

REGULARITIES OF BASS TUNING IN GEORGIAN TRADITIONAL MUSIC

In the Georgian ethno-musical space, bass is a form of peaceful mutual creation of more or less competent performers directed towards the common aim. That's why we can talk of bass as of the most conceptual element of the Georgian folk song. At the same time, bass of Georgian song-chants has a sort of ambivalent meaning: it seems to be the emanation and interface of leading voices and, at the same time, it is the basis onto which the creative "spring" of the upper voices is reflected.

Bass is the most important code of semiosis of the Georgian traditional music. It can be represented as a sign-icon (supporting and final tones in bass, as a sort of the metonym of a modal center), as a sign-index (the step or movement of bass denoting attraction) and as a sign-symbol (root, radix, basis, as a motivated and not-intentional sign).

From the semantic point of view, bass is a symbol of response call ("Shebaneba" = blending bass) or communication. Its etymology does also point to this: "bam," which signifies link, connection (in my opinion, the following etymological versions of "bani" or bass in Georgian should not be ruled out either: a. "bani" = flat surface; b. "bam," "ban" = the sound mimicking expression of the singing of low sounds with the method of sharp attack; c. name of an ancient musical instrument, "ebani" and its string, "bam"). Accordingly, bass in Georgia implies the general principle of polyphony, voice blending.

When discussing the bass of the Georgian song-chants, we distinguish its following functions: **performing regulative, structural** (expressed in graphic form), **and communicative**.

In terms of the performing regulations, bass can be group, ensemble (in case of the specific voice part, "gadadzakhili" _ far calling) and solo one. Group bass is mostly bourdon. Ensemble bass implies superior performing and creative competence and its part in most cases is more mobile.

What about solo bass, it also represents most frequently the leading voice of the developed triphony, mostly, in the format of three soloists of the Gurian song “Trios.”

As for the graphic relief, bass is one of the most evident criteria for the identification of the forms of polyphony. It can be bourdon, ostinato, parallel to upper voice/voices, it can have a free development, too; apart from these, the mentioned types of bass can be simple and figurative. It is remarkable that while sorting bourdon into various forms, to distinguish its simple and figurative forms is essentially relevant and not so, to distinguish its recitative and continual varieties.

What is, upon the first glance, the developed movement of bass, does reflect to the less extent the compositional principle of a melody, in compare with simpler, but more accurately expressed melodic phrases. It can be boldly asserted that Gurian bass causes the elaboration of a complex polyphonic structure mostly by the very method of figuration and not due to a free improvisational melodic development.

Bass and upper voices _ soloists almost entirely cover the paradigm of the Georgian polyphony, according to which, the structure of the Georgian multipart singing can be imagined as two main functional layers, out of which, in one layer there occur mostly the upper solo voices moving with third parallelism, and in the second layer there is implied the group bass. Bass and upper voices represent a sort of a conceptual biphony, or bi-layerism.

This model is less efficiently matched by the format of Gurian “Trio.” It has an equal three-voice structure, where it resembles to the chants (and apparently it takes its origin from chants, too). Yet, “Trio” just due to this fact, can be possibly even not be regarded as a typical variety of the folk music. This opinion is backed by the factor that trio performers were outstanding masters, so called “semi-professionals” (Garakanidze, 2007).

Communicative functions of the Georgian bass under the conditions of coordination with the other voices can be most comprehensively separated by the degree of *creative initiative* (Gabisonia, 2009). Bass in the Georgian song can have communicative functions of just accompaniment, background (having no initiative), partnership (with equal or wave-like sharing of initiative among other voices), and melodic (holding the initiative). Bourdon bass is believed to be a background bass, partnership bass in synchronic one (moving synchronically with upper voices),

and parallel and paralinear polyphonic bass moves its sounds freely. We consider ostinato and “gadadzakhili” (far calling) type basses as melodic ones.

