of paintings of Rouen Cathedral (I shall return to this analogy further below).

Together with the above features (the parts of the Narrator and the Redeemer, and the story of Christ's Crucifixion), the most significant aspect in all types of the Passion, including the Georgian "Shekhvetiliani", is the union of two emotions, expressing the significance of the idea of the work: emotion caused by physical pain turning into elevated ecstasy and bliss caused by the love for the Redeemer. The Narrator seems to take Christ's path and suffers together with Him, thereby enjoying the bliss born of supreme divine love. He is purified, undergoing catharsis.

How is the idea of catharsis presented in Mamisashvili's work? As the composer explains, each phase of the triple-phase system has a functional role. The first phase presents the general mood, the second dwells on the details, while the function of the third function is to unite the first two. Through the example of the *Passione*, what we see in each part of the cycle is a presentation of the general mood with the corresponding text, the next phase – narrating a short story or an idea; for instance (part 1, figure 4) "Let them be covered with reproach and dishonour that seek my hurt" – is represented by prayer-like recitative material and the third – a vertical chord, where catharsis is to be achieved by means of empathy, when the composer and the listener sympathize with the subject of the narration of the previous phase, e.g., "Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness" (part 1, figure 7). The same can also be said about other parts, and in the same manner the alternation of phases within one part may occur several times. The idea of empathy and catharsis resulting from the element of suffering in the Passion is presented in Mamisashvili's *Passione* in a very general, one might even say abstract, manner, which, to some extent, is conditioned by the choice of the verbal text (phrases selected from prayers and hymns).

The cycle consists of four parts and is composed for a large *a cappella* mixed chorus, though each part has its individual structure. It would be appropriate here to return to Claude Monet's Rouen Cathedral series, in which one and the same subject is depicted in different colours.

Different voices also represent different musical colours. The first part of the eternal sun is composed for the full mixed chorus – here each timbre is presented in two parts. The second, "Behold, earth, ashes and clay," repeats the structure of the first part but without the sopranos. The third, "Let us be filled at dawn," is composed for female voices only, sopranos and altos

divided into two parts. The fourth, "And the Powers of the Heaven" is again for full mixed chorus.

Let us look at the first part of the cycle again, though in other parts the principle of the choice of verbal text and the construction of the musical texture is also the same. In particular, the music does not follow the narration of a concrete story, the verbal phrases being excerpted from different prayers and hymns and structured according to the stages of the corresponding triple-phase composition and representing them, as was said above; these stages are the general mood, detailing and uniting.

The first part of the cycle "Of the Eternal Sun" represents one of the postulates of Christianity, one of its delights, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven." It is noteworthy that "blessed are they" occurs and plays a significant dramatic role in the "Shekhvetiliani" structure, but it develops in the second part of the structure divided into three parts. With Mamisashvili it is present in the first part.

In the whole first part there are three elements, which render textually three interconnected ideas: a fragment excerpted from Michael Modrekili's prayer-chant, which says what the souls of evil people are threatened with. It is their fate to be in eternal darkness, but those who are kind and radiate sympathy are in shining light. These phrases are rendered in a meditative, tranquil mood, divided into two parts by the prayer "Lord, have mercy upon us," given in the form of a recitative. It ends in this manner: as one of those in Matthew's Gospel says, "Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness." In textural terms, this passage is close to the previous two simultaneously including both elements as if uniting them.

Proceeding from all that has been said above, in my opinion it would be correct to speak not about the resemblance to the traditional Passion types (psalmodic responsorial, motet, oratorio) or its resemblance to the Georgian "Shekhvetiliani", but about a separate variety, which may be called conditionally "Nodar Mamisashvili's *Passione* of a transformed type"

In spite of the fact that the topic of this Mamisashvili's work *Passione*, for the sake of comparison I should like to touch upon another choral work of his, *And He lightened the whole World*, which is dedicated to Ilia Chavchavadze, a great Georgian writer and public figure, and his road of martyrdom. This composition also reveals signs of the passion. As the musicologist Nana Kavtaradze justly notes in her article, "Mamisashvili's poem is also interesting from the viewpoint of its polygeneric character. In the poem a synthesis of the characteristic features of two genres – the poem and the passion – is presented..." The author views the manifestations of the features of the two genres both on the "wide" and "narrow" levels. First of all, Kavtaradze views the wide understanding of the passion in the concept of the composition, i.e. in the idea of Ilia Chavchavadze's divinization, and his representation as a martyr. She also notes that, "...it also represents a narration about tragic events and a lyrical-philosophical meditation associated with the former, the prediction of what is to happen, and catharsis..." She notes also signs of the wider understanding of the Passion in the closeness of the poem to Georgian hagiographic texts and the elevated aesthetics characteristic of them. She sees signs of the narrow aspect of the Passion in its structure; specifically, she writes that, "In the lyrical-dramatic fantasy the plot unfolds in a narrative form." I agree with the author's suggestion of the presence of the associations with the integral characteristic features of the Passion in Mamisashvili's choral poem. Ilia's "Ich erzähle" evokes associations with the evangelist's part and another aspect – that of the Redeemer. In the same manner some passages of the poem are associated with different chapters of the Gospel, the third passage with the Apocalypse, the sixth with death and catharsis.

In this case we are dealing with a type of Passion that develops like a poem. As the composer says in his work, two different types of the passion genre are present – "transforming" and "developing like a poem." I believe that in spite of the different structure and the different form

of development, it is possible to class both specimens as the “transforming Passion” type, as in both cases the changing and transformation of traditional features is strongly pronounced.

And, finally, I should say that in this cyclic choral composition *Passione*, the composer forms his “transforming passion” by using the triple-phase system of composition and representation of the cathartic idea in a different manner.

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APPENDIX

1 "pawlybawdymla dshokh..."

5^o

Largo (misterioso)

41 31 4

A T B

41 31 4

41 31 4

5 41 7 31 8 21

21 31 41 12 41

S¹ A¹ T¹ B

②

41 42 43 44

S.I. *no -* *b.* *2)* *4)* *b.c.*

A.I. *no* *b.* *b.c.*

T.I. *- no -* *b.* *(quasi b.c.)* *b.c.*

B. *b.* *b.c.*

③

45 46 47 48

S.I. *3* *b.* *no -*

A.I. *b.* *(b)* *b.c.*

T.I. *b.* *b.* *b.c.*

B. *b.* *b.c.*

3. 21 †

(b.c.)

(b.c.)

quasi comprecatio (ritmica - ad lib) (declam) canto cantabile.

41 † rit 42

(ritmica - ad lib) poco a poco rit (quasi cantabile canto)

5. *allargando* *largo*

recitativo cantabile

