

On Georgian Contemporary Popular Music

According to Soviet epoch tradition Georgian pop music was referred to as ‘light music’ or ‘variety music’. It became popular in late 1940s alongside classical and folk music –main directions of radio music programs. “Iron curtain” prevented Georgian people from familiarizing with different music directions and worldwide popular examples. Examples of jazz and South American pop music were heard from time to time on radio and LPs. But for a long time ‘Western Stile’ was interpreted as ‘Non-Soviet’ and unsuitable for working masses; due to this, the style was opposed in Soviet reality.

From the 1940s until the first decade of the 21st century pop music directions developed in American and West European scenario, but with a sort of belated reaction.

Awhile the examples surviving ‘Iron Curtain’ were received with enthusiasm in Soviet Georgia, but new musical ideas in both professional and pop music were persecuted in response to the warning signals of the Soviet Government. In the 1960s-1970s after ‘Iron Curtain’ was ended in Georgia the music of non-Georgian origin was disseminated easier, but the soviet censorship did not disappear. Georgian people similar to other Soviet peoples knew the performers with either Communist inclination or those stylistically far from ‘bourgeois degraded art’. Records of popular Western performers were brought mainly by sportsmen, actors, musicians and were fairly expensive at black market. Sometimes the recordings of “The Beatles” and “The Rolling Stones” were made on the used X-ray photographs.

According to popularity to this day Georgian ‘light music’ can be listed as follows: Georgian urban music, film (partly theatre) music, pop, jazz rock.

Main layer of Georgian song is Georgian urban music, originated from urban folklore, which lesser uses foreign intonations.

Most renowned authors of Georgian pop song are: **Revaz Laghidze** (1921-1981), interred at the Mtatsminda Pantheon of Writers and Public Figures in Tbilisi; **Giorgi (Gogi) Tsabadze** (1924-1986) author of the most popular Georgian musical film “Melodies of Vera Quarter” (1973).

In the 1940s-1950s popular were vocal ensembles whose repertoire was saturated with Georgian folk motives, mostly with guitar accompaniment, their melos was mainly nourished by the traditions of Georgian urban romance; from this standpoint particularly noteworthy are the Ishkhneli Sisters.

Sandro Mirianashvili (1914-1984) is one of the founders of Georgian pop music; he is the author of about one thousand songs and romances; He was the first who attempted to

combine folk instruments with piano. Vocal duet of **Eter Gvazava** and **Tsitsino Tsitskishvili** became popular thanks to Mirinashvili's songs in the 1950s.

Also popular were the duets of **Shalva Chkhikvadze** and **Valerain Dzagnidze** in the 1960s; sisters **Natela** and **Nazi Chapichadzes**; the trios of **Marekh Godziashvili**, **Kote Makaridze** and **Eduard Sepashvili**; **Eduard Sepashvili**, **Julieta Muradeli** and **Guram Balarjishvili**.

From the 1950s distinguished was the quartet **Guram Bzvaneli**, **Shota Kharabadze**, **Tamaz Tsintsadze** and **Guram Bakuradze**, who sang together with the Jazz-orchestra of Georgian Polytechnic Institute- the collective instilled Glenn Miller orchestra style. In 1972 the students of the same Institute **Tamaz Seperteladze**, **Malkhaz Tavartkiladze** and **Davit Abesadze** created a vocal trio with guitar accompaniment “**Tsisperi Trio**” (“**Blue Trio**”) which until today boasts great popularity; the trio successfully toured with concerts in many countries of the world.

Also popular in the 1970s was a family duet of **Maqvala** and **Archil Chikhladzes** with guitar accompaniment; majority of their songs were written by **Otar Tevdoradze**.

Today Georgian urban music is basically popular among middle-aged listeners.

Author’s Song

Inola Gurgulia (1929-1977) initially directed trio “Samaia”, later she became very popular; she never released any record in the lifetime. The singer and her songs are documented in many feature films, little before passing she recorded several songs which were released as a disc after her death. **Inola Gurgulia** enriched the tradition of urban romance with the motives of swing.

