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**“THE UNDILADZE FAMILY” / “DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN”:  
A NATURAL AND INEVITABLE ANALOGY**

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**Abstract:**

*The goal of this article is the comparison of two extraordinary opera projects, two tetralogies – Richard Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen" and Teimuraz Bakuradze's "The Undiladze Family". Obviously, a parallel discussion of these two gigantic works in the frame of one article is an extremely challenging task for the researcher, so, I will focus on the most specific aspects.*

*It is true that these research projects are in an unequal position and this circumstances defines and meanwhile, complicates the angle of the study: "Der Ring des Nibelungen" already a century and a half ago took its place on the stage of the best opera houses or the outstanding conductors' repertoire. Moreover, Wagner's name, despite the ambivalent attitude of professionals and amateurs towards him, is recognized as the greatest artistic event, the name of Teimuraz Bakuradze is known to almost no one. However, such kind of dissbalance, definitely, does not make any limitation for the research process of Bakuradze's work at the first stage. On the contrary, I believe that it is extremely challenging and even necessary, to explore the tetralogy "The Undiladze Family" through different contexts, which, I hope, will arouse interest to this work. It should also be noted that these issues determine the relevance of the research object.*

*Thus, the paper is dedicated to "The Undiladze Family" and its natural and inevitable analogy – "Der Ring des Nibelungen". The main objectives of the study are to determine the similarities and differences between these two opera cycles by considering different aspects: the structure of the cycles, definition of genre of the cycle and every part of tetralogies, the cycle unifying factors, the context of creation, and other parameters.*

**Keywords:** *Teimuraz Bakuradze; Richard Wagner; "The Undiladze Family"; "Der Ring des Nibelungen"; opera tetralogy.*

The goal of this article is to introduce to you a great work, unprecedented for our time – the opera cycle completed in 2015 by Teimuraz Bakuradze, tetralogy “The Undiladze Family”. However, not on its own, rather in the context of a comparison with the masterpiece, which is its natural and inevitable analogy. Of course, the mention of the operatic cycle, tetralogy, always reminds us of Wagner's “Der Ring des Nibelungen”, although in the history of the genre, in addition to this one operatic cycle, we can name a few more, starting from Berlioz's "Les Troyens" and ending with Stockhausen's "Licht: Die sieben Tage der Woche".

Nevertheless, it is expected that it is impossible to discuss two huge (approximately 16-hour long) compositions at the same time within one report. Moreover, this task is beyond the power of a single researcher. For this reason, today I would like to focus on just a few aspects of the similarities and differences between these two works.

Thus, the objectives of this article are to compare Richard Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen" and Teimuraz Bakuradze's "The Undiladze Family" in terms of their name, model, genre, structure, libretto peculiarities, and artistic idea.

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For any composition, for its subsequent outside influence, the title is extremely important.

The name of Wagner's tetralogy – "Der Ring des Nibelungen", is associated with the main driving force of the work's dramatic collision: the ring – a symbol of power, for which both the Gods and the Nibelungs fight, and the title of each part of the cycle, specifies the individual characters or events that are at the center of this or that part – "Das Rheingold", "Die Walküre", "Siegfried" and "Götterdämmerung".

We see a different approach in the title of Bakuradze's opera cycle: the cycle as a whole and each parts of it is called "The Undiladze Family" and then specified: "Jackals", "Hyenas", "Leopards" and "Dreams of the Undiladze Family". Thus, we get, conditionally, a two-step title, which allows us to make out exactly both, the name of the whole and of each separate parts of it.

I will briefly explain the name of Bakuradze's tetralogy. First of all, why the "The Undiladze Family"? Furthermore, who are the Undiladzes?

I would like to let you know that The Undiladze surname is a distinguished one in Georgia, three representatives of which made a name for themselves at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries and held a special, high position in the Persian Empire during the Safavid dynasty; But the characters of tetralogy are not the historical figures, but rather bearers of their qualities "Snoozing Leopards" (the Undiladzes), "Jackals" (the Kvantrishvilis), "Hyenas" (the Kamikadzes) and "Dreams" (the Aquirinelis). Thus, the names of the parts of the cycle are related to certain psycho-types, more precisely to the various archetypes of human nature, its essence, and the relationship between them.

