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Georgian Wedding Music – Tradition and Modernity

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8-10, Griboedov str., 0108, Tbilisi, Georgia**Abstract**

In the wedding ritual of a particular ethnic group there are clearly imprinted the features that define its identity including musical language the study of which raises numerous important issues. One of them is the issue of the influence of foreign cultures on national musical language.

In the course of centuries-old history of our country assimilation of the elements of foreign culture by Georgian culture and adaptation on own ground occurred more than once. At the same time, national musical culture also remembers the cases of being oppressed by foreign culture. Naturally, these processes were also reflected in wedding music.

The twentieth century is a new page in the history of Georgian musical folklore. The epoch of increased technologization has totally changed the existence of folklore and man's listening environment. In the wedding the tradition of best men was substituted by hired musicologists, the best men's songs – by pop music, traditional instruments - by electric musical instruments. Despite this, it should be noted that performance of traditional wedding songs nowadays is fixed here and there. As is seen this is due to the changes occurred in Georgians national consciousness.

Naturally nowadays folk music no longer has that kind of load it had in the past, although some attempts to preserve ethnic musical tradition as a factor determining national identity are extremely significant and positive phenomenon.

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Traditional wedding is a set of rituals formed little by little throughout centuries, which clearly shows the nation's beliefs and notions, its concept of the universe perception, social structure, mode of life, character and creative potential. In a word, wedding is the ritual which clearly reflects the characteristics defining the identity of a nation, including musical language, the study of which puts many significant issues. One such is the relation with foreign cultures and the changes, which traditional, in this case Georgian traditional wedding music underwent at different stages of the country's history.

First written data on Georgian wedding were documented in the works of Queen Tamar's historians. In "History and Eulogy of the Royals" when describing the wedding of high social layer representatives, the author mentions poets (*mgosani*), musicians (*mutribi*) and players participating in the party [10, 49, 51; 2, 95, 97]. The same term is encountered in the literary monuments of the epoch, such as "The Knight in Panther's Skin", "Visramiani", "Abdulmesiani").

Several Georgian scholars touched upon the issue of the afore-mentioned terms (I. Javakhishvili, N. Marr, G. Chkhikvadze, K. Kutsia, G. Akhvlediani). As it turns out poets and musicians were the people who told their own verses with instrumental accompaniment. Poets' instruments mentioned in written sources are *ebani* and *barbiti*, that of the musicians is *changi* [7, 455, 529; 10, 49, 51; 2, 95, 97]. Both terms are of Oriental origin: *mgosani* is Persian, *mutribi* – Arabic [10, 49, 51]. These should have been the performers of Georgian urban music [6, 11-12]. It should be said, that according to the description, their art also reminds the art of *ashughs*, popular in high society later in the 18th century. It is not excluded, that this approved in Middle Ages phenomenon, could have been introduced from foreign cultures, as for players and the term *tamashoba*, according to Sul Khan-Saba Orbeliani defines it as the term denoting singing and

entertainment [7, 198]. The term should imply Georgian traditional folk music. In olden times *simghera* meant playing and vice versa *tamashi* implied singing as well [2, 99]. Tamar's historians also speak about chanters participating in wedding party and the rule of performing church hymns [ibid, 98].

Apparently, different musical cultures coexisted during wedding parties celebrated at Royal court. Alongside secular songs and sacred hymns presented here was the art of poets and musicians, different from folk music. Today it is hard to say how exactly developed the dialogue between cultures in Georgia of the time.

17th century is a very interesting stage in Georgia's history. This is the time when Persian culture occupies significant place in Georgian noblemen's life. Its influence is felt in all branches of art, including music. From this time first Persian, then Azerbaijani and Armenian music gain foothold in Georgian musical life, including wedding. This is expressed in the appearance of monodic repertoire performed on Oriental musical instruments typologically foreign for Georgian polyphony. This tendency first appeared in high society and among urban population, later in rural areas as well. In the 19th century European musical stream was added to the Oriental one.

At the end of the 19th century, in Georgia, more precisely in Tbilisi mode of life documented were Oriental instruments such as *tar*, *saz*, *kamancheh*, *zurna*, *duduki*, *doli*, *daira* (daf), *dipilipito* (*nagara*); European guitar, harmonica (*buzika*), *arghani* (organ), partly mandolin and balalaika [9, 19]. According to ethnographic data at Tbilisi wedding parties in avoidable was a group of *duduki* players [ibid, 20].

Apparently the society's attitude to this phenomenon was different. Some accepted, liked and enjoyed these tunes; however some considered the appearance of Oriental music in Georgian mode of life as a negative occurrence: "You Georgians, give up Qizilbash croaking, their songs!" appealed Jambakur Orbeliani to the society [11, 160]. Bright example of the encounter of two completely different cultures is Nikoloz Baratashvili's well-known letter to Zakaria Orbeliani, where Baratashvili describes his sister Kato's wedding party. The guests, who went from Tbilisi to Odzisi took with them *zurna* and the renowned singer Sitara; the hosts welcomed them as accompanied with Imeretian singers. "When we approached Odzisi, where Bidzina Eristavi lives, we were welcomed by Levan Eristavi, noblemen and Imeretian chanters.... When it got dark, we went to Akhagori. The palace was lit with lamps; Among the guests was Bishop Tsulukidze – brother of Kato's mother-in-law and his chanters. Deacon welcomed us at the fortress door, the *zurna* was blown, Satara's singing (who we had brought with), raffle-shot and shouting crowds of people was a magnificent sight" [3, 120].

