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## TWO INDEPENDENCES OF GEORGIAN MUSIC (1918/21 - 1991 ...)

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### **Abstract**

*Georgia gained and restored its independence twice in the past century (1918/1921 and from 1991 to this day). Over the century the two-way path from independence to independence was difficult and heterogeneous with intertwined causal connections in socio-political and cultural spheres. Freedom is like a litmus test, which reveals and catalyzes certain processes. The golden age of new Georgian music – the first republic of independent Georgia in 1918-1921 – was preceded by a long period that prepared this rise in musical culture. At one glance, similar processes preceded musical culture of the second independence. First of all this was the path of reforms in different directions, including the sphere of education, music professionalization. Main reason for the not-so-insignificant success of the reforms was the consolidation of the political and public spectrum, active public participation in the process and a well-thought transformation of the inherited ugly system.*

*In this context the paper discusses: what challenges did the musical culture of the Democratic Republic face? What was the path like it took before gaining independence? What were the features of the idea of Georgian nationalism?*

*How did these two stages of Europeanization/globalization take place in the country, whose musical culture was based on a different type of professionalism before the 19th century? What does independence mean in music?*

**Keywords:** *Independences of Music, the first republic of Georgia, musical education in Georgia, Reflections of New Georgian Music*

The article is dedicated to the first Democratic Republic of Georgia from 1918-21, the 100th anniversary of the Soviet occupation and 30th anniversary of the restoration of independence in 1991

Georgia gained and restored independence twice in the past century (1918-1921 and from 1991 to the present). The path from independence to independence was complex and heterogeneous with intertwined cause-and-effect relations in the socio-political and cultural spheres. The participants of the discussions on these issues often drew parallels between the challenges facing the First Democratic Republic of Georgia and post-Soviet Georgia; however I think that despite similarities, the responses to these challenges from a century ago and today are different.

The tasks facing the musical culture of that time were perfectly understood by Zakaria Paliashvili and the first generation of Georgian classics, whose activities clearly confirm preservation of cultural memory and Europeanization of Georgian musical art.

And yet, what challenges did the musical culture of the Democratic Republic face? What was the path it took before gaining freedom? What played a crucial role in this process? How did these two stages of Europeanization / globalization take place in a country on the path to independence? How did these two stages of Europeanization / globalization take place on the way to independence in the country, whose musical culture was based on a different type of professionalism before the 19<sup>th</sup> century?

This article is an attempt to answer these questions; however, I perfectly understand that in this volume of work it is impossible to touch upon all the issues. This article is an attempt to answer these questions; however, I perfectly understand that in this volume of work it is impossible to touch upon all the issues. I will therefore focus on the importance of independence for the development of musical art; the achievements, challenges of these periods; intersection points of the two independences and the differences between them.

### **Georgian National State**

The first Georgian national state was created by the 1918 Act of Independence. It existed for only a few years and fell without being able to fully introduce the elements necessary for a national state. The second national state of Georgia was formed in 1991 after the collapse of the USSR and despite the internal controversy and great chaos unknown to its predecessor, it proved to be more enduring than the Republic created in 1918. In order to clarify the problems in building a national state in Georgia, as well as the problems of Georgian nationalism, I will name some formal signs that accompany a national state:

1. Unified culture based on national tradition, in the creation of which crucial is the formation and standardization of a single linguistic field. Against this background the work of Ilia Chavchavadze and his like-minded for the standardization of language norms is all the more valuable.

2. Next important step in the generalization of national culture is the establishment of a universal system of European-style education. Talking about unified culture is impossible unless there is a system of general national education. If there is no unified culture, there is no necessary basis for national identification either.

What steps have been taken in this direction in musical culture and how important is it to talk about Georgian music in the context of state independence in relation to the aforementioned issues of national identification?

As is known, the language of music is of great importance in the formation, maintenance and adaptation of collective identities – national and cultural identities. At the same time, music as a specific language is a stronger means of identification than verbal language (for example, Iakob Gogebashvili's "What Lullaby did" and "Voices of Homeland"), at least because it is impossible to determine the age of a traditional song by its verbal text, since historically it is more changeable than the musical text.

Freedom is like a litmus test, which reveals and catalyzes certain processes. As you know, art has its own development regularities and does not start existing all of a sudden, nor do emerge the results related to the processes from 1918-21 or from the 1990s to the present. Accordingly, for a start, we need to recall the events associated with the activities of the

*Tergdaleuli* movement in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because the national rise initiated by it also affected Georgian music. [1]

The 19<sup>th</sup> -century national movement across Europe spread to other countries as well and against the background of these processes, the map of Europe was drawn in a completely different way. Georgia, which was part of the Russian Empire, was no exception and it is no coincidence that Georgian politicians of the time imagined the struggle of this small country for national independence not only militarily, but also culturally.