The last part of the cycle has a different name, its **Postludium** (Day four) – "Dreams of the Undiladze Family", and the subtitle, 'Count Keyserlingk cannot sleep', is a direct modification to Bach's "Goldberg Variations". More precisely, it's the composition and structure of his creation, without direct musical interrelations. The specific form chosen for the Postludium, the dream, is associated with surrealism (Luis Buñuel, Salvador Dalí, Ingmar Bergman, Joan Miró, René Char, etc.), which allows us by "going out" into the surreal world to comprehend the cruelty, malevolence, intolerance and misery of contemporary life (and not only it).

And here, under the subheading of "The Undiladze Family": Verfall einer Familie, the story of the collapse of a family (the subtitle of Thomas Mann's "Buddenbrooks"), refers not only to the story of the collapse of a particular family, the Undiladzes, but also to the devastation, fall down of a mankind as a family. At the same time, it is perceived, or to be more precise represented not as a catastrophe that can cause complete despair and negative emotions, but, not surprisingly, it bears a resemblance to the characteristics of the traditional Italian *dramma giocoso* genre, with a light twist of irony and cheerfulness.

Along with the title of the tetralogies it is important to comment on their commitments. Wagner, as a child of his time, dedicates Der Ring to his patron, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, and complements a score of "Die Walküre" with an extensive, high-style poem.

The dedication of "The Undiladze Family" is a concentration of the essence of the whole work, more or less wearing a veil. The text on the title page requires making quite an extensive commentary. Here, taking into consideration the format, I would like to introduce only an introduction: "To my dearest friends, / whose lifestyle / and sense of humor helped me to find / The Undiladze Family". "Friends" refers to all those intellectual and spiritual "acquaintances", community and their way of life, as well as artistic or historical events that influenced the creation of "The Undiladze Family" [1].

This brief review of the titles and dedications of the works also demonstrates that both tetralogies are somewhat peculiar to the "Model of the Universe". Each of them is based on a certain hierarchical structure. In "Der Ring des Nibelungen", these are three distinct entities separated from each other: Gods, Humans, and Nibelungs, and Giants, alienated from them – artists who were supposed to serve eternal and beautiful, but who refused, and quitting their vocation led them to a disaster: to the murder of brother and to the transformation into a gold guarding dragon. But the collision of Wagner's cycle, as well as its literary first source, is not based on a relationship between the artist and the universe, but rather on breaking of taboo, a birth of a super-hero caused by some intersection of isolated layers in the universe – Gods, Humans and Nibelungs and as a result, there is an imbalance in the world. There is only one solution – to exterminate the hero and cleanse the world with fire.

"The Undiladze Family" is also based on a multi-layered hierarchical structure. According to the author, "society distributed in social nests" is allegorically represented as leopards, hyenas and jackals, and beyond them there are eternal symbols: a burial-forgotten Mikela Undiladze<sup>1</sup> and a stutter Mariam-Marusa-Marusia-Marie-Marika-Maros<sup>2</sup>, tended by everyone and still forsaken – a representation of the village, or the world; The wordless character Nibelung Fortinbras-Mime (German circus Aujust), whose multifaceted name evokes several associations at the same time; The corrupt General Undiladze<sup>3</sup> – the great commander of the great wars of others and also two Aquirinelis – the philosopher Papuna and the musician "Arnoldia-Partkuna" (Arnoldia-Strummer). From the above list I would single out the Aquirineli who, as I consider, are in opposition to Wagner's Giants: unlike Fafner and Fasolt, a philosopher and a musician, the representatives of high art, are distanced from the events that take place around them. The nature of the Aquirineli is precisely explained by Arnold Schoenberg's opinion of Charles Ives: they have "solved the problem how to preserve one's self-esteem and to learn" <...> They respond "to negligence by contempt". They are "not forced to accept praise or blame" [2].

The tetralogies, represented as the "icon of the universe", are directly related to specific artistic models. It is well known that before setting off working on "Der Ring des Nibelungen", in 1852, Richard Wagner had published the programmatic artistic-aesthetic manifesto "Oper und Drama". At this point he, on the one hand, uncovered the negative features of the opera genre and declared that opera, as such, has been based on an error: "the means of expression (music) became the target, and the purpose of expression (drama) the means" [3]; On the other hand, he presented his own creative orientation – the ancient Greek tragedy and the dramatic principles of tragedy. It is true that extensive discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of my report, but I suppose I should definitely focus on the following: creating a tetralogy for Wagner was interrelated to the decision to take opera out of the impasse in which he thought he would reconnect drama and music at a new stage in history and once again connect drama and music, once again he set out to breathe life into the ancient Greek tragedy, but not by re-establishing the ancient tragedy, but by creating a similar one on a national, German soil. This, in the composer's deep belief, would allow him to create a "The Artwork of the Future" in which the "creator is a modern author, who anticipated the future and sought to be a part of it" [4].