Manana Menabde (b.1948) was born in the family of Ishkhneli sisters; she writes songs in her original style – a kind of avant-garde reincarnation of Georgian melodic-rhythmic peculiarities. Menabde lived in Berlin from 1991 and in Moscow since 2005. She cooperated with Nika Machaidze and Gogi Dzodzuashvili, also with the Berlin based Georgian group “Shin”

Jansugh Kakhidze (1935-2002) in the first place attracts attention as one of the most renowned Soviet orchestra conductors; at the same time he is the author of about 100 soundtracks for over 40 films, which he himself performed masterly and which were greatly loved by the Georgians.

Otar Ramishvili (1934-2011) widely recognized “Colorful person of Tbilisi”, a typical representative of author’s song; his songs performed with guitar accompaniment were distinguished in simple and refined melos easily understandable for everyone; informal, intimate style and energetic performance manner.

“Old Tbilisi Music”

The performers distinguished in Near Eastern musical language were very popular among the multinational population of Tbilisi – lovers of Oriental tunes; this direction was also attractive for the population of some east Georgian provinces as well. Most popular from this viewpoint was **Khachik Talgaukov**’s ensemble of *duduki* players with **Ana Vardiashvili** as soloist. Today this tradition is continued by ensemble “**Soinari**” founded by **Misha Ksovreli** and currently directed by **Eldar Shoshitashvili**. Today Oriental motives are also popularized by pop-singer **Nino Chkheidze**.

Philharmony

Foundation of “**Georgian State Philharmony**” in 1937 greatly contributed to the development of Georgian variety music, which on its part continued the traditions of “Georgian Philharmonic Society” created in 1905 and the “People’s House” created by the renowned maecenases the Zubalashvili brothers in 1908, however it paid particular attention to variety music. It should be noted that Philharmony was a kind of censor. The activity of Philharmony was especially activated in the 1960s-1970s, when this society was headed by **Apolon (Guguli) Qipiani**. At this time Georgian variety artists successfully performed in Soviet republics and East European Socialist countries.

Special mention should be made of **Evgeni Machavariani**’s – Artistic Director of the Philharmony, who alongside his activity as director greatly contributed to the propaganda of Western pop, rock and jazz music in his TV programs “**Variety Music and Contemporaneity**” and “**This is Variety Music**”. Machavariani was the initiator and founder of the famous all over the Soviet Union “Tbilisi Jazz Festival” first held in 1978.

In the early 2000s one of the most advanced activities of the Philharmony was the popular show “**Yumorina**”, introducing music with humor, the show was created by **Jemal** and **Gia Baghashvili**.

First official Rock-Festival “Spring Rhythms” was held at Tbilisi State Philharmony in March 1980, where Georgian ensemble “**Labyrinth**” was awarded second place.

Also noteworthy is one of the most popular TV programs of the 1970s-1980s “We are looking for talents”. TV- contests such as “**Geostar**”, “**New Voice**”, and “**X-factor**” gained popularity in the 2000s.

Jazz

Noteworthy is the activity of **Jano Bagrationi** – director of one of the first jazz-orchestras (1945-1950) and Philharmony variety music orchestra (1953-1956). In Georgia Jazz became particularly popular thanks to the **Jazz-Orchestra of Tbilisi Polytechnic Institute** directed by **Ioseb Tughushi**. Singer **Jilda Ddatuashvili** became popular popularity together with the orchestra.

All-Union popular variety music orchestra “**Rero**” (1956) directed first by **Giorgi Gabiskiria** and later on by **Konstantin Pevzner** also instilled popular version of jazz. One of the first soloists of the orchestra was **Suliko Koroshinadze** (1932-2012).

Alongside pop songs **Giuli Chokheli** (b. 1935) successfully performed together with different Western jazz-orchestras. She was the first from Georgia to be a success at International festivals (First place in Sopot/ 1967; Moscow and Tallin).

Contrabassist and bass guitarist **Tamaz Qurashvili** () is the only jazz performer whose star was opened at the entrance of Tbilisi Philharmonic Hall. At certain time he lived and worked in the USA; is the participant and winner of many jazz-festivals; in the beginning of his career he was a member of a trio together with Sergei Gurbeloshvili and Azerbaijaniyan Vagif Mustafazadeh.