The degree of independence of bass from upper voices is also revealed when it possesses original verbal text. In general, the more ancient the layer of the Georgian song is, the more independent and original are the verbal texts, articulation and composing principles of its separate voices.

The myth concerning the fact that “a Georgian does not blend voice with a Georgian in unison” is frequently basted with exactly Georgian group bass practice. What can be this phenomenon be a reflection of? Maybe it is a descendent of responsive archaics (Zhordania, 2004: 38)? _ a response to coryphe’s call, which was initially based again onto the repeat of the soloist’s phrase?

A clear example of such joint (or rather ensemble and not group type) melodic bass is the Gurian “gadadzakhili.” In songs with “gadadzakhili” there is accentuated a sort of “alternative dramaturgy” of bass: a standalone model of unison bass (Gabisonia, 2009: 40) is opposed to the bass sung by trio, which is paralinear and has an individual development ([example 1](#)). In this respect, it is interesting to discuss the alteration of roles by bass in the song “Tirini horeramashi” _ from the melodic phrase the bass is switched onto background bourdon (Garakanidze, 2007) ([example 2](#)). There occurs a sort of reception _ assimilation of other modes, which gives birth to a contaminative form (Gabisonia, 2009: 93).

The group unison melos (melisma) used in simple responsive songs, in Tushetian “Dala,” Ajarian “Tirni horerama,” Megrelian “Dzabrale” and in others ([example 3 a. b.](#)) has a function similar to “gadadzakhili.” Such melodic phrases represent a certain “Cantus firmus” in which there is sometimes reflected the finished musical idea and which assigns a high degree of polyphony to the multi-part texture. In general, “gadadzakhili,” as a separate voice part, must not be classified with the part of other bass in a song. Respectively, songs of Gurian trio and one-voice “gadadzakhili” must be perceived as four-voice (tetraphonic) songs and not three-voice ones.

Imeretian and Ajarian group melodized bass deserves a special attention in connection with “gadadzakhili.” It can be boldly asserted that Ajarian biphony, and developed solo of Gurian trio represent the stage directly preceding the bass and, in general, Georgian contrastive polyphony.

We shall cite several formulae according to which we can reach key steps in bass (we orient from the Gurian bass as the most improvisational one): a) gamma-like movement to the key-step (example 4); b) simple figurations: third alterations one second (secunda) upwards and downwards (example 5); c) complex figurations: second-third and third-second figuration in order to yield a third (both upwards and downward) (example 6 a. b.), also, figuration of triphony in order to yield a fourth (example 7), cross and sequence thirds downward (example 8 a. b.); d) sequence figurations, mainly, with thirds steps (example 9).

There must be also remarked that, in general, the figurative movement of the bass of Georgian songs, oriented towards the key steps, has mainly the cadence character. In the same trio, the movement of bass mainly represents a chain of cadences loaded with figurations from step to step. In each such phrase there can be identified the synthesis of two cadences predominantly: from the supporting step to the oppositional step, and then making a cadence from the latter to the new (or the former) supporting step (example 10 a. b.).

It is accepted that bass is the main conditioning factor of harmonious functionality of Georgian song-chants. The Georgian folk song is characterized by a relatively distinctly differentiated functionality in compare with the ecclesiastic chant, as the latter stands out by more extents of modality.

Ioseb Zhordania believes absolutely logically that one of the principles of the Georgian harmony is the family relationships of third type characteristic for the bass steps (Zhordania, 1989: 54, 58). I. Zhordania's another idea is also worth considering, that the third and fifth melodic orientation in the Georgian songs is matched with second and fourth harmonic coordination of voices (Zhordania, 1989: 152). This binary relationship of the dramaturgy of Georgian songs is, in principle, correctly contemplated by this author as early as 27 years ago.

