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‘Seven Songs for Voice and Piano’ by Nodar Gabunia – Addressing the Interrelationship between Speech and Music

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Abstract:

The relationship established between musical and poetic texts manifests itself in various ways; among them, in the generalized or detailed musical reading of the word, in visual-conceptual, plot-thematic, structural-compositional, rhythmic connections, in speech and musical intonation, in the issue of alteration of the verbal text when the composer interprets the word with music, and more... As a result of all this, the alliance of the above-mentioned origins is sometimes "harmonious", and sometimes it even resembles a kind of "dispute".

The report is devoted to some aspects of the interrelationship between verbal and musical texts in the work of Nodar Gabunia, a famous Georgian composer of the second half of the 20th century, namely, "Seven songs for voice and piano". Amazing nostalgia, sorrowful lyricism, deep psychological moods, and dramatic nature flock together in this composition of the chamber-vocal genre, featuring great internal emotional variety.

What does the poetic pattern gain during musical interpretation, and, on the contrary, what does the musical side acquire from the word; how do these two mutually complementary spheres affect the content, means of expression, taking into account the compositional and dramaturgical context? The report aims to reveal the interaction of verbal and musical intonation during the "narration" of seven stories by the "voice".

Key words: *Nodar Gabunia, interrelationship, musical text, verbal text, intonation, declamation, song, voice, piano.*

The relationship between speech and music is an important area of research. If we review the history of musical art, the "cooperation" between concrete and abstract, words and music, has developed intriguingly – from the core of syncretism to syntheticity. The combination of verbal and musical elements in vocal and vocal-instrumental works can be examined from not just one, but many perspectives.

The relationship established between musical and poetic texts manifests in various ways: in the generalized or detailed musical reading of the word, in visual-conceptual, plot-thematic, structural-compositional, and rhythmic connections, in speech and musical intonation, and in the matter of how the composer alters the verbal text when interpreting the word with music, etc. As a result, this alliance can sometimes be "harmonious" and sometimes resemble a kind of "dispute" [1,2,3].

The present article deals with some aspects of the relationship between verbal and musical text in the work "Seven Songs for Voice and Piano" by the famous Georgian composer of the second half of the 20th century, Nodar Gabunia (1988) [4,5]. Amazing nostalgia, lyricism mixed with sadness, deep psychological moods, and dramatic character come together in this chamber-vocal genre composition with its inner emotional variety.

It is interesting to explore what the poetic pattern gains from musical interpretation, and vice versa, how the word enriches the musical aspect. How do these two complementary fields affect the content and means of expression, considering the compositional-dramatic context? ... The interaction of verbal content and musical intonation drew my attention when the seven stories were “narrated” by the “voice”.

Georgian composers, including works by O. Taktakishvili, A. Machavariani, S. Nasidze, N. Gabunia, V. Azarashvili, and M. Virsaladze have created many chamber-vocal cycles [6]. A notable historical fact is “the passion of Georgian composers in the second half of the 20th century for chamber-vocal compositions, which internally contain several numbers united by a single dramaturgical line” [7:268]. The chamber-vocal work is noteworthy from both compositional-dramatic and musical-poetic perspectives. The unification of vocal miniatures and their smoothing can be achieved through various means.

Nodar Gabunia was one of the outstanding representatives of Georgian musical culture in the second half of the 20th century, known for his diverse work, innovative compositions, delicate piano performance, and profound artistic thinking [8,9].

In the vocal-instrumental cycle consisting of seven pieces under consideration, there is no fixed timbre, unlike the composer's previously written “stanzas” of a similar genre (e.g., “Three Elegies”) for bass and piano.

The verbal basis of the cycle includes songs based on poetic creations by **Ana Kalandadze** (“Memory” [I had a beautiful friend], “Let Us In, Gardener,” “Butterfly”), **Galaktion Tabidze** (“Believe It,” “Mzeo Tibatvisa”), and **Vazha Pshavela** (“Song” [Once There Will Be], “Ballad of the Weary Eagle”). Poems with completely different content, style, and versification are bound into a penetrating dramatic composition through music. Poetic patterns with independent lives blend together as if they were meant to be united ever since the beginning. Anna Kalandadze's bright lyrics written in verses gradually become nostalgic, and then the dramatized lines of Galaktion and Vazha alternate with each other.

"Seven songs for voice and piano" by Nodar Gabunia		
<i>No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Poets</i>
I	Memories	Ana Kalandadze
II	Let us in, Gardener	Ana Kalandadze
III	The Butterfly	Ana Kalandadze
IV	Believe it	Galaktion Tabidze
V	A Song	Vazha-Pshavela
VI	Prayer to the Sun	Galaktion Tabidze
VII	Ballad of the Weary Eagle	Galaktion Tabidze

Let's make a brief overview of the seven songs.

The First Song: A nostalgic **Recollection** sets the foundation for the characteristic signs that unify the cycle. The relationship between words and music is exposed here (and the composer stays loyal to it until the end of the cycle), with tetrachord melodic movements, musical intonation that seems to be derived from declamation, sequential repetition of phrases, and variations of the Ionian-Mixolydian mode. The direction of the melody, whether ascending or descending, resonates with the content of the spoken text. The piece develops with increasing dynamics, although the vocalist's speech fades into silence like a mirage. An interesting symbol – a wing of a dove, butterfly, or sun – appears onomatopoeically in the first, third, and sixth songs.

The Second Song: "Let Us In, Gardener" is a lyrical oasis in the cycle. The composer revives an early theme from the film "Ivane Kotorashvili" but again alters the poetic text by repeating the stanza and varying the musical side. Vocalization, added by the composer between the verses, contrasts with the intonation of the verses. The melodic line remarkably changes direction with descending motifs and phrases building towards the climax with the dynamic energy of sequence, and synchronicity with the accompaniment continues.