Consequently, for Wagner, while creating tetralogy, the model, the artistic-aesthetic starting point was an ancient Greek tragedy brought about on the basis of German mythology. Greek tragedy and myth, as the primary creative impulse, are the consequential foundation for Bakuradze's opera tetralogy, but here it is conceived in the context of one of the greatest artistic peaks of the modernism

<sup>1</sup> Violino/Viola.

<sup>2</sup> Coloratura mezzo-soprano.

<sup>3</sup> Drama artist.

era. It refers to James Joyce's "Ulysses" and the resulting "multistage" connections: an ancient epic closely related to mythology, myths to tragedy, and this path eventually leads to the modern novel and opera of our time. A direct parallel can be drawn between "The Undiladze Family" and "Ulysses", first of all, in terms of the configuration of the artistic language: both works are saturated with quotations, allusions, metaphors, and multi-layered sub-text, rich of associations. The connections between the story lines, events, characters, musical works, make the hidden relations more and more apparent and put the last touches on the work as a whole.

When considering any cycle, the question naturally arises: what is its composition, what is its structure?

While being focused on the structure of the ancient tragedy, Wagner aimed to make use of a similar construction and create a trilogy as it was accepted in the ancient Greece. But, it was deemed necessary for him to lead an **Vorabend** that would introduce a viewer to some preconditions of the collision. The fact that Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen" was established as a tetralogy on the opera stage in the present day was, in fact, determined by the performance practice.

"The Undiladze Family" was originally conceived as a work to be performed for the duration of four days. It should be noted that Teimuraz Bakuradze, based on the historical experience of the structure of Wagner's tetralogy and the peculiarities of the cycle, created a mirror-reflection opposition to Der Ring. Thus, Wagner's cycle can be schematically represented as 1 + 3 – three three-act operas, preceded by a one-act introductory evening (I would like to note here that Wagner repeats the structure of the cycle in "Götterdämmerung" and composes it as well as 1 + 3, prologue and three acts), and "The Undiladze Family" is based on 3 + 1 construction. However, the structure of "The Undiladze Family" is not limited to these 'on the surface variance' similarities. The First day consists of a Praeludium and two acts, the second acts of the three-act Second, Third, and Fourth days are Interludims: "Silent Cinema" (Second day), "Street Theater" (Third) and "Black Comedy of Our Time" (Fourth). The natural and necessary functional part of the architeconic of the cycle is the Fourth day – Postludium, which, on the one hand, mirrors Wagner's idea of Vorabend, on the other hand, is the opposition of the Praeludium, and, then again, at the same time, is similar in scale to the previous three days. I would like to add that the Postludium of "The Undiladze Family" makes post factum understandable the main reason for all the events that took place, which is due to the peculiarities of the arrangement of the cycle's musical time, nevertheless this issue requires special research.

More or less, explicitly or implicitly, having been based on the myth defines the eternal and all-encompassing problems of the "Der Ring des Nibelungen" and "The Undiladze Family". At the same time, each of them is a reflection of the key events of a particular period and the socio-cultural context: the ideological basis of the "Der Ring des Nibelungen" reflects the orientation towards the material values of the world of that time and the idea of total domination.

The main idea of "The Undiladze Family" rests on several pillars. By the same token, the most important to the author is the eternal beginning, the different aspects of the manifestation of human nature, which retains its archetypal features in a changing environment, at various stages of history, and in different societies. Nevertheless, in distinctive parts of the cycle, only a typical moral-ethical orientation is being revealed. Among the others is the declaration of the American co-director David Wark Griffith for the film "The Birth of a Nation", which we constantly see at the Second day on monitor in Interludium: "We do not fear censorship, for we have no wish to offend with improprieties or obscenities, but we do demand, as a right, the liberty to show the dark side of wrong, that we may illuminate the bright side of virtue – the same liberty that is conceded to the art of the written word – that art to which we owe the Bible and the works of Shakespeare" [5].

Of course, the comprehensive idea determines the integrity of each composition, but for any opera it is important to have a specific text based on that idea, the libretto.

While working on "Der Ring", Wagner chose the traditional way: he created a poetic libretto, the story of which he used as the "Nibelungenlied", taking into account the alliterative arrangement of poems in the Old German and Celtic traditions.