Georgian musicians of the new era had several important tasks to fulfill: to save from oblivion Georgian chanting, which was on the verge of disappearance by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and traditional song, as a symbol of Georgian identity, because traditional culture with “historical memory” is the most important in the formation of national identity. The second task facing Georgian music was to create new Georgian professional music, basing on the European experience of national musical culture of the time. And the basis, on which the new Georgian professional music was to be based, was Georgian chanting and folk music. Both the *Tergdaleuli* and first generation Georgian classics understood this well.

Restoration and preservation of old Georgian professional music was undertaken by the “Committee for the Restoration of Georgian Chanting” and practically thousands of hymn examples were preserved for posterity, history. At the same time initiated was the activity for collecting folk songs, followed by the publication of folk song collections.

The formation and development of European-style professional music, creation of a new national school of composition was preceded by the introduction of opera into Georgia, its popularity and great love of the Georgians for it, dissemination of European-style music and instruments, inculcation of European-type musical life, emergence of the centers for musical education and Georgian musical collectives, such as Lado Aghniashvili’s choir, which played an immeasurably big role in these processes. All this prepared the grounds for the creation of a new Georgian professional school of composition. The generation of composers who had great success in the period of first independence, were well-aware of the tasks topical at the stage of inception and development of national music in general; these were not just means for their self-expression.

Moreover, I would say that the idea of hearing a Georgian word from the stage had become an *idée fixe*, and not only for the text to be understandable for the listener, but also to make Georgian language sound on the opera stage, because opera as a genre of synthetic art was a symbol of national identity for all national cultures. This was the goal of the “Society for Transferring Operas into Georgian”, which started translating European and Russian operas into Georgian language, thus preparing the basis for the idea of composing a Georgian opera. Let us recall one fact after listening to the concert of Aghniashvili’s choir under the direction of Josef Ratili, Ilia Chavchavadze wrote in the “Iveria” newspaper: “I sensed the smell of Georgian opera”.

1918-1921 is the era of independent Georgia, the time, which, unfortunately, did not last long, however, “three years of the democratic republic were stronger in terms of the intensity of feelings than a hundred years of our slavery” (Konstantine Gamsakhurdia).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Democratic Republic of Georgia had its own anthem (“Dideba”/ lyrics and music by Kote Potskhverashvili) coat of arms (Joseph Charlemagne) and flag (Iakob Nikoladze)

According to the press of that time, Georgia lived active musical life in 1918-1921. Here functioned: “Georgian Society of Music and Charity”, “Union of Georgian Musicians and Singers”, with singer Mikheil Nanobashvili (Michelle Dariali), who had recently returned from Paris, elected as chairman in 1920; “Georgian Philharmonic Society”, founded in 1905 on Zakaria Chkhikvadze’s initiative; “Georgian national choir” with Mikheil Kavsadze as choirmaster; “West Georgian Folk Choir” directed by Dzuku Lolua; mixed female-male choir of Georgian Military Union directed by Niko Sulkhaniashvili; in 1919, the Georgian Music Society created a choir directed by Arakishvili and Danovsky. In 1919 a music school was opened in Kutaisi on Meliton Balanchivadze’s initiative. In 1920, a branch of the Georgian Music Society was opened in Signaghi.

The period of the first independence of Georgian music was marked by a number of important events, these include Paliashvili's "Abesalom and Eteri", as the crown and at the same time the first and best example of the existing national classical opera.

According to the press of that time, in 1918-1921 Georgia boasted intense musical life.

Along with opera and concerts of classical music, noteworthy was everyday life of Tbilisi, an integral part of which were numerous cafes, restaurants, salons, tea-rooms, which also pursued charitable activities and where classical music often sounded. The cafes were gathering places for Georgian culture and art figures, including the modernists (Kiril and Ilia Zdanevich). It would be enough to name café "Kimerioni", "Argonavtebis navi" and "Internatsionali", where the poets declared Tbilisi the capital of poetry, – Grigol Robakidze writes.

In addition to many performing groups, the staging of Georgian operas became one of the most important events in the Georgian culture of that time. The first was the opera "Kristine" by composer Revaz Gogniashvili, which was staged on 21 May, 1918 in the Georgian Club, in 1919 three operas were performed in a row with great success at Tbilisi Opera House – D. Arakishvili's "Legend about Shota Rustaveli",

Z. Paliashvili's "Abesalom and Eteri" and Viktor Dolidze's "Keto and Kote".

The words of Dimitri Arakishvili and Zakaria Paliashvili, quoted from their autobiographies, clearly show how the artistic beliefs of Georgian music classics responded to the national idea: D. Arakishvili: "I am trying to stretch invisible threads between Georgia and Europe. I think that purely national creativity, endowed with an ethnographic character, will have only local significance. ..." [2] Z. Paliashvili: "This principle is the complete and pure preservation of Georgian coloring, originated from the people's heart. Of course, all this within the forms of European or, to put it better, world music; and based on its own musical laws". [3]

Both quotes express the same idea, the one formulated in Arakishvili's first sentence: "I am trying to stretch invisible threads between Georgia and Europe".

It is important that the position of Georgian composers in principle coincided with the requirements of the new era, which saw the future of the professionalization of "national" music in communication with the "international". This position, from the very beginning of its existence, created music schools in all directions and subordinated the musical talent, which has always been abundant in Georgia, to the classical basis.

## Musical education in the First Republic

The society of the time was especially concerned about the creation and production of Georgian opera. Typical is the article in "Theatre and Life" (1918, #9, 16. VI), which reads: "Along with drama, the capital of Georgia also needs Opera. An opera troupe should be created and the foundation should be laid for Georgian opera. For this we have both the repertoire and resources".<sup>2</sup> It was the staging of Georgian operas that became the most important occurrence in the Georgian culture of that time. Composer Revaz Gogniashvili's "Kristine" was the first opera to be staged at the Georgian club on 21 May, 1918; it was performed for the audience only five times;<sup>2</sup> – the opera which is completely forgotten today, as is its author. The year 1919 was especially remarkable in the history of Georgian opera: February 5, first performance of D. Arakishvili's "Legend about Shota Rustaveli"; February 21 the premiere of "Abesalom and Eteri". The opera was attended by a large audience including the representatives of foreign states. The evening made an indelible impression on the public and acquired a festive character", on 11 December, 1919, Viktor Dolidze's "Keto and Kote" was staged for the first time with great success.

<sup>3</sup> Journal "Theatre and Life", 1919, #1, pp. 12-13

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.25

The press of that time actively responded to the acute problems of national music, including the issues of musical education. Vasil Karbelashvili's letter "Distortion of Georgian Chanting" published in the 25 August, 1920 issue of "Sakartvelo" newspaper is critical about the Russian-style chanting in the churches of the time. In #17 issue of "Theatre and Life"[4]<sup>5</sup> of the same year, S. Tsereteli expresses his heartache "why not create a Georgian opera studio with a national repertoire and classes of Georgian choir", that the conservatory was Russified; Russian articulation is taught, not Georgian, etc.<sup>6</sup>

The Conservatory was founded on 1 May, 1917, preceding the proclamation of the Independent Republic of Georgia. But in fact, after the February Revolution, Georgia was already on the way to independence, and the creation of the conservatory was a logical consequence of this.

It is interesting to note that the establishment of the Conservatory in Georgia took place in parallel with the establishment of the University. But the paths to the same goals and ideals were different. The university could exist on its own. Which was impossible for the Conservatory - there were a few Georgian professional musicians at that time.

Preservation of national musical traditions became one of the most important tasks during the period of gaining national independence. Zakaria Paliashvili wrote: "Tbilisi State Conservatory wants to be an instiller of Georgian musical creativity. The interests of Georgia should be put first ... We all know that the victory of culture is a guarantee of political victory". [Paliashvili, 1918]

Inspector Zakaria Paliashvili became the acting director of Tbilisi Conservatory in 1918. Paliashvili sent an extensive report to the then-Minister of Education in this regard. [ 5]

The administration of the Conservatory conducted its work in Russian. Moreover, none of the subjects was taught in Georgian. In the only higher music school of Georgia, nobody said a word about the existence of national music and the need to study it. Zakaria Paliashvili could not put up with all this. In his report, he clearly outlined the plan for the reconstruction of Tbilisi Conservatory. Paliashvili writes: "As an executive director of the Conservatory, as a citizen, a patriot of my homeland and an artist committed to the interests of art, I ask the Ministry of Education to allow me to express my opinion in the hope that my considerations may not be fruitless in resolving the issue of transforming the Tbilisi Conservatory". According to Paliashvili, two issues needed to be resolved first of all: 1. Reform of the administrative structure of the Conservatory and 2. Replacement of Statutes and old curricula with the new curricula suitable for higher education, which was aimed at reforms in all directions.

