



Focus on Civilizations
and Cultures - Music

ECHOES *from* GEORGIA

Seventeen
Arguments on
Georgian
Polyphony

NOVA
MUSIC

FOCUS ON CIVILIZATIONS AND CULTURES - MUSIC

ECHOES FROM GEORGIA

SEVENTEEN ARGUMENTS ON GEORGIAN POLYPHONY

RUSUDAN TSURTSUMIA

AND

JOSEPH JORDANIA

EDITORS



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CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING THE TYPES OF POLYPHONY OF GEORGIAN FOLK SONGS

Tamaz Gabisonia

Despite the long-lasting interest in Georgian traditional polyphony the attempts to classify its forms have hitherto been rare and rather superficial. Araqishvili mentioned the presence of drone and contrapuntal polyphony respectively in Eastern and Western Georgia (Araqishvili, 1906, 1908). Aslanishvili and Chkhikvadze dedicated articles to this topic (Aslanishvili, 1954; Chkhikvadze, 1964, see Aslanishvili and Chkhikvadze in this volume). One of the reasons for this is the complex character of Georgian traditional polyphony. I shall try to introduce more specificity into the discussion of this phenomenon, and focus my attention on the “type” of polyphony, the principal taxonomic unit of the structure of Georgian folk polyphony.

Which features of polyphony should be characteristic of the certain “types” of traditional polyphony? It is clear from the beginning, that to be perceived as a certain type of polyphony, it should be typical of tradition, represented by a number of versions. Apart from this, in determining the concept of “type” a single clear-cut feature will come to the fore, as the main characteristic detail of the specimen under discussion.

The understanding of “type” also implies that a structure perceived as a type should repeat or, in the direct sense, should be “typical” in the given stylistic area.

As to defining a specific type of polyphony – in terms of operation – it should involve two aspects: to what extent does the term accord with (1) internationally accepted terminology, and (2) Georgian folk terminology?

In general, “research into the detached terminological corpus, established in one or another musical culture, is not very fruitful” (Mikhailov, 1990:8). In my view, the validity of this thesis is limited by the restrictions of the apparatus of the terminology. As to the local terminological system, here we should not only bypass traditional terminology, but try to conceptualize original phenomena expressed in traditional concepts, as a parallel system of the international terminological apparatus.

But Georgian folk terminology is not rich in concepts reflective of the process of singing in many voices. Like many other polyphonic traditions, here the terms for the voices predominate, but separate terms for the types of polyphony are hardly ever present. The

original creative method is basically reflected in names expressive of these functions. This is natural: voices are subject to differentiation, while style is not. The image of polyphony, as a language of musical expression, was so natural with the people that it would hardly create a need for designation.

What significance should the factor of tradition have in defining the type of polyphony? I think, a type should embody a historically shaped and stable pattern of polyphony. Single specimens, distinguished for the individuality of structures, do not constitute a typical phenomenon.

When defining the type of Georgian polyphony in my earlier studies (Gabisonia, 2000, 2008), I was unhesitatingly guided by the compositional principles of polyphony, as a method of polyphonic creative thinking and an already approved concept expressing it in musicology (Marius Schneider wrote about this in his "History of Polyphony", 1934-1935). But the concept of compositional principle may be adjusted to different phenomena arranged according to various methods. Apart from the method of coordination of different voices, the compositional principle may be manifested by a single specific voice (like ostinato, or drone). And this is another reason to call a separate polyphonic textures a "type".

In my earlier publications I singled out the following five principles of polyphony in Georgian folk song: (1) drone, (2) ostinato, (3) parallelism, (4) synchrony and (5) paralinearity (or contrastive, or contrapuntal, with independent movement of parts). I call them the "principles of polyphony" because they form original structures of functional polyphony. These five principles can be divided into two groups: (a) principles of coordination between the parts (parallelism, synchrony, paralinearity) and (b) principles of a specific single part (drone and ostinato). The latter implies an original type of coordination between the parts, based on an individual part which has a specific technique of development and does not use more conventional melodic ways of development. This individual part creates a functional contrast with other parts. This may be the function of (a) the background, as well as the (b) periodic repetitive function, realized respectively by the (a) drone or (b) ostinato, or in a first case by a part with the sustained pitch (drone), and in second case, part with the continuous repetition (ostinato).

