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The Transformation of the Passion Idea on the Example of Nodar Mamisashvili's "The Passione"

Maka Virsaladze

V.Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire, 0108 Tbilisi, 8 Griboedov str.

Abstract

In the article is considered „ Passion “ the cyclic work of Nodar Mamisashvili (the work is composed for mixed choir a cappella , the words are taken from Psalms, the Bible, the prayers of Miqael Modrekili). 0108 Tbilisi, 8 Griboedov str.

Nodar Mamisashvili in his composition gives the other form of Passion's genre: he spreads and shows the generalized form of passions' idea . In the article is considered how author unfold the genre of Passion throughout usage of the conception, musical language and texture .

The Passion of Nodar Mamisashvili is interesting example of modification of European genre in the Georgian Musical thinking , the confirmation is his “ three-phase compositional system” which is based on Georgian musical harmonic elements (this system N. Mamisashvili uses in his compositions also in his „Passion”).

Keywords: *Passion, three-phase composition, transformation, mixed genre, general mood, detalisation, catharsis*

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

Nodar Mamisashvili's musical system of the three-phase composition is an example of the European rational thinking arising from the Georgian national soil, which can be seen in different manifestations of the system: in the regular principles of the constructing of the vertical and horizontal proceeding logically from one another, for instance the shifting and producing of the segments, the smallest parts of the system, are based on the regular mechanisms. It should be noted that the chords can be developed from the segment groups in any direction, that is retaining the interval composition characteristic of "Georgian chords," or by means of the transformation into "European chords" or vice-versa. For instance the group of second degree segments is based on the chords widespread in the Georgian musical folklore (quintquartchords, secundequintchords). It is possible to develop and spread the chords in the direction of European harmony i.e. towards the triads or septachords. As to the group of fourth-degree segments they are triads and the continuation of the chords of this group may

lead to the chords wide –spread in Georgian musical folklore. (Here I should also mention that in spite of its belonging to Europe, it is a well –known fact that from the viewpoint of the musical language, chords and harmonic bending of the sound to and fro, the Georgian musical art as well as the specimens of Georgian sacred music greatly differ from the musical pieces created in keeping with the west European musical traditions).

Though the present paper is not targeted at discussing the above said system I will touch upon it in the context of the cyclic work “Passione” (as the author spells it in the Latin alphabet). Herewith I should also emphasize that the fusion of west European musical traditions with the Georgian musical thinking principles is not a mere chance in Nodar Mamisashvili’s creative work, it is included in the thinking principles of his compositional system.

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

Georgian public is aware of Nodar Mamisashvili’s deep interest in religious themes. He is the author of the Georgian church bells, he made up 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 Passion idea cannot be perceived as a casual phenomenon.

As it is usually known *Passione* is a musical composition based on the Gospel text, which tells the story of the betrayal of the Redeemer, His capturing and crucifixion. Historically the Passion genre has passed through various stages of its development and as a result there are the psalmodic, responsorial, motatic, protestant, oratorical types, there are also some in the Bach character where the features of the Passion of various types are fused.

It is interesting how the composer substantiates the absence of the components traditionally characteristic of all types of the Passion, even the absence of the narrator, the forgiveness of the Redeemer, the story of Christ’s Crucifixion, presenting the Passion in a different aspect, i.e. the transformation of the genre.

As N. Mamisashvili puts it the 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/her; man cannot remain to be as he/she used to be. They try to better themselves and if the attempts are successful they are transformed. The same is the case in art, the artist’s goal cannot be a direct copying and a slight change in this or that form or genre, on the contrary he/she must try to get transformed in his/her composition and accordingly transform the forms, genres in keeping with the national character and individuality. This is what Mamisashvili thinks in connection with the Passion. Then how does he transform the Passion?

In N. Mamisashvili’s cycle “*Passione*” there are no strongly pronounced stages of narrating. What is present is depicting a single theme, a single condition in different aspects. For the author himself this type of the cyclic work is reminiscent of Claude

Monet's series of paintings "The Views of the Rouen Cathedral". (I shall revert to this analogy of the composer further below).