According to Paliashvili "Tbilisi Conservatory should only be transformed into Tbilisi State Conservatory". One of the important issues raised in Paliashvili's report, was that during the 35-year existence of Tbilisi Music School nothing had been done for the study Georgian folk and church music.

He is deeply convinced that the creation and development of national professional music is impossible without creative assimilation of the achievements of common European music. He also points out the need for all conservatory students to study Georgian traditional church- and small but still existing Georgian professional music – "the latter will help them reveal their musical taste in Georgian melodies and enrich their musical imagination."

With the sense of national pride Paliashvili notes that Tbilisi Conservatory serves the musical interests of the Caucasus and is the center, which attracts young musicians aspired to study, from different cities of the Caucasus: "Georgia's interests should be given first place, but wouldn't it be desirable for the Republic of Georgia to retain the attractive position of Tbilisi (Georgia) as a cultural and educational center?"[6]

<sup>5</sup> "Theatre and Life", 1920, #1, there is information, that "Georgian Opera Studio under the direction of Stolerman performed at the expense of the Union of Cooperators; 18 portraits of "Opera Studio Actors" are printed in # 6.

<sup>6</sup> There was an attempt to establish an opera studio back in 1919, which was soon canceled.

This report is a kind of manifesto of the great artist, practical implementation of which he tried in every possible way.

• Thus, the shifts that occurred as a result of the European cultural transfer in Georgia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the process of globalization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century changed the socio-cultural environment and directed musical consciousness of the Georgians towards Europeanization. This process was marked by an active interaction of various cultural sources, which created fundamentally new layers of Georgian musical culture, based on traditional and European classical music.

## **Second Independence and Reflections of New Georgian Music**

By the symbolic act of November 1990, Soviet Georgia was transformed into the legal successor of the 1918-1921 Democratic Republic – Republic of Georgia. Thus, the aspiration for independence acquired an irreversible character and ended with the restoration of Georgia's independence on 9 April, 1991. Georgia was no longer a Soviet Socialist Republic; it was already the successor state of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, which existed for 70 years under the conditions of annexation, although it did not put up with it.

As we have already mentioned, the First Republic of Independent Georgia in 1918-1921 was preceded by a long period that prepared this rise in musical culture. At first glance, similar processes preceded the musical culture of the second independence. First of all, it was a path of reforms in various directions, including music, tended towards professionalization and integration with the European contemporary education system, the “Bologna Process”. Main reason for the considerable success of a number of reforms was the consolidation of political and social spectrum, active participation of wide sections of society in the process and the desire to transform the inherited system. The very process of re-evaluating history was reflected in the official historical narrative much later.

Musical art, like the country itself, has gone through many cataclysms, from the “Warming” of the 1960s to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the horrors of the civil war in the 1990s, when many of the “sixties” generation of the (and not only composers) left Georgia to avoid seeing what was happening. As Giya Kancheli said in his work “Abi ne viderem” (“I left so as not to see”, 1996). Kancheli is the composer who gained worldwide recognition during the independence of Georgia.

Political shifts made significant amendments to the cultural isolation prevailing in the 1920s - 1950s, in the “dual world” that formed the stereotype of Homo Sovieticus’ thinking under the ideology of the Soviet state; the achievements of the tabooed European art became secretly, gradually available. The process of search and renewal encompassed all spheres of public life, including art, the vector, however, was clearly projected onto European modernism of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The existential reflection of M. Mamardashvili’s philosophy, by which he expresses the statement of time; the works of O. Chiladze, G. Panjikidze, N. Dumbadze,

Sh. Nishnianidze, A. Sulakauri, O. Ioseliani; the films of E. Shegelaia, T. Abuladze, with their characteristic cinematic poetics and philosophical symbolism; the ecbasis of M. Tumanishvili, R. Sturua in theatre; B. Kvernadze’s, S. Nasidze’s, N. Gabunia’s, G. Kancheli’s, N. Svanidze’s, N. Mamisashvili’s music, which organically fits into the complex processes of artistic searches of this period.

The so-called “Thaw” period of the 1960s enriches national music with stylistic pluralism. The illusory opening of the “Iron Curtain”, which isolated our culture from the world musical processes, provided the 1960s-1970s generations the opportunity to intensively assimilate the

melosphere of 20<sup>th</sup> -century European culture: young generation of that time discovered for themselves Stravinsky and Bartok, New Vienna School and Total Serialism, dodecaphony, aleatory and sonoristics.

