

Georgian Traditional Music

Georgia (*Sakartvelo* in Georgian) located on the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountain Range – a small country at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. Thanks to its peculiar geographical, historical and social-economic conditions here (particularly in mountain regions) oldest layers of the daily round and creative thinking survived for a long time. Music occupied significant place in Georgian culture; traditional music is still a powerful expression of national consciousness.

Georgia is a classical country with the oral tradition of polyphony. The country surrounded by monophonic cultures (bordering with Azerbaijan to the east, Armenia and Turkey to the south) created, developed and maintained various forms of multi-part singing. In May, 2001 UNESCO proclaimed Georgian polyphonic singing a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible heritage of Humanity. However, this unique phenomenon has always been the topic of particular attention. Georgian music has roots in remote past. Noteworthy is the wind instrument made of swan (shin) bone from ancient burials of Samtavro in Mtskheta supposedly dating back to the 15th-13th centuries B.C (**Figure 01**).



1 Shamuri from Mtskheta

in the Silver Bowl from Trialeti (II millennium B.C.) – one of the most significant archaeological monuments for the Georgians (**Figure 02**).



Silver Bowl from Trialeti

Ancient Greek historian Xenophon (4th century B.C.) writes about warriors' and round-dance songs of the Kartvelian tribes.

Figure 1

The function, content and musical structure of many examples surviving to this day clearly date back to pre-Christian times. Noteworthy material on singing traditions and musical instruments is preserved in oral sources, Georgian translations of the "Genesis", hagiographical and old Georgian written monuments. The written source testifying to Georgian polyphony is "Commentary on the philosophy of Proklus Diadochus and Plato" by Ioane Petritsi – the 11th-12th century Georgian philosopher, Neo-Platonist, in which with when defining the unity of the Holy Trinity the author draws parallel with the constituent voices of Georgian three-part singing (*mzakhr*, *zhir* and *bam*). Different names of voice parts indicate to the ancient origin and long historical development of this tradition.

Also enchanted by Georgian traditional music were Italian missionaries – Don Christoforo De Castelli and Archangelo Lamberti (17th c.), French traveler Francois de Gamba (1st part of the 19th century), Gurian contrast polyphony, four-part *naduri* (work) songs were the topic of admiration for writers – Alexandre Dumas and Romain Rolland, World renowned musicians Igor Stravinsky, Boris Assafiev, Alan Lomax and others, brilliant example of Kakhetian drone polyphony "*Chakrulo*" was launched into space in 1977 on board of the spaceship 'Voyager 1' by the United States NASA program together with other achievements of mankind.

Another unique phenomenon is Georgian church chant – a monument of old professional music. After the introduction of Christianity (preached in west Georgia by the Christ's disciples in the 1st century, and adopted as the official religion of the country as a result of the sermons of St. Nino from Cappadocia). It passed hard and interesting path. The Georgians put the single-part chant introduced from Byzantium within their own system of musical-thinking and preserved it as polyphonic (three-part) examples from various schools of chant. Despite the fact that "*Iadgari*" – the hymnographic collection ornamented with neums by Mikael Modrekili dates back to the 10th century (**Figure 03**),



1 Mikael Modrekili's nevmaz ue music script had been applied since much earlier time, which was preceded by long oral chant practice. With Georgia's unification with Russia and abolition of the autocephaly of Georgian church service in churches (19th century) was interdicted. Georgian Orthodox chant became part of family tradition and survived in oral way thanks to the efforts of separate family dynasties (the Karbelashvilis, Dumbadzes, Erkomashvilis).

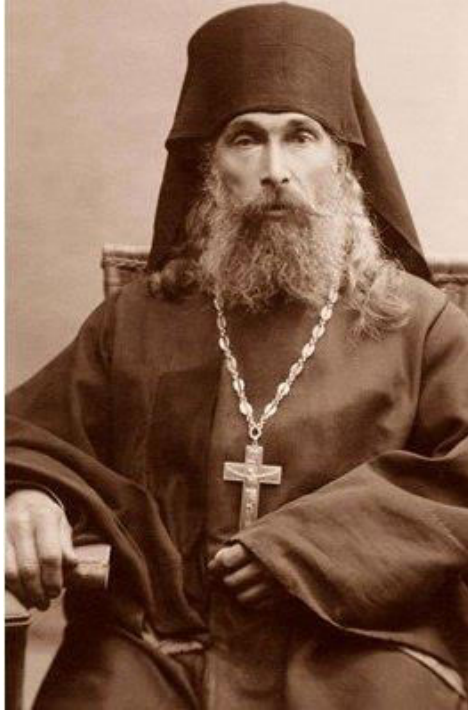
Georