

UDC 78.01

MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT BURN
(Dimitri Arakishvili's opera "Legend of Shota Rustaveli" editing history)

Marina Kavtaradze

PHD, professor

V.Sarajishvili Tbilisi State Conservatoire, Griboedov str 8/10, 0108, Tbilisi, Georgia

Abstract

In the history of any national culture, the works of art recognized as classical heritage and their authors enjoy special respect. Frequently, time makes its own amendments and the work recognized as a classic is re-evaluated, but for this, history should preserve its musical text or audio recording. The paper is dedicated to the 150th anniversary from the birth of Dimitri Arakishvili, a classicist of Georgian music, the founder of Georgian folkloristics, a pedagogue and public figure; discusses the editions of the classically recognized opera "The Legend of Shota Rustaveli" and the problematic issues of publishing its clavier.

The opera premiered on 5 February, 1919, during the short independence period of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia and boasted great reviews. Subsequently, the opera was staged several times, various editions were created including those of the author. It is included in all textbooks of Georgian music history as an example of Georgian classical music. But neither the clavier nor the audio recording of the opera has yet been published. And most importantly, the complete version of the opera score is nowhere to be found.

The paper tells about numerous editions of Arakishvili's opera and the first clavier edition prepared on the basis of the manuscript in 2023.

Key words: Arakishvili's opera, opera editions, musical classics

Preambula

When researching the past, the historian's task is not to determine what the author of the source is telling us, but what is hidden from him. The entire era of Soviet music history is proof of this: those facts and events that were assessed positively or critically in Soviet times today require a radical transformation and the establishment of causal relationships. The existence of a source does not in itself guarantee objectivity, especially if it is based only on a narrative. There is a difference between information contained in a source and scientific fact because the historian reconstructs scientific fact.

Having a source does not in itself guarantee objectivity. There is a difference between information contained in a source and scientific fact. Historical fact is the raw material on the basis of which the historian reconstructs a scientific fact. The role and importance of historical facts is determined by the fact that hypotheses are built on their basis.[1]

“The Legend of Shota Rustaveli” and its Micro Histories

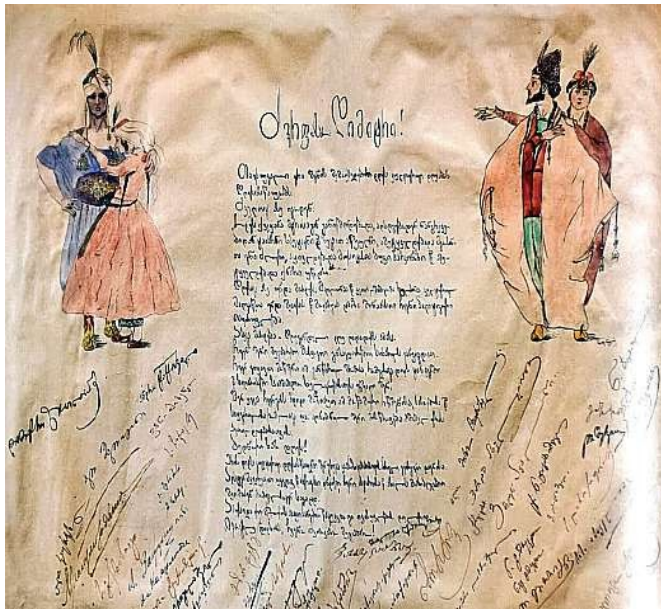
The wide panorama of Georgian musical culture is made of micro histories. Each is unique in its nature, just like puzzle pieces that make a complete picture in the end. In this respect, each musical piece holds its specific place in the history of national culture, especially when referring to the legacy of classical figures, when sometimes it is necessary to re-discover their work.

In the history of any national culture, the works of art recognized as classical heritage and their authors enjoy special respect. Frequently, time makes its own amendments and the work recognized as a classic is re-evaluated, but for this, history should preserve either its musical text or audio recording. The report is dedicated to the 150th anniversary from the birth of Dimitri Arakishvili, a classicist of Georgian music, the founder of Georgian folkloristics, a pedagogue and public figure; discusses the editions of the classically recognized opera “The Legend of Shota Rustaveli” and the problematic issues of publishing its clavier. The project, which was aimed at the first printed edition of Arakishvili's opera clavier, is nearing completion and has already been sent to the printer.

The opera premiered on 5 February, 1919, during the short independence period of the First Democratic Republic of Georgia and boasted great reviews. Subsequently, the opera was staged several times, various editions were created including those of the author. Although the initial two-act opera underwent numerous alterations since then. It is included in all textbooks of Georgian music history as an example of Georgian classical music. But neither the clavier nor the audio recording of the opera has yet been published. And most importantly, the complete version of the opera score is nowhere to be found.