Familiarization with world civilization and accumulation of new information in such a dose cannot but lead to unconscious confusion of values. Therefore, artistic value of the works created in the search process was different, but a sharp stylistic shift in the 1960s clearly demonstrated the ability of the 1960s-generation musicians to interpret new ideas in their own way; to master the new technology without going through blind copying. In the conditions of information vacuum, each of them intuitively mastered current trends in the world; which resulted in the integration of their creativity into these universal processes. Almost all artists of the

1960s-1970s were not as sure about current world events as they subconsciously and intuitively realized and sensed the ways and means for renewal, to overcome the crisis, and most importantly, the necessity and inevitability of this renewal.

New trends encompassed full range of musical creativity. National and auditory experience was enriched by new developments, and here we must not forget the phenomenon of Mikhail Shughliashvili – the “Georgian Xenakis”; he created his own completely new style which found a recognition decade after the author’s passing.

Contacts are strengthened between academic and non-academic music, sacred, classical, jazz and pop music. Debate over the use of new techniques is a thing of the past and the time to master the vast arsenal of art has come.

In fact, national culture was exported abroad by the works of this generation, in a limited volume, but nevertheless, the phenomenon of the “Georgian” was integrated into it as a national achievement. N. Dumbadze called this a “small renaissance “of Georgian art.

Even though creative works of the 1960s generation was presented to wider audience in the so-called Khrushchev’s “Thaw” period, but in essence, they still worked in isolation. They remained unfamiliar with the musical achievements of their contemporary world, at least with procedural innovations, stylistic features ... All the more paradoxical is the fact how Georgian composers managed to grasp and sense the pulsation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Soviet space.

And yet, why Georgian art, distinguished by the sign of nationality, acquired its own name, at a time when, despite the period of the “Thaw” in the country, there was still a rather powerful form of the so-called policy of “Soviet culture”. I will single out two main factors: 1) Freedom, first of all, as a response of soul, realization of which is considered the basis of creativity in art. 2) Interest to a human, an individual, to his inner world. “Patience to human weakness, kindness, compassion for a person and, in particular, for a ‘little’, ‘ordinary’ person. The voice of Literature kind of got warmer...[7]

If the generations of the 60s "educated" each other and were under the main influence of Western European modernism, then during the period of the second independence, the generation of the 80s and 90s was focused on their modern music, because freedom accelerates the processes taking place in it slowly or even secretly. And the process of generating new ideas.

Freedom, access to information, opening of borders bore fruits in postmodernism era: new eclecticism and electroacoustic music, minimalism, multimedia, and experimental music emerged alongside traditional trends; nothing is unknown for new Georgian music anymore, it has become a contemporary of West European music, and the asynchrony of the past decades, caused by the prohibitions of the totalitarian regime and the “Iron Ccurtain”, is a thing of the past.

It is said that a free person is usually a person born or raised in a free country.

Georgian music got a real opportunity to enter the international arena. Along with other spheres, Georgian music also occupies a full-fledged place in the civilized world. Implementation of this was prevented by the tragic fate caused by the establishment of Soviet

power, which significantly imprinted further development of Georgian music. Unfortunately, the best decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – full of innovations, Georgia spent under the Red Terror.

The crisis that began after 1991, even under freedom and independence, was at the same time a means for opening up great opportunities and horizons. It was from this period that Georgia started to position itself on the international arena, when it appeared here after gaining independence in education, creativity or any other field, because the independence we gained under the First Republic did not allow Georgian culture to enter the world arena in a short time, even though, the leaders of the time were well-aware of the need for this, especially in the field of education. The period of the second independence really provided this opportunity, the then-initiated process of renewal and exchange of experience is very important, especially in the field of education. For art, it was a historically determined act that revealed both the expansion of the creative horizon and mastering of contemporary processes taking place in 20<sup>th</sup> -century art. All this is reflected in the unique style of the new generation Georgian composers. However, under complete freedom, it clearly lacked the intensity, which probably is the driving force for true art, which had evoked interesting new concepts in Georgian music of the previous period, said what needed to be said, covertly, but still spoke using double coding, the language of proverbs and brought its sorrows to listener.

I want to end the article with Merab Mamardashvili's words: "Independence is the first and absolute goal for me today. But not just to be independent, but in order to see ourselves and create the situation where our real problems will be visible. The solution to this problem is internal liberation i.e we need to free ourselves not only from the empire. ... [8]"

We did free ourselves from the empire, but did we gain this inner freedom?

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