Ioseb Zhordania also correctly certifies symmetrical relationships of the steps of bass under the conditions of tonic center (Zhordania, 1989: 69). Such a symmetry is characteristic not only for the steps, but also for melodic figures, and bass of certain Ajarian two-part songs serves as a good expression of the described regularity. In this respect, symmetrical movements of bass deserves some interest, too (example 11).

Yet, we consider that the early opinions of I. Zhordania demands certain corrections today. Namely, his ideas about the dominance of the upper 4th step, and tonic nature of the lower 4th step proceed from the idea of transposing tertia (third) principle unchanged onto the whole scale. Yet, in the Georgian traditional music, to a greater extent than in the European harmonious system, getting farther from the tonic sound in both directions is manifested by the gradual weakening of tertia (third) links. The same is true for the second (secunda) interval: the harmonious-functional opposition, in most cases, is connected with the second interval, and the fourth (quarta) interval can be perceived both as oppositional and as kin or relative (the fifth, quinta interval resembles in this respect to the fourth).

Therefore, the principle of tertia (third) family ties in the Georgian polyphony, especially in the West of Georgia type polyphony is matched with the octave, as well as with the principle of vertical blending of fourths and fifths, which implies making emphasis on the steps located within the key portions of time measure. These steps can be alternated with the third (tertia) sound (more frequently) as well as with the fourth and fifth sounds.

At the same time, we believe that today we can boldly speak of the hybrid harmonious structures born under the influence of the European music in the space of the Georgian traditional music. We imply here the dominant fourth ascending vector as well as the subdominant alternative tonicity (in chants there is often discernible a sort of the “subdominant tint”) (example 12).

Generally speaking, in terms of harmonic vertical, according to our opinion, D. Araqishvili’s thesis, where he believed that the trichord (quart-quint-chord, or fourth-fifth-chord, D. Arakishvili, 1916) was the basis for the Georgian harmony, needs some small revision. It can be boldly affirmed that the Georgian traditional set of chords is based on the “banal” triphony to the greatest extent. Also, we do not share the enthusiasm about often emphasized importance of non-third (non-tertia) cosoundings for the Georgian singing. Thus, it can be expressed so that the Georgian singing is not cardinally disjointed from the general “musical substance” and it will set its painting according to the “kaleidoscope” of its own “ethnic ear” (Zemtsovski’s terms - I. Zemtsovsky, 2004: 17).

In general, stability of bass as of the symbol and guarantee of the stability of Georgian folk song can be expressed with three vectors: 1) the harmonic skeleton of the song; 2) melodic phraseology; 3) unison performance.

In the Georgian ecclesiastic chants, bass has not such outstanding spectrum and diversity as in songs. Here it must be cited as its general peculiarity its clearer parallel orientation in respect with the upper, leading voice in compare with the orientation of the second voice in respect with the same leading voice. The bourdon bass in Georgian chants, as distinct from the songs (and as distinct from byzantine isokratimas), with traditional spectrum, is not certified as a matter of fact. This fact points to the loyalty of the Georgian chants to the parallel movement of voices, just like the Western European organum. At the same time, we must think that increase of the volume of melody and development of the paralinear movement of sounds in the Georgian singing must be indeed a result of the influence of chants.

In Georgian chants the differences in bass are most comprehensively expressed among the decorated samples of Svetitskhoveli and Gelati schools. Generally, the creative activity of bass is limited to figurations to a greater extent in chants rather than in songs. In the samples of the East of Georgia this figuration rarely exceeds two sounds (**example 13**). In the West of Georgia, figurations containing 4-5 sounds are common (**example 14**).

It is interesting that in Georgian chants, just like songs, there is evidently shaped the fifth-octave (quinta-octave) altering parallelism with the upper voice of bass (**example 15**). This testifies one more time the suggestion that songs presumable borrowed the principle of parallel voice movement from chants. Generally speaking, it can be boldly affirmed that, in respect of harmonic orientation and melodic behavior, bass of the Georgian song and chant is a more uniform stylish movement than the upper voices of these two massive groups of the Georgian traditional music.

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