Together with the above features (the narrator's and the Redeemer's parts, the story of Jesus' Crucifixion), the most significant for all the types of the "Passione" is the union of two emotions, which come to express the significance of the idea of the work and its concept. It is an emotion caused by a physical pain turning into elevated delight and bliss caused by the love for the Redeemer. The narrator seems to take Jesus' road, suffers together with Him, herewith enjoying the bliss born of the supreme divine love, he is purified, going through "the catharsis."

How is the "Catharsis" idea presented in Mamisashvili's work? As the author explains each phase of the three-phase system has its functional role. The first phase presents the general mood, the second dwells on detailing, the third one's function is to unite the first two. On the example of "the Passione" what we see in each part of the cycle is presenting the general mood with the corresponding phonic texture, 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 a prayer-type recitative material and the third one - a chord vertical, 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 which are persecuted for righteousness' sake" (part 1, figure 7). The same can be said about other parts too, (in the same manner the alternation of the phases within one part may occur several times). The idea of empathy and catharsis resulting from the suffering characteristic of the Passion is presented in Mamisashvili's "Passione" in a very general, it may be said a very abstract manner, which, to some extent, is conditioned by the choice of the verbal text (separate phases of prayers and hymns).

The cycle consists of four parts and is composed for a big, a cappella mixed chorus, though each part has its individual structure. It would be proper to revert to Claude Monet's "the Views of the Rouen Cathedral," where one and the same subject in depicted in different colours.

Different parts or the timbres 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, the earth, ashes and clay," repeats the structure of the first part but only without the sopranos. The third "Let us be filled at dawn" is composed for the female timbres only, here we see sopranos and altos divided into two parts. The fourth one "And the Powers of the Heaven" again is a full mixed chorus.

Let us look at the first part of the cycle again, though in other parts the principle of the choice of the verbal text and the construction of the musical texture is also the same. Namely, the music does not follow the narration of a concrete story, the verbal phrases excerpted from different prayers and hymns are structured according to the stages of the corresponding three-phase composition and represent them, as it has been 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 which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven” In the whole part there are three elements, which as a text render three interconnected ideas. Namely, 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 the bright light. These phases are rendered in a meditative, tranquil mood, which is divided into two parts by the prayer “Lord, have mercy upon us,” performed in a verbal recitative form. It ends in this manner. As one of those enjoying the blissful mood in Matthew’s Gospel says, “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” By its texture 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 types of the Passion (psalmodic responsorial, motatic, oratorical) 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 the above paper is Nodar Mamisashvili’s only one work “Passione,” for the sake of comparison I should like to touch upon another choral work of his “And lightened the whole world” which is dedicated to Ilia Chavchavadze, a great Georgian writer and public figure, his road of martyrdom. This composition also reveals the signs of the passion. As the musicologist Nana Kavtaradze justly notes in her article “And lightened the whole world...” Nodar Mamisashvili’s poem is interesting from the viewpoint of its polygenre character as well. In the poem the 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 Nana Kavtaradze views the wide understanding of the passion in the concept of the composition, i.e. in the idea of Ilia Chavchavadze’s deification, and his representing as a martyr. She also notes that ...”It also represents the narration about tragic events and the lyrical –philosophical meditation associated with the former, the prediction of what is to happen and the catharsis...” The scholar also sees the sign of the wide understanding of the passion in the closeness of the poem to Georgian hagiographic specimens and the elevated aesthetics characteristic of them. She sees the signs of the narrow aspect of the Passion in its structure, namely, she writes that “In the lyrical –dramatic fantasy the plot unfolds in the 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 one aspect “ich erzahle” evokes associations with the evangelist’s part and the other aspect of his – to the part of the Redeemer. In the same manner some passages of the poem are associated with different chapters of the Gospel, the 3rd passage with the Doomsday, the 6th one -to death and Catharses.

In this case we deal with the type of the 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 think that in spite of the different structure and the different form of development, it is possible to class both specimens

with the type of the “transforming passion,” as in both cases the changing and transformation of the traditional features is strongly pronounced.

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

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