However, there is a completely different, unique example of the verbal text of Bakuradze's opera "The Undiladze Family" libretto, which has no analogue in the history of music. The composer himself writes: "The libretto had been composed after having finished the work on the score of the tetralogy" and defines his own experience as "keeping balance, while climbing all the way up a ladder that rests on nothing". As a result, we get the "verbal version of the musical composition", the "verbal mutation of the four-day score" [6]. This statement of the author should not be understood as if, while working on the score he did not have a selected story and did not know, who the characters of his opera are or whatsoever. Certainly no! But the libretto of each day of tetralogy took its final shape only after the work on the score had been completed, and it has grown and expanded to the extent that it became an independent literary work. The text of the libretto also contains passages that are not intended to be performed on stage, but define the overall tone of the cycle, the key themes, the basic moral-ethical and philosophical vector of the whole work. Teimuraz Bakuradze notes that "the libretto is composed" and thus emphasizes the method of high parody based on the principle of composition, citation-allusion. Here I would emphasize that the basis of Bakuradze's artistic world is a historical consciousness, which does not make a distinction between "one's personal" and "someone else's". On the contrary, the achievements of the world culture (Western and Eastern) are united in one indissoluble whole, which contains the "others" as well, but in a new perspective and enriched with new qualities, in a new context. To make Bakuradze's compositional method more understandable, I would like to complement that "someone else" becomes very special, authorial in his works and acquires new features by changing the context.

Some musical milestones of "The Undiladze Family" are: masterpieces of opera from Monteverdi to the present day, several instrumental works, including Beethoven's "Diabelli-Variations", Bach's "Goldberg-Variations", vocal-instrumental opuses, such as Webern's Cantatas and Lieder, Bach's "Hohe Messe", Beethoven's "Missa solemnis", Brahms' "Ein deutsches Requiem" and many others. It should be emphasized that the Bakuradze method of high parody is fundamentally different from the so called collage: here the separate fragments of "someone else's text" are not stuck together, but are transformed into a new whole, transmuted into a new artistic quality.

The issue of the genre of "The Undiladze Family" is directly related to the method of high parody. If Wagner defined his operatic cycle as a Bühnenfestspiel, Bakuradze called "The Undiladze Family" a Canticorum-Canticum<sup>4</sup>, *dramma giocoso* (drama with jokes). This means that, a genre born on the eve of Baroque and Classicism, which gave several masterpieces to the history of music and ceased existence in the first half of the XIX century is parodied here. Bakuradze's interest in this, in a manner of speaking, forgotten genre is related to several aspects. First: Mozart's "Don Giovanni" and especially "Cosi fan tutte" are outstanding opera masterpieces for him. The second reason is related to the artistic position: talking about serious issues requires lightness, and the third: unlike the other genres of opera, *dramma giocoso* provides a rich means for scenic situations, portraying of characters, confrontation and coexistence of superior and low (elevated and ordinary).

When talking about the analogies between the tetralogies of Wagner and Bakuradze, the question naturally arises, is not "The Undiladze Family" a Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk? The composer does

<sup>4</sup> **Canticorum-Canticum** – double allusion: **Canticum Canticorum** (Song of Songs) – Solomon; **Canticorum-Canticum** (Kebata-Keba) parodied (inversed and turned into a single word) – Vazha-Pshavela.

not answer this question directly, as usual, and only clarifies: "The story of one family at the crossroads of all the art ... It would be fair to say: a family watching the great wars of others for three thousand years and four days on the Silk Road ... or 0.047% of the land at the crossroads of empires" [7]. But, if we observe, this phrase contains the answer to the question posed, namely, the reference to "the crossroads of all the art" answers the idea of Wagner's art synthesis. Even more diverse as it is a synthesis of music, drama, cinematography, circus, burlesque, variety, which requires the mobilization of enormous performing resources. The performance includes: soloists, soloist-instrumentalists (as well as characters), actors of the Drama Theater and, in addition, there is a monitor, equal to the characters: the table of the Undiladzes, solitary chair, gramophone, and other stuff.

In my opinion, this synthesis further expands Wagnerian ideas, as with him, drama is finally integrated into music and presents itself through music, while with Bakuradze, the whole components remain equal units, which serve to achieve the final artistic result.

In conclusion, as a final point, this brief and fractional comparison of Richard Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen" and Teimuraz Bakuradze's "The Undiladze Family" revealed how immense is the world of art that we are dealing with and how much more is still to learn! And, most importantly, what a long and difficult path must be passed for the full-fledged stage realization of the "The Undiladze Family".

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