Not all the fragmentary manifestations of the compositional principles of polyphony should be considered as a form of polyphony (and accordingly as a polyphonic type). It must be taken into consideration whether it is a typical structure. Therefore, different fragments should be identified and recorded by a certain criterion. This may be qualitative or quantitative indicators according to which the specific features of traditional polyphony should be analyzed.

Ideally, such a minimal fragment of the stability of musical structure should be identifiable as a clearly defined segment of the song. A fragment with a formulated musical sense has such boundaries, expressed explicitly in a cadence phrase. Such fragment must have at least two (beginning and the end) out of three elements (beginning, development, and end). As to the songs where the musical idea is developing without the complete musical sentences, with the unspecified and relatively large fragments with a same repetitive characteristic structure, periodical repetition (in the conditions of ostinato polyphony) is the only criterion. Here it is not a completed phrase that will serve as a criterion for determining the type of polyphony, but the periodical repetition of the musical material, in this case the repetition of the ostinato formula at least three times.

One more important factor: large number of Georgian songs can not be easily ascribed to one of the polyphonic types mentioned above, as they use different polyphonic types and compositional principles in the same song, and even in the same musical phrase. Sometimes these principles follow each other in a close pursuit, and sometimes they are represented simultaneously, in the same musical sentence by different parts of the same polyphonic texture. I describe these two different mixed forms generally as a "composite" (or "synthetic") forms of polyphony, with the first one as "medley of polyphonic types" (when the different compositional principles follow each other in the same song and even same phrase), and as a "blend" (when different compositional principles are blended in the same phrase, in the same vertical texture by different parts). Musical texture in such songs contains fragments of various construction, caused by fusion of different song layers or motives. Occasionally, these fragments become drastically detached from one another, and sometimes grow into one another. In the latter case it happens when the musical thought is not completed, and the musical thought gains a new dynamic charge by the appearance of a new compositional principle. As a result we have complex composite (synthetic) polyphonic structures, where the concept of "polyphonic type" in its pure form does not apply.

Thus, I consider the structure with a completed or periodic development form of musical thought to be the compositional type of Georgian traditional polyphony, in which (a) the compositional principle or principles of polyphony are expressed clearly and stably, and (b) which is believed to be characteristic from the stylistic standpoint, in terms of the frequency of its manifestation in a culture.

My personal views, as well as the experience of Georgian ethnomusicology, suggests that the classification of the forms of Georgian folk polyphony can not bypass the established criteria of various polyphonic forms (Aslanishvili, 1954; Chkhikvadze, 1964). However, as a precondition of general typological classification, or as the best mechanism for identifying various regularities, I believe it is necessary to set up various classification schemes drawn up according to a single criterion. These small-scale local classification systems have intermediary or working meaning, hence I refer to them as "working classifications".

With respect to Georgian song, I find it more fruitful to use the "grammatical" method of classification (Czekanowska, 1983:109), which envisages creation of a local typology with the frame of the given multiplicity, in the direction from the phenomenon to the concept.

At the same time, when differentiating the phenomena, we should try to divide each classification unit into two groups, without residue, according to one criterion, where ". . . any image cut transfers its name and definition to its lower units" (Orbeliani, 1991:109). Elements equipped with uniform properties lying at each stage, resulting from binary division, are divisible according to some other sign (or it is already not divisible, depending on the researcher's opinion).

Of course, many classification schemes can be offered, which will place two antagonistic groups without a residue at only one step. For example: simple polyphony – composite polyphony, homogenous polyphony – heterogeneous polyphony, synchronous polyphony – non-synchronous polyphony, etc. Such primary differentiation is possibly needed, and these too can be taken for varieties of "working" classifications. In my case, such division will enable us to determine which of the constructive elements are important for Georgian song.

Before embarking on the discussion of the musical side of Georgian traditional polyphony according to different criteria, I think it is necessary to sort out those factors which are already present even before the performance starts. I call this method "the criterion of

performance regulation”, giving preference to the concept of “class” as its corresponding taxonomic unit. Such classes are a kind of moulds in which the same material is grouped in various versions. Here specimens are identified according to a single feature and, accordingly placed at one stage. I simply call such systems “rows”. This word points to a single level of division and at the same time it implies many members within itself. Here I shall present seven such classes and their rows:

1. Rows of social regulation class: peasant, “artisan’s” or “folk professional”, church, urban, military, guild polyphonic songs;
2. Rows of regional (dialectal) regulation class (Georgian musical dialects): Khevsuretian, Pshavian, Tushetian, Mtiuletian, Gudamaqar, Mokhevian, Kartlian, Kakhetian, Ingilo, Meskhetian, Imeretian, Rachan, Svan, Megrelian, Gurian, Acharan, Shavshetian, and Laz polyphonic songs.
3. Rows of genre regulation class: cult and ritual, work, church, lyrical, table, etc. genre polyphonic songs.
4. Rows of gender-age regulation class: men’s, women’s, children’s, mixed, children and women polyphonic songs, etc.
5. Rows of performer composition regulation: solo (implied) polyphony, ensemble, choral, antiphonal, responsorial polyphonic songs;
6. Rows of class of instrument use regulation: vocal, instrumental, vocal-instrumental,
7. Rows of class of performer number regulation: two-person, three-person, four-person, and unlimited regulation of persons with instruments.

Rows could be identified by some other feature as well. Some researchers (Volkova & Javakhishvili, 1982:203; Garaqanidze, 1990:156) note that vertical differentiation of singing styles is marked well on Georgia’s ethnographic map, which prompts us to identify classes of mountain and valley. Identification of a row according to the verbal text of song is perhaps justified (it is interesting that Sheikin gives special attention to the interrelationship of the verbal and musical texts; he singles out four variants of this dependence (Sheikin, 1983:79) and vice versa – the autonomous character of the verbal text from the musical one (for example, one of the distinguishing features of dance songs from round-dance songs is losing of the function of the verbal text (Rogachevskaya, 1980:125-126). Such a lexicographic (not the above mentioned grammatical) method helps us form a vivid idea of the entire “geography” of the external factors exerting an influence on traditional polyphony. At the same time, while observing these rows of classes it becomes clear that in Georgian traditional polyphony the “pre-performance” factor is basically of non-typological significance, for the compositional principles of polyphony do not display a tendency to perfect distribution in classes of some row. The coincidence of four-part class with the polyphonic form of Gurian *Naduri* (collective work) songs constitutes an exception.

My earlier discussed model as a concept of a melodic-rhythmic pattern in traditional polyphony seems to me an important criterion of the “working classification”.

The only form of Georgian folk polyphony, in which the melodic and rhythmic models are manifested less distinctly, is a pedal drone polyphony: a polyphonic texture based on unaltered accompanying line sung on a vowel.

In specimens containing a clear model I consider the criterion of a model in terms of its two components: (a) *pitch* model and *rhythmic* model, and (b) *shared* (similar) and *contrastive* models (both pitch and rhythmic).

Although pitch links are of decisive importance in polyphony, the rhythmic side of the model is more capable of clear primary division of the forms of Georgian traditional polyphony than the pitch side. I agree with the view that polyphony is a polyrhythm in its essence (Skrebkov, 1973:5). Indeed, the division of Georgian folk polyphonic songs in terms of its content of shared rhythmic model and contrastive rhythmic model yields two more equal-sized and clearly delimited groups than do multi-voice drawings grouped according to the content of shared or contrastive melodic models.

Thus, I shall divide Georgian traditional polyphonic songs into two groups: (1) a group containing a shared rhythmic model and (2) a group containing a contrastive rhythmic model.

At the next stage I shall use the criterion of a pitch model together with the rhythmic model.

The group of shared rhythmic model is divisible into groups of shared rhythmic-pitch model (or *parallelism*), and of shared rhythmic model alone, or that of *synchrony*. The compositional principles of parallel and synchronous movement of voices constitute the creative method of implementing the shared model at the pitch and rhythmic stages.

On the other hand, the group of rhythmically contrastive model will be placed in the group containing the rhythmic-pitch contrastive group. Only the conjectural group of shared pitch model (and rhythmically contrastive or imitative) cannot be found among Georgian songs. Extremely rare and fragmental cases of imitation in Georgian polyphonic song cannot be taken into account.

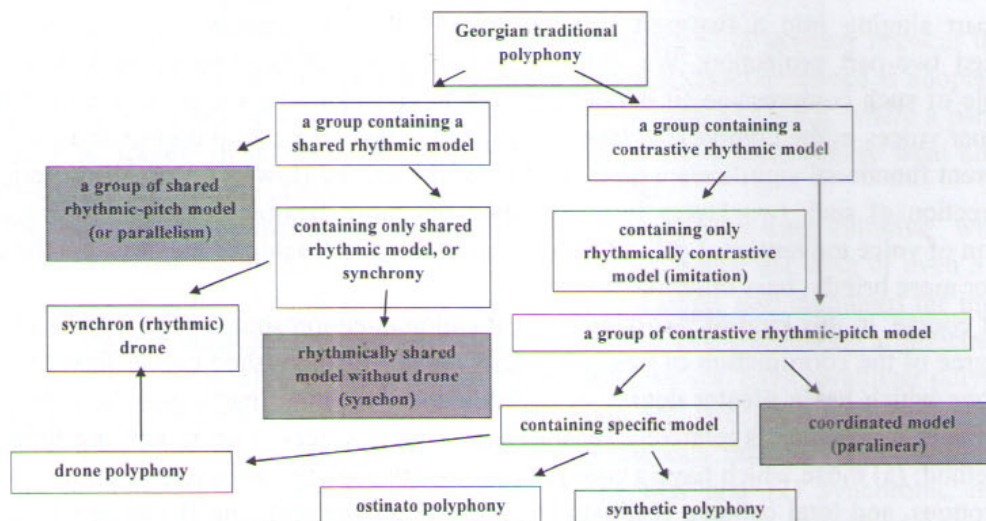


Diagram 1.

As we can see, in using the model as a criterion, the following forms of Georgian traditional polyphony: parallel, synchronous, drone and free-constructive (paralinear, or contrapuntal) can be defined. Synthetic forms and ostinato polyphony constitute an exception, for these criteria fail to “trace through” all the varieties of the models.

I shall try to divide the forms of Georgian polyphony by the criterion of sound movement or the direction of melody. At first sight, the structures of parallel, opposite and oblique melodic movement correspond to the parallel, contrastive and drone varieties of Georgian polyphony. However, apart from the first (parallel polyphony), the remaining two find no direct analogue in Georgian song. Contrastive sound movement presupposes voice movement of opposing direction to the forward movement of voices (counterpoint), which may occur in single cases in Georgian folk polyphony. More often we come across the contrast as a result rather than contrast as an aim (as this is the case with classical counterpoint). To put it in a different way, the opposing movement of voices in Georgian polyphony is determined by the principle of free movement of voices rather than by contrastive movement. In my earlier studies I called such voice movement paralinear, in accordance with Kurths term (Kurth 1931: 94).

As to oblique voice movement, in a literal sense it implies two-part singing with only one voice changing its pitch. In my opinion, consideration of drone bass two-part singing as an oblique voice movement would be irrelevant, for here drone plays the role of accompaniment (background) rather than a part sounding at one pitch at a certain span of time.

Thus, the criterion of melodic direction between voices does not work actively in Georgian song, for it clearly defines parallel voice movement only. Parallel voice movement in its clear form in Georgian song is quite rare, but I suggest it would be appropriate to grant it a status of compositional type of polyphony. At the same we should note, that the observed stages of development of polyphony in Georgia seem to suggest that parallel melodic movement in early Georgian song must have had more significance than it has today.

The above-mentioned criterion of the “melodic direction” is hardly effective in three-part singing, for the criterion itself deals with the interrelationship of the two parts. However, under certain conditions, I believe it is possible to compress the graphic model of Georgian three-part singing into a two-part layer and apply the abovementioned criterion to this modified two-part projection. We shall present the unity of the two upper voices as an example of such compression (it is not necessary to consider only the parallel movement of the upper voices in the compressed layer). Frequently, bass as a choral unison or an object of a different functional significance takes the role of the second (lower) layer. The criterion for the direction of such two layers is a simplified but more flexible form of the processual criterion of voice movement. I call it the criterion of the relationship of the bass and the upper parts, or more briefly, bass criterion.

Of course, in this kind of “working” classification attention should primarily be given to the degree of the coordination of bass with other parts. I distinguished two different types of bass: one which has a greater degree of coordination with other parts, and the other, more independent bass which is relatively separated from other voices. Two groups are formed by this method: (a) those which have a coordinated bass (this group comprises of drone, parallel, synchronous, and total ostinato [ostinato in all parts] polyphony), and (b) those which have individualized bass (this group comprises paralinear [contrapuntal] and ostinato polyphony with independent bass).

Here is the corresponding diagram:

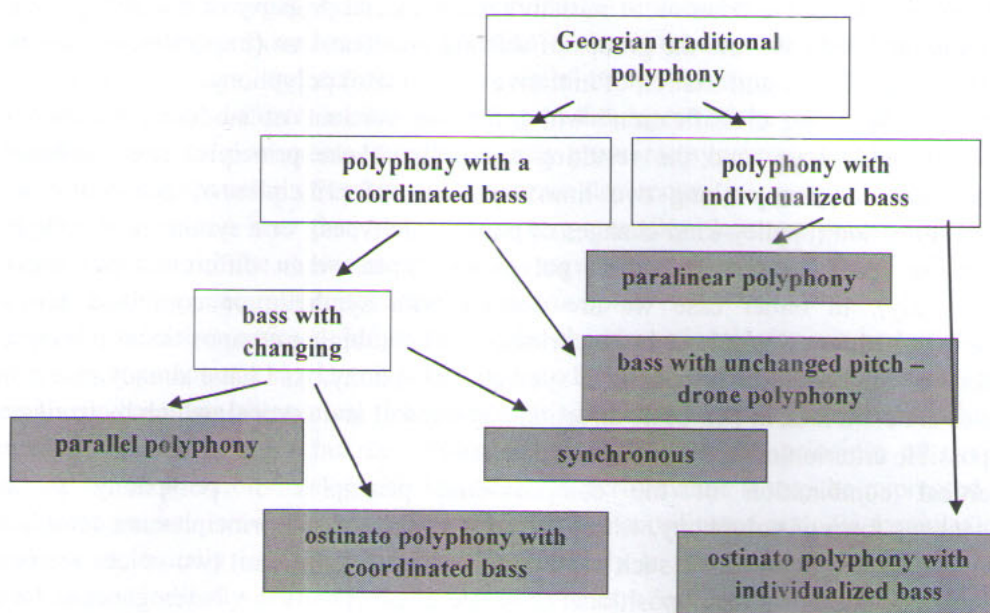


Diagram 2.

It is easy to notice that the contours of compound (synthetic) forms are not represented by these criteria, especially of four-part singing, for it is unfeasible to present any two layers as one layer. The criterion of bass can not distinguish paralinear from ostinato, or parallel from synchronous forms. It is also impossible to single out an individual (non-total) ostinato polyphony by these criteria.

I believe it is useful to use the criterion of the “initiative” of guiding musical thought which I have discussed earlier. Such an initiative means that creative charge is adopted by a separate part, either throughout the song or for a certain section of a song, where a part takes the role of a “leader” in active music-making. I am not going to discuss here what kind this initiative may be – melodic, timbre, rhythmic, or some other.

The initiative can be manifested in two different ways: (a) “shifting initiative” when the initiative is frequently transferred from one part to another during the song or even a single musical sentence, and (b) “continuous initiative” is when a single part maintains the initiative at least for a whole musical sentence. This criterion will lead to the following arrangements of the polyphonic texture: (a) in the case of shifting initiative we will have paralinear polyphony, and drone complementarity (implying the alteration of two upper voices aimed at complementing each other); and (b) in a case of continuous initiative there will be five different arrangements of polyphonic texture: (1) parallel and (2) synchronic melodic movements, (3) polyphony containing ostinato, (4) drone-parallel and (5) two-part drone forms.

As we can see, a separately taken criterion of initiative is not very effective in identifying types of Georgian polyphony. However, a closer scrutiny shows that its fragmentary use can yield effective results. In particular, the criterion of initiative clearly divides choral bass into forms containing initiative (ostinato) and passive (drone) bass models.

At the same time, the criterion of initiative has a special property of dividing polyphony of the individualized bass into the groups of shifting manifestation (in paralinear polyphony) and of “single person” manifestation of initiative (of ostinato) polyphony.