Beka Gochiashvili (b.1996) has been playing jazz compositions since he was 9; currently at the age of 13 he is a student at Julliard School. In the jazz world he is referred to as a wunderkind; he is already winner of many music festivals.

Tbilisi Big Band (1997) – directed by **Givi Gachechiladze** won the title of the best big band at the 2006 Monte-Carlo Music Festival. Laureates of various international Festivals **Dini Virsaladze** and **Maia Baratashvili** successfully cooperate with the orchestra.

Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles (VIA)

Vocal-Instrumental Ensembles (named VIA) are particularly popular in Georgia since the 1960s.

Robert Bardzimashvili (1934-2003) directed ensembles “**Orera**” and “**75**” (he is the author of first Georgian rock-opera “Romeo and Juliet”). Proceeding from the number of concert tours in and outside the USSR, it can be said that “**Orera**” was the most successful Georgian pop ensemble in the Soviet Union. “**Orera**” was one of the first collectives to sing

English-language songs. The Soviet censorship could say nothing as the group was founded at the Institute of Foreign languages and such performance was considered as practice. In 1970 Musical TV film “Orera Full Speed Ahead!” was shot depicting the ensemble’s concert tour in Australia. “Orera” toured with concerts in about 80 countries of the world.

At the turn of the 1970s-1980s Vocal-instrumental ensemble “75” became especially popular among the youth. It also became popular in the USSR and East European countries. “75” performed **Ioseb Bardansahsvili**’s rock-opera “Alternativa” in 1977.

Together with “Orera” another group “Iveria” directed by **Alexandre Basilaia** (1942-2009) was considered as one of the most popular vocal-instrumental ensembles until late 1990s. **Basilaia** is the author of musical shows “Jay Wedding” (1979), “The Argonauts” (1982), “Pirosmani” (1995), in which humour occupies significant place and the elements of rock and pop are merged. The distinguished soloist of the collective is **Teimuraz Tsiklauri**.

Ensemble “**Dielo**” directed by Amiran Ebralidze maintained popularity in Georgia until the beginning of the 21st century. Its style was blend of Georgian motives and elements of jazz and rock. Amiran’s partner in the group was his brother **Soso Ebralidze**, who also directed ensemble “**Tsitsinatela**”. Later on the members of “Dielo” and “Tsitsinatela” actively worked with “Orera” and “Iveria”.

In the 1990s another popular ensemble was “**Sakhe**” who sang in the style of soul. One of the ensemble’s soloists **Dato Khujadze** currently lives and works in Moscow.

In 1971 first children’s vocal-instrumental ensemble in the Soviet Union “**Mziuri**” was created, the collective soon became popular in and outside the USSR. Former members of the group were famous singers in Georgia and elsewhere Tamar Gverdtsiteli, Tamar Chkhonelidze, Maia Jabua. Also noted should be the contribution of **Meri Davitashvili** and **Inola Gurgulia** in the creation of children’s songs.

Popular Style Singers

Meri Shildeli (1915-1982) was a renowned performer of Georgian songs and romances; in her creative work especially noteworthy is the period of WWII (1941-1945), when she actively sang for Soviet military units and at hospitals.

Nani Bregvadze (b.1938) is recognized in Georgia as “Century’s Singer”, former soloist of “Orera”, she was very popular in the Soviet Union as unique performer of Georgian songs and Russian and Gypsy romances.

Vakhtang (Buba) Kikabidze (b.1938) another former soloist of “Orera”. Mostly performs individually at concerts. Slightly raucous voice of low register determined his popularity. He is very popular in the countries of former Soviet Union as both singer and actor. His star was opened at the “Star Square” in Moscow in 1999.

Merab Sepashvili recognized as the best Georgian pop singer of the 20th century started his career in the popular ensemble “Teatroni” (1983).

Giorgi (Gogi) Dolidze (1954-1996) famous Georgian folk and pop song performer was nominated the best 20th century Georgian male singer in 1999.