The Third Song: "The Butterfly" echoes the soul of a friend, it is a piece bringing light mixed with sadness. The butterfly's uplift and flapping are expressed in the hostile-rhythmic variation of intonation and in wave-like, glissando-like movements. Some poetic text is repeated by the composer, giving the work a reprise character.

The Fourth Song: "Believe It" ("Believe it if you don't believe") is a dramatic turning point piece. The text by Galaktion changes the direction of the cycle. The composer adds "mourning bells" (dan-dan-don, dan-dan-don, dan-don) both verbally and musically, initiated by the text. The piece features ascending-sequential development of descending melodic phrases that gradually swing towards the climax.

The Fifth Song: "The Song" with its title, too, is a composition having a clear couplet-variant structure. The musical revival of Vazha Pshavela's text is quite dramatized. The syllabic combination creates a song-cry about eternal thought, the inevitability of destiny, and separation from this world. The melodic line, colored by the Doric mode, is delivered in the usual manner before it fades into space...

The Sixth Song: "Mzeo Tibatvisa" (O Sun of the Month of Hay-Harvest, again the poetic text written by Galaktion Tabidze) is a pleading play that is perceived as a quiet climax in the cycle. The musical direction is *noteworthy – quasi preghiera* – almost in the manner of a prayer – which is a whispered singing prayer. The third stanza is climactic but quickly relieved. "Floating" songs with chromatic intonations similar to speech are again delivered in syllabic phrases. The piano accompaniment gradually reduces to a minimum, leading to an abrupt pre-climax instrumental revival that segues into a torpid ending.

The seventh, last song: "The ballad of the weary eagle" features the most extensive verbal text. This final part is almost twice as long as the previous six altogether. The musical material gains intonational intensity; the accompanying solo becomes active, but the vocal part stiffens into the background, or even disappears. Repetition returns in an arcing style, and persistently repeated tetrachord intonations reach their maximum. At the end, a kind of wrestling of words and music fades into eternity.

In conclusion, Nodar Gabunia's cycle can be analyzed from various aspects, including the relationship between speech and music. The work illustrates how intriguingly verbal content is transformed into corresponding musical phrases. The expressiveness of the verbal text is projected onto the melodious recitative-declamatory nature of the musical intonation. The syllabic singing of the poetic text follows the cycle to the end, with the musical side standing out for its simplicity. The onomatopoetic music sometimes approaches and intensifies the verbal text, and the poetic text transforms into sung speech during the musical interpretation.

The composer uses poetic patterns variably; this is especially true for the first three songs, which is not unusual for this genre. Additions or omissions in the verbal text strengthen the dramaturgical idea, enriching the poetic pattern. The volume of the spoken text increases from song to song.

Purely musically, the cycle is characterized by the stream of sounds stratified into the layers of lead vocal and background piano parts. The interacting features of text and music are mainly presented in the vocal part, while the piano accompaniment serves as an echo. The compositional

structure of all seven songs is marked by its simplicity, reminiscent of a genius's simplicity.

The textual-musical syllabic ratio becomes organic for the whole composition; achieving a "sung" speech, narration, speech in verbal-musical phrases, the dominance of sequential development, sometimes in conditions of changing meters, clarity of speech intonations as well as a peculiar "silence" of the singing character of the melody.

Along with the syllabity, the appearance of the melodic drawing is also characteristic. Repetition and sameness are clearly revealed. In the cycle, as a unifying factor, there is mostly occurring repetition-recitation of the sound, with tetrachord ascending or descending movements, slow scale-like wave movements, or chants, sometimes with glissando-like associations. A melodic development revolving around an axis is repeatedly observed. All of these can be taken as an influence of the verbal parameter on the musical language, and on the contrary, the appearance of the melodic line is symbolically connected to the verbal content.

The listed characteristics run through the whole cycle as invisible or visible threads and serve to consolidate the thoughts of different poets. With the transparent texture of the songs, with the play of tonality inclinations, those lights and shadows are achieved, which are aimed at meaningful self-expression.

Attention is involuntarily attracted by the variety of songs of the cycle, and the depth of content; clear sadness, nostalgia, search for the truth, futility of the existence, eternity of the soul and the world – emerge after listening to the work.

These characteristics represent the influence of verbal parameters on the musical language and vice versa, with melodic lines symbolically connected to verbal content. The entire cycle features visible or invisible threads that consolidate the thoughts of different poets, with the transparent texture of the songs and the play of tonality creating light and shadows aimed at meaningful self-expression.

Thus, with the expressive means of music, each play weaves a penetrating dramatic line. Independent poetic patterns create unity of stories. Also, certain musical-content associations appear with other works of the composer (theme from the movie "Ivane Kotorashvili", "Piano Trio", etc.).

Ultimately, what is achieved in the interplay of music and words, or is there any interplay at all? Music, with its potential disguised by abstraction, generalizes and enriches concrete verbiage to convey the creative thought of the words. The counterpoint of speech and music emerges in the eternity of the world and vanishes like a mirage. Nodar Gabunia's "Seven Songs" organically continue this genre's path, representing his own creativity and trends characteristic of the chamber-vocal genre of the last century in Georgian music. Discussing this further could be another topic for research.

Finally, "with age, a person thinks about more valuable topics – the essence of life, presence and absence... his vision becomes more philosophical, profound" [10:19] – as a kind of symbol of the thoughts of composer Nodar Gabunia, a true thinker, there has turned out to be for us the cycle "Seven songs for voice and piano".

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