The next “working classification” will bring out versions of modeling compositional principles of polyphony and the resulting synthesis. These principles are combined in Georgian folk polyphony along two lines: synthesis of principles of polyphony in the horizontal direction (medley-kind changes of polyphonic types), or a synthesis of polyphonic principles in vertical fusion (blend of polyphonic types, when different types are used simultaneously). In either case we are dealing with synthetic or combined forms of polyphony, which are worked out by the principles of combining compositional principles of polyphony or compositional principles of synthetic polyphony. As I have already noted, these principles are combined in two basic directions: horizontal and vertical, which by itself points to the possible criterion of the “direction of synthesis”.

Vertical combination of the compositional principles of polyphony yields a heterogeneous form of polyphony, where different compositional principles are combined in one polyphonic texture. Clearly, such combination is feasible (at least two voices are needed for the manifestation of the compositional principle of polyphony). A heterogeneous form in Georgian polyphonic song is obtained by the combination of the following principles:

1. By antiphonal (complementary) alteration of the upper two voices against the background of drone bass (drone-complementary polyphony);
2. By the parallelism of the upper two voices against the background of drone bass (drone-parallel polyphony);
3. By the parallelism of the upper two voices against the background of contrastive bass (contrastive-parallel polyphony) – relatively rare;
4. By the simultaneous use of at least two (or more) specific voices, like ostinato and drone; or ostinato, drone and contrastive parts (ostinato-drone, or ostinato-drone-contrastive polyphony).

Each of these forms are worth of the definition of a heterogeneous type, as they meet the above cited conditions. However, in terms of definition, the first three are mostly perceived as a subject of one of the five basic types. In particular, drone-complementary polyphony and drone-parallel polyphony, are perceived as a subtypes of drone polyphony; contrastive-parallel polyphony can be perceived as subtype of synchronous polyphony (or contrastive, paralinear polyphony). Only the fourth layer containing the ostinato (the yodel – *krimanchuli* uses ostinato figures) and the drone (specific pedal drone in the middle of the texture – *shemkhembari*), found in the *naduri*, collective harvest songs, do not clearly belong to any of the five principal types, so I consider it as a separate type – “heterogeneous type of *naduri*”. Here I must say that because the bass is the main element of determining the general characteristics of the polyphonic type, the polyphony of four-part *naduri* songs are often perceived as the examples of contrastive polyphony (because the lowest part, bass represents a free contrastive melody). I propose that as *naduri* songs do not represent ordinary contrastive texture, and as they are unique, the use of a specific term “heterogeneous type of *naduri*” (“*naduri* type polyphony”) is justified.

When the compositional principles of polyphony alternate horizontally during a completed musical thought, a medley-type compound form of polyphony is obtained. Such

synthesis is basically brought about by two methods: (a) replacement of drone bass with voice movement containing a shared model (activation of drone bass by a parallel or synchronous movement or vice versa, replacement of the parallel or synchronous bass by the drone bass, and (b) alternation of different models according to the degree of the presence of these types of polyphony in voice movements (parallelism may grow into synchrony, or vice versa).

Medley-type alternation of heterogeneous forms also occurs.

It should be noted here that in Georgian songs medley-type compound constructions actually do not acquire the character of a typical regularity - largely owing to the diversity of combining and fragmentary manifestation of the principles.

I want to discuss ostinato polyphony. Like the drone, ostinato is a specific type of melodic development of a single voice. For ostinato it is alien to be based on the usual type of development based on the typical dramaturgic triad "beginning - development - the end". Ostinato is based on the principle known in psychology - the principle of periodical concentration of attention on "signal". In collective performance it may be expressed by all voices (total ostinato, when all voices sing different but coordinated melodic formulas), or by a single voice, usually bass, in which case it (similarly to the drone background, although ostinato is a melodically active element) is perceived as a leading compositional principle of polyphony, as it becomes the basis of a whole polyphonic texture.

I shall try to produce a criterion for the identification and classification of the varieties of ostinato that may shed light on the essential nature of this phenomenon. What is characteristic of ostinato? It is primarily periodicity and non-stop development. In the latter I imply redundant repetition or the lack of the means of completing the musical thought. I want to use a special criterion (I suggest to call it "finiteness"), to distinguish this property.

By the criterion of "finiteness" we shall, first of all, divide all polyphonic structures into structures of "finite" and "infinite" development. The notion of "finite" denotes the possibility of perceiving a completed musical thought as a dramaturgically completed unit. The concept of "self-sufficient development" may also be applied to such a phenomenon.