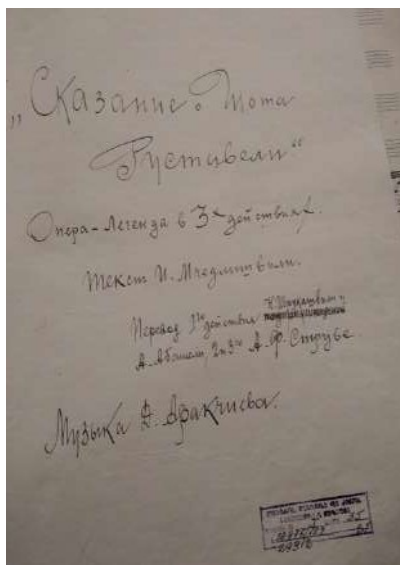


Program and performers: After the premiere on February 5, 1919. Source: “Theater and Life” 1919, March 2.



Greeting card to the author after the premiere

The fate of D. Arakishvili's opera *The Legend of Shota Rustaveli* is strange indeed: premiered 105 years ago, its vocal and orchestral episodes still attract us thanks to their melodiousness and vivid, highly emotional characters, but paradoxically, despite its doubtless musical value, the score and piano arrangement have never been published, neither has the opera been staged since the 1960s. The opera libretto was first published on the basis of the manuscript in 2023. [2]



From the Manuscript surviving fragments of the 3-act Russian-language of the opera.



Clavier and CD of opera “The Legend of Shota Rustaveli”, first edition, 2023

The main reason of revising the opera (five versions in all, among them four by the composer himself) lies in its plot: the word „legend“ does not presuppose historic accuracy. The libretto is based on a folk legend featuring certain historic figures, as well as drawing inspiration from Shota Rustaveli’s epic, its romantic storyline, which has no connection with the historic reality.

The classical medieval epic *The Knight in the Panther’s Skin*, admired for its literary and cultural value, has been widely popular in Georgia. However, the biography of its author remains rather vague, resulting in innumerable legends about Shota Rustaveli, including those that many thought were inappropriate for the acknowledged writer the entire country held in high esteem.

The opera is based on the legend popular in Samtskhe-Javakheti (south-west of Georgia), featuring “Shota Rustaveli and his wife”. The story, first recorded by Anton Purseladze (1839- 1913), became the basis for the libretto by A. Khakhanashvili, S. Shanshiashvili and I.Mchedlishvili, shaping the dramatic canvas of the opera. The romantic nature of the legend prompted the lyrical mood of the opera, complete with inclusion of romances and chamber pieces.



The author’s handwritten fragment of the opera.

D. Arakishvili first got acquainted with the legend in the 1890s. "I was 19," the composer remembered, "when I read the legend recorded by A. Purtseladze. It appealed to me so much that I decided to compose an opera based on it.

I wrote the libretto in Russian myself and then the music, only the vocal parts, without any accompaniment." The two-act opera was completed by 1914, followed by the first review in the magazine "Nov" (The Novelty), N. In his extensive review, Iliko Kurkhuli wrote about the proximity of the opera with the Georgian folk music, as well as dwelling on the content and six separate episodes, such as the Bard's Song, the female choir, the *davluri* dance, Shota's Praise, Queen Tamar's *cavatina*, the duet of Abdul the Arab and Gulchina.[3]

The opera was staged on 5 February 1919, immediately turning into a memorable celebration of national culture. Partly, the success was thanks to A. Tsutsunava, the director, and the performers: V. Sarajishvili (Shota), O. Bakhutashvili-Shulgina (Gulchina), G. Spitko (Tamar), P. Poliaev (Abdul the Arab), S. Inashvili (the Bard), V. Kalandadze-Aghasova (Nino). The choreography belonged to S. Vakarets, with the prima ballerina M. Bauersachs performing the solo parties. The numerous favourable reviews published after the premiere cited the historic significance of the opera, specifically stressing the highly artistic scenes, the overall lyrical mood and the performance of the orchestra conducted by Samuel Stoler mann. [4]

Following the premiere, the opera was presented eight times. The third act was added with the *Polovtsian* dance from A. Borodin's opera "Prince Igor". [5]

The fact of staging a Georgian opera and the impressions of the premiere were so powerful that they somewhat overshadowed certain misgivings of the libretto. However, some critics pointed out the laconic nature of the opera, urging the composer to revise his work.

The new 1923-24 season at Tbilisi Opera was opened on 12 October with the new version of the opera. Now it was staged in three acts, with Kote Marjanishvili as the director, Valerian Sidamon-Eristavi, the art director, and Ivane Paliashvili, the conductor. The parts were performed by: V. Sarajishvili (Shota), E. Bokovao (Gulchina), M. Eksanishvili (Nino), S. Polianov (Abdul the Arab), L. Kavsadze (the cart driver), V. Lortkipanidze (the Bard) and others. The choreography belonged to I. Sergeev. [6]

Theatre and music lovers welcomed the new version of the opera, but the administration of the Tbilisi Opera still deemed *The Legend of Shota Rustaveli* inadequate for staging. The composer was offered to lengthen the opera by adding the fourth act. In truth, the real reason for criticism was that the Soviet ideology could not accept the lyrical finale where Shota's fiancée commits suicide. In the minds of certain authorities, Shota Rustaveli's idealised image clashed with the final romantic, lyrical, emotional scene. It demanded a grandiose, rather pretentious finale that had already been firmly established in the Soviet aesthetics.

