

Static Sounding and Georgian Traditional Polyphony

Static and Dynamic Sounding

In an early work we mentioned “static sounding” “in which melodic phrase is not summed up in contrast to chordal, synchronic”. Now we try to analyze this phenomenon of traditional music in more detail, though not only within the limits of polyphony but as a general musical compositional principle.

It is interesting to discuss such static sounding through the prism of the category of chronotype. Different modes of the concept of chronotype such as time-space essential interconnection, projection of “musical graphic” in different time dimensions perhaps is more vivid in traditional music than in European professional, even in program music. We can say that chronotype of traditional music, especially of religious character is expressed through distinct individualism of time and space creative initiatives, especially in polyphonic action.

In general, musical substance can be placed in space according to two motivations of being, two vectors of sounding: sounding for sounding and sounding for development. Though these two vectors dialectically pierce each other as well. Such ambivalence can be compared to corpuscular and wave nature of atom. Music is spread in time but either discretely when musical thought does not spread in time or continuously when it is possible to imagine it simultaneously as well. Here we face two oppositions: dynamic and static music.

These two constituents of musical sounding can be compared to relation of *geschaltdt* and the background. But static sounding, in its absolute revealing does not disperse but uses other modes of arts or everyday life (fine arts, plastic, non-artistic everyday life) as the background and presents itself as a figure. An example of this can be non-melodic musical installation in the space of landscape of everyday life sounding (bells, noise of factories, sign signals, etc.).

For example, constant which by its function can be opposed to static sounding is important in the soundscape. It can be silence or some monotonous sounding (sound of a fountain in the garden, cars riding, noise of factories, etc.). This component is a kind of support for an observer due to which he/she perceives environment as a kaleidoscope picture of fragments and not as a continual phenomenon of cause-effect unity.

(It should be noted that frequently one of the best ways of emotional and intellectual relaxation for man is fixing his/her attention on the object which is devoid of any idea developed in time).

But static sounding, on its part is a kind of dichotomy. It is a kind of “standing” as well as “tramping”. In Georgian traditional music we can compare compositional principles of two relations to it – on the one hand, bourdon and delayed accords, and on the other hand – ostinato and figuration. These groups can be expressed through the following names as well – **delayed sounding and drawn out sounding**.

By the way a Georgian philosopher of 11-12 centuries Ioane Petritsi perfectly expresses such delayed status of music through the term “erTobai Seyovlebisa” (“unity of delay”) which is parallel to the narrow understanding of the concept of harmony (vertical sound combination) and at the same time is presented schematically without a reference point of expanding in time.

Of course, from the aspect of share of static sounding, modal and major-minor paradigms like religious and profane music in general, distinctly differ from each other. And the main determinant here is mainly horizontal attraction of sounds (in major-minor) and lack of any attraction (in modality).

But dynamics of functional harmony is revealed not only in sound attraction but in creating and relaxing of tension which is given in solving of dissonance in consonance. It is solving a problem. Such contrast gradation, of course, is strange for static sounding.

I think it will not be a serious mistake if we say that the vector of development of professional music moved like a wave from static to dynamic sounding (Middle Ages, Renaissance – static; Barroco, classic, Romanticism – dynamic, majority of the 20th century developments – static, etc.). It demonstrates that melody is not the only “soul” of music, melody is a kind of extravert revealing of music, and delayed sounding is introvert, while both are two sides of a medal.

Statics and Temporality

Every component of sounding which is fixed by our cognition has its independent temporality – temporal essence and contour. And totality of such elements can have a one-dimensional as well as multi-dimensional projection.

For example, a good case of ambivalence of temporality of music is that style of gamelan which considers putting into practice similar melodic phrases in different voices and different temporal dimensions. Different temporal coordinations are also summed up in bourdon polyphony, responsorium, polyplastic music (in two or more musical actions sounding simultaneously).

Static Sounding and Mode

Mode as an original system of behaving of sounds is, in main, determined by a linear reference point and where melodic links are weakened and consequence of more or less autonomous harmonic co-sounding is pushed to foreground, characteristics of mode do not have a serious impact on sonority (phonism) or dramaturgy of delayed soundings.

Mode factor in the case of static sounding is revealed comparatively variously in the environment of mixodiatonics. In this case we receive a kind of effect of the “new world” which was one of the leading factors in dodecaphonic serial music.

Static Sounding and Genres

As we noted earlier drawn out sounding frequently is a sign of religious point of view. Therefore, in traditional music we understand static sounding as entourage of religious and magic activities. And still, in what genres do we more frequently notice this phenomenon? In such phenomena where logic of melodious development is of secondary importance. And it, in main, means function of accompaniment. Such type of agency can be revealed in the following directions: signal, prayer, lament, accompaniment of a kinetic action or mental activity and is expressed in soft murmuring-singing of small repeating phrases.

Regarding functional meanings of the mentioned genres which contain static sounding, they can be determined by the following motivations: background, strengthening, confirming, accumulation of energy, teasing of the listener, grotesque and enjoyment. Let's, discuss every point of this list:

Background was discussed above.

As an example of strengthening-confirmation we can name coda or continuation of ending sound. Here we recall traditional continuation of finishing unison of Slav songs – after always “tramping” melody which often is a kind of alternative of the previous part. It often happens so that the shorter is the refrain the longer is unison.

As examples of energy accumulation, we can name collective war calls, as well as second soundings in traditional music.