A voice or a structure is of incomplete development if it lacks an inner charge of dramaturgically conceptualized "finiteness", based on the triad "beginning - development - end". Completing an incomplete, or infinite voice is entirely in the competence of the partner voice (voices). I divide the group of incomplete development into two groups: those of "spreading development" and those of "spiral development". The latter is based on a periodic repetition of melodic model, so the ostinato form of polyphony is a graphic example of this type of development.

The notion of "spreading" (as opposed to "spiral") points to the development by an "unplanned" or "free improvisation" principle for which the use of clear melodic formulas or established phrases is not characteristic. In Georgian traditional polyphony this method fragmentarily occurs only in a pedal drone type of polyphony.

The specific voice *krimanchuli* is an interesting manifestation of ostinato principle. *Krimanchuli* is a technically very elaborate yodel in the top voice, which uses wide melodic jumps. *Krimanchuli* is a part of polyphonic singing in several regions of western Georgia, particularly in Guria and Achara. Owing to the frequent and extremely fast figurations, it is not perceived as spiral development (the feature that is characteristic of choral ostinato bass). Hence, *krimanchuli* is often perceived as a single integral spreading layer. In other words, *krimanchuli* develops spirally, but because of the frequency of such pulsation it is perceived as the background of the part that has the initiative of developing the musical thought due to

its large melodic range. That is why *krimanchuli* fails to impart the name of ostinato polyphony to the structure in which it participates. As the three-part texture with *krimanchuli* is very characteristic of Gurian traditional contrapuntal polyphony, and has very clear stylistic features, I suggest to call three-part contrapuntal polyphony with yodel (*krimanchuli*) a special term “counterpoint with *krimanchuli*”.

As to the “finite” or “self-sufficient development” group, it includes drone, synchronous, parallel and paralinear (contrapuntal) forms of polyphony. As we can see, the right of the criterion of dramaturgy is restricted at this stage.

Here is the diagram based on the “finite-infinite” criterion:

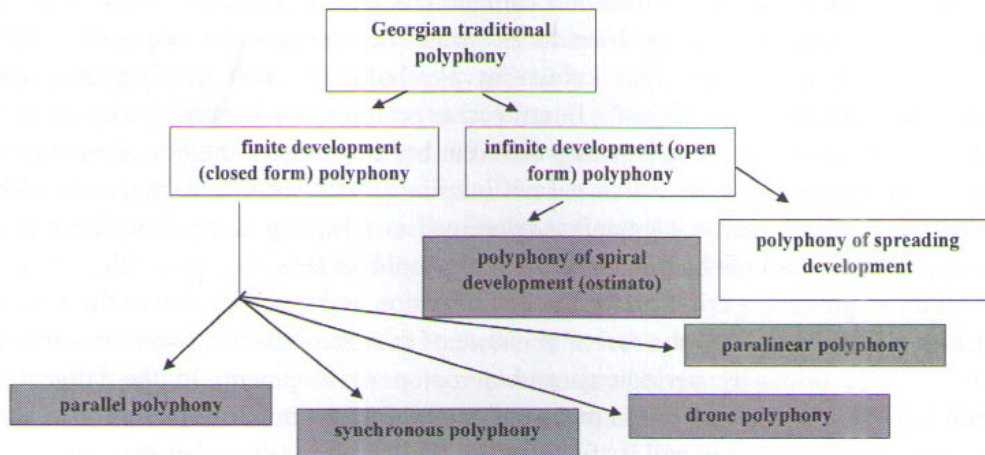


Diagram 3.

How tangible are the results of the “working” classification schemes in the differentiation of the types of Georgian vocal polyphony? The characteristic forms or contours of types of polyphony are now more clearly defined. We have the following types of polyphony identified in Georgian traditional songs:

- (a) drone (subtypes: two-part drone *example 1*, drone-complementary *example 2* and drone-parallel polyphony *example 3*),
- (b) synchronous (synchronous proper *example 4* and a parallel-constructive subtype *example 5*),
- (c) ostinato (with subtypes of total ostinato *example 6*, ostinato-refrain *example 7* and ostinato-continuum *example 8*),
- (d) parallel *example 9*
- (e) paralinear, or contrapuntal *example 10*
- (f) “counterpoint with *krimanchuli*” *example 11*
- (g) “*naduri* type” *example 12*.

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