In the 1960s-1970s little girl named **Irma Sokhadze** was very popular all over the Soviet Union; she performed together with orchestra “Rero”; at the turn of the 20th -21st centuries Irma Sokhadze led several TV programs on Georgian State Television.

Nino Katamadze (b. 1972) director of the group “**Insight**”. In 2000 she was conferred the title “Best Georgian Singer” several times. Her singing style unites jazz and rock; Improvisation occupies significant place in her performance.

Katie Melua (b. 1984) Georgian-born British composer and singer, sings in the mixed style of blues, ballad and folk in English and Georgian languages. Her songs have many-fold been hits in Great Britain.

Among the popular singers in today’s Georgia are **Nugzar Tsiklauri, Eka Kvaliashvili, Lela Tsurtssumia**; Georgian pop singers **Soso Pavliashvili, Dato Khujadze, Keta Topuria** and others live and work in Russia.

Rock

Ensemble “**Bermukha**” directed by **Bachi Kitiashvili** was the pioneer of rhythm-and-blues and hard rock in Georgia. The group was very popular, but until the 1980s had to overcome serious obstacles created by the officials.

Irakli Charkviani (1961-2006) started musical career in 1976; later he was a member of the group “**Taxi**”. His first solo disc was released in 1993; his songs are an original blend of rock and pop music. It can be said that Charkviani was the most popular singer among the Georgian youth in the 2000s.

Lado Burduli (1964-) a renowned Georgian rock musician, whose TV program “*Okros Bibilo*” (“Golden Crest”) significantly contributed to the popularization of rock in Georgia.

Ensemble “*Okeane*” (“Ocean”) directed by **Kako Vashalomidze** and with **Vakhtang Makalatia** as a soloist was a leading rock music collective in the late 1980s. Vashalomidze is still considered as the best Georgian rock-guitarist.

Robi Kukhianidze (1965) leader of the punk-rock group “**Autsaideri**” (1989). In the 2000s the group was very popular among the youth for the style characteristic of alternative music.

Soft-Eject (1989) English-language Georgian rock group, which performs the compositions in art-rock style frequently with the use of Georgian folk motives.

It should be noted also about the next rock Bands: “**Vakis Parki**”, “**Bakur Burduli**”, “**Natvris Khe**”, “**Flash**”.

Instrumentalists

Temur Qvitelashvili (1960) is the most renowned Georgian guitarist. At the International Contest of guitarists in Hollywood in 1994 he was nominated “The best Guitarist of the Year” in fusion. Qvitelashvili himself creates compositions as the synthesis of rock, jazz and Georgian motives.

Rap

Alexandre Kavtaradze (1981-) aka **Leks-seni**, the most famous Georgian rap singer, actively participated in Governmental events.

Ethno-Jazz

Ethno-jazz group “**Detsishi**” (1994) was created in Lezhavas family of traditional singers. The group lesser applies folk quotes and is more oriented to the free interpretation of folk motives.

Group “**Shin**” directed by **Zaza Miminoshvili** is the most successful Georgian folk-jazz project. The group frequently applies folk quotes, often performs together with a Georgian dancer, and actively cooperates with other singers and collectives.

Ethno-jazz is presented by the group “**Stumrebi**” (2013).

“**Zumbaland**” (1994) directed by **Zaza Korinteli** also successfully merges folk and contemporary music.

Electronic Music

Leader of Georgian electronic music is **Nika Machaidze** (b.1972). Among the authors of alternative music noteworthy is **Gogi Dzodzuashvili** (b.1971).

Tamaz Gabisonia

2014. Georgian Voices from the German Prison Camps// Echoes from the Past: Georgian prisoners' songs Recorded on Wax Cylinders in Germany 1916-1918. Editors Rusudan Tsurtsimia, Susanne Ziegler. Tbilisi, Publishing House Cezanne.

Tsurtsimia, Rusudan 2005. "20th Century Georgian Music. The Individuality and Value Orientation". Summary in English of the book 20th Century Georgian Music. p.286-327