Instances of teasing listeners or revealing grotesque in traditional music are unknown for us though we suppose that such motivation cannot be strange for a tradition when directed to the outside world subjects or even animals. Many will agree with me that we had experienced such motivation in our childhood.

Of course, the most natural motivation here is an aesthetic factor. Comparative delay of the selected delayed co-soundings to other ongoing accords often stresses the effect of pleasure or attaching special artistic importance.

Kinds of Static Sounding

Static sounding is reflected in the following modalities of traditional music:

Delayed sounding: a) bourdon; b) concord; c) comparative delay.

Drawn out sounding: a) ostinato; b) recitation; c) non-developing (simultaneously unconsidered) improvisation.

Static Sounding and Bourdon

In polyphonic tradition music, usually in bass, as we have noted earlier, bourdon is a kind of support offered to the upper voice. It is acknowledged that in polyphony containing bourdon, leading upper voice is melodic. In general, melody – movement in separate voice – is a pre-condition of getting functional initiative. Here bourdon quite often is as if only a background. But if we pay attention to some bourdon traditions (Raga, Homey, Vargan, Shopaen polyphony, Georgian “Mestviruli”), we will notice that eidos of musicking here is a tonical sound expressed by means of bourdon. Even more: it can be said that bourdon the changeability of which depends on upper voices, is only a kind of “harmonious” bourdon, a background and not a self-sufficient, autonomous bourdon.

Regarding the melody accompanying such bourdon which has a functional initiative, it is always static. This last one aims not at melodic development, but at enriching tonical sounding with melodic figurations.

Such bourdon – the most perfect expression of delayed sounding – always creates tonicality – the effect of support. When we speak about stressing tonical sounding, our attention is drawn to binary principle of development of musical thinking, which in folk music is based on agonal alteration of two opposite stages separated tercialy (major-minor alternative), secondly or quarterly (tonical alternative). And this creative vector is developed mainly on the basis of bourdon. Regular character of such alteration also creates a kind of delayed sounding of the highest rank.

Concord and Statics

It can be said that we failed to fit vertical co-sounding to the concepts “accord” or “concord” since in it there are signs of functional indifference (concord) as well as the vector of vertical

understanding of sound combination (accord). But in order to distance from tonal terminology we chose the concept “concordian” for Svanetian harmonious system.

We have mentioned Svaneti because in the Georgian space the samples of this region are the main treasure of delayed sounding. In particular, in the structure of Svan lament hymn “Zari” our attention is drawn to the peculiarity which is not met in any other region of Georgia. This peculiarity is a clearly revealed discreteness of musical thought in it. In fact it is gathering of concords, cumulation and not logical consistence. The exception is presented by some solutions in three-voce cases.

Delayed sounding is presented in an exceptionally complete form in Taiwan song “Pasybutbut” – a harvest song. As it is known the song is a total bourdon. This tradition is a kind of maximum of static sounding. But it is just here that the characteristic feature of folk tradition is revealed which shows that it is impossible to have only one compositional principle realized in such music. At least two such creative methods are necessary. And in Pasibutbut drawn out sounding is complemented by the principle of adding new stages and moving to the culmination via gradual raising of voice. Dynamic development in this case can belong to a later period, but at present it is so.

One of the distinct expressions of binary creative method is a delayed second in folk musical tradition which we have discussed in other works.

Proportional Delay

By this concept we mean revealing of statics in different proportion in various parts in the conditions of polyphony. The example of such proportion is a method of melodic delay (mainly at lower 6) of bass in Georgian chants which earlier could have a certain rhetoric semantics as well.

Ostinato and Static Sounding

It is possible, in folk music, to call ostinato a figurative bourdon. Traditionally this term denotes recitative, discrete bourdon, but essentially ostinato is of the similar idea. Insistent repetition of a short phrase of musical thought is one of the types of static. But it is a creative vector of establishing and strengthening. We can name mantra, some types of Kazakh manas -Zikris as examples of ostinato of drawn out sounding.

Recitation and Drawn out Sounding

One of the kinds of regular static sounding or “static movement” is recitation of partially speech intonation which is mainly expressed in religious practices: different types of psalmodia that is instrumental sounding (with dungchen) in Tibetan praying practice echoes drawn sounding (Buddist psalmodia). The same creative principle is the bases of “folk aleatorica” (if we can say so), this “folk rap” which is often developed against the background of ostinato instrumental “reef”. Laos “Mor Loom” is a distinct example of such musicking. One of the characteristic features of such recitation is amorphic meter of this musical speech.

In contrast to recitation melody intonation is distinctly expressed in dramaturgically undeveloped improvisation. Here we have a melody which aims not at developing musical thought, but at adorning temporal space with musical ornaments, like singing of a nightingale. Such creative tendency can be seen in some ragas, exposition of makam, Sufist ritual of kavali. In Georgian tradition we can name a kind of lament soft singing “Korkali” and some “Nanas”. In general, it must be said, that cradle and labor songs in Georgia exploit both kinds of static sounding – ostinative and improvisational which we have spoken about just now (Orovela, Urmuli).

In conclusion we can say that static sounding in musical tradition is revealed in two main modes: delayed sounding and regular figuration. It can be said that delayed sounding is a kind of eidos of static, which annihilates feeling of temporality. On the other hand, drawn out sounding is an unchangeability given in time and thus one of the bases of folklore and religious musical action.

Thus we think it necessary to pay more attention to static sounding in traditional music as a creative principle when naming those genres and compositional forms where this type of musical thinking is fixed as a distinct factor.