With the lapse of time both Eastern and Western musical material developed in their own ways. These melodies were incorporated in Georgian polyphonic thinking system and formed as Georgian urban folklore. It can be said, that it never infringed the logic of traditional musical thinking. In the early 1900s the influence of urban music was felt in separate folk song components, Dimitri Araqishvili and Zakaria Paliashvili – who were at the beginnings of Georgian folkloristics also noted this [8, 6-7; 1, 21-22; 12, 56-57], but this phenomenon did not have total character. At the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, Georgian wedding ritual was accompanied by "Maqruli", "Jvari tsina", "Mepis dalotsva", "Supruli" and others according to the tradition.

No other epoch had made significant influence on Georgian folk music as the epoch of technologisation. 20th century completely changed people's mode of life, auditory environment and attitude to folk art.

This process was factually revealed in the early 1900s and gradually reinforced. By the 1950s the performance of traditional peasant's folklore was completely neglected in the rituals with song accompaniment in the past, including wedding. This circumstance was determined by many reasons, such as establishment of Soviet power, communist propaganda, backing of the negative attitude to folk beliefs and rituals. Changed the rhythm of life, people's working environment, folk song was displaced to stage and turned into the art often expressing the aspiration of masses. Introduced were the examples of lesser value, saturated with Communist ideology. By the Radio,

later by TV accessible became strange or lesser known before –examples of Soviet composers of the time, ethnic music of Soviet peoples, examples of pop music of various countries, etc. The latter apparently greatly contributed to the changes of wedding musical language. Not only wedding music, but wedding structure and a number of rituals as well underwent changes.

In the first place lost is the tradition of singing “Maqruli” on the way to bride’s house, and taking her from there and bringing to the groom’s house. Also lost is the ritual of walking the bride around the hearth, accompanied with singing; the tradition of religious wedding ceremony – *jvristsera*, traditionally accompanied with chanting has been replaced by secular marriage; specially hired musicians replaced the groomsmen at the wedding party.

Since the second half of the 20th century the ensembles with the following membership have become popular at wedding parties: a *duduki* (or clarinet) player, a *doli* or *garmoni* player. In order to make the sound stronger the instruments were frequently doubled. These ensembles basically performed urban-style single- or two-part songs. Such songs soon banished traditional examples from wedding parties, which the society perceived as irrelevant and unacceptable for wedding. In the 1990s Edisher Garaqanidze wrote about this: “About ten years ago the folk singer grooms of the villages Kavtiskhevi and Kakabeti – Sagarejo district, decided to invite their singer friends to their wedding parties to “find easy solution” to the problem. Their family members and relatives rebutted them and insisted on inviting instrumentalists. The grooms had to “surrender” [4, 68].

From the 1970s electric instruments were added to the ensemble of *doli* and *garmoni* and gradually completely replaced them. Pop songs were included into the repertoire, more precisely the examples which were spread by means of mass media and were popular among people.

In the 1990s electric instruments were replaced by audio recordings; only one live musician was enough if necessary. This could be explained by hard social conditions of the time – the family had less expenses.

Thus if in the beginning of the 20th century wedding and musical language were still Georgian, at the end of the 20th century wedding was characterized by surprising eclecticism. Georgian and foreign music of different genre is introduced. Folk song is practically vanished. As a rare exception documented were the cases of performing “Visia, visia”, “Kalakuri mravalzhamieri” and folk dance melodies by the musicians at some wedding parties.

The changes in the Georgians’ national consciousness since the 1980s also made influence on modern Georgian wedding. Turning to national traditions is also reflected on modern wedding ritual. Today both in the cities and regions there is increased interest to folk song; many juvenile folk groups and chanters’ choirs have been created. Created has been certain socium, which revives folk music in its mode of life at the highest possible extent. Thus the buried in oblivion “Maqruli” returned to wedding ritual. New attitude to traditions is also expressed in wedding attributes. Today Bride, groom and groomsmen dressed in national costumes is a frequent occurrence. Religious wedding ceremony accompanied by Georgian chant – an inseparable part of wedding ritual is back.

All this has been reflected on wedding musicians as well, they include folk songs into the repertoire. Thus at today’s wedding parties ethnic music is also heard alongside pop music, at lesser extent but still. At the same time the bands of both electric and Georgian instruments have become popular lately. It should also be mentioned that the performance level of wedding musicians has also risen. Restaurants and banquet rooms often have demands to musicians. Unlike previous decades, fairly often professional musicians are involved in this activity. The music performed by such bands is based on folk intonations. Hiring dancers alongside musicians has become common lately. The dancers in national costumes perform folk dances, thus underlining national shade of the wedding.

Throughout its long history Georgian traditional music has many times faced interesting challenges. Modern life evokes new difficulties. I think today it is very important for a Georgian to acknowledge that Georgian polyphonic culture is the most significant factor of national identity, preservation of the identity is the necessary condition for the survival in the process of

globalization. From this standpoint the society's interest to traditional song and dance evoked lately, provides the grounds for optimism.

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