D. Arakishvili completed the third version of his opera in 1929, with Sandro Shanshiashvili invited to re-work the libretto. The first act was edited: the first scene of Shota Rustaveli, departing abroad, bidding farewell to his family and Nino, his fiancée, and the second scene was set in Greece (Shota in Athens). The music was learnt by the soloists, the choir and the orchestra, but the dramatic deficiencies revealed during rehearsals led to cancellation of this version of the opera.

However, the work continued, re-working the second act and adding the fourth act (*Celebration in Didube*). As a four-act opera, *The Legend of Shota Rustaveli* was staged to the full house on 23 March 1930. It was directed by A. Tsutsunava, conducted by V. Ulrich, while the scenography and costumes belonged to D. Shevardnadze and V. Ivanov. The premiere coincided with the 30th anniversary of the composer's creative life and making him the People's Artist of Georgia.

The following musicians contributed to the success of the performance: N. Kumsiashvili (Shota), E. Bogolepova (Rusudan), S. Inashvili (Abdul the Arab), V. Ovcharenko (Tamar), D. Badridze (cart driver), Sh. Khanum-Mamedova (Nino) and others. For many years Shota's

part was masterfully performed by D. Andguladze, Rusudan's by H. Danelian, the cart driver's by L. Gersemashvili. In 1953 the life-long achievement of D. Arakishvili – the teacher, researcher and public figure – was widely celebrated in Tbilisi. At the jubilee the composer was festively presented with The Legend of Shota Rustaveli, the handwritten musical score of the last version in a decorative binding. Today that score is the only complete copy of the opera that has reached us, being kept by the composer's descendants. Our present publication used that manuscript because other copies, such as the one kept in the Artpalace as part of D. Arakishvili's archive and the earlier, Russian-language version, as well as many fragments of the score and libretto are earlier versions.

The „sincere“ attempts of the Georgian culture authorities to save the opera from oblivion due to its shortcomings was futile. The more they tried to improve it, the more fragmentary the dramaturgy of the opera became. Also, the static character of the affected finale overshadowed the mood as a whole, losing the initial attraction, the genre shift causing the lyrical opera to acquire traits of an oratorio.

However, in case of a classical inheritance, every single version, every interpretation and adaptation have the right to exist. In our case, none is preserved in either a published or digital form, thus they all belong to history.

The sincere intention of Georgian cultural figures to save Arakishvili's opera from oblivion at the expense of the "viciousness of the plot" proved unsuccessful. The more they tried to "correct" it, the more "fragmentary" became the drama of the opera, and the static pompous finale lost its original charm, the more it attracted listeners, as the genre transformation gave the lyric opera the signs of an inappropriate oratorio. for the style of the composer.

The last production of the opera took place after the composer's death. In 1966, to celebrate the 800th anniversary of Shota Rustaveli, "The Legend of Shota Rustaveli" in new (fifth) edition (composer Nikoloz Gudiashvili and librettist Carlo Kaladze) was staged at the Tbilisi State Conservatory Opera Studio, with changed characters and additions of romances by Arakishvili ("Starry Night" and "Shemogamdeba"), which made this trend even more distinctive. [7] Ironically, this recording turned out to be the only complete version of the opera to be included as a disc with a printed edition klavier.



A scene from the performance of the Opera Studio, 1966.

The legacy of the classics is priceless. Despite the large number of editions of Arakishvili's opera, all editions are important in terms of history, as they not only tell us about the peculiarities of the composer's own style, but their micro-histories also tell us about the demands of the "Great style" of twentieth century Soviet art, which made the classical heritage "a procrustean bed". Time is the best judge, the main thing is to be able to assess events objectively without amnesia.

Despite the numerous versions of Arakishvili's opera, each of them is important not only for creating a full-fledged opinion of the composer's work, but also from the point of view of studying history, as their microhistories are unique documents that, like a puzzle, allow creating a unified panorama of Georgian Soviet music of the twentieth century and objectively assessing the events.

Dimitri Arakishvili's music, so much appreciated by many generations of listeners, awaits the time when an appropriate, professional performance will revive the opera with new performers, holding the place it deserves in the history of Georgian music.

References:

1. Kavtaradze, M. // Interpretation of facts and events in the history of music (one episode from the history of Tbilisi Conservatoire) // GESJ: Musicology and Cultural Science. 2018, #2, pp.38-45
https://gesj.internet-academy.org.ge/ge/list_artic_ge.php?b_sec=muz&issue=2018-12
2. Dimitri Arakishvili. The Legend of Shota Rustaveli (Clavier), Tbilisi, Ltd. Cezanne Printing House, 2023
3. Magazine "НОВЬ" 1914 (138)
4. Magazine „Theatre and Life”, 1920, #1 pp.11-12
5. Ibid, p.25, Journal "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
6. Khuchua, P., Dimitri Arakishvili. pp.174-175
7. Ibid, p.177

Article received: 2023-12-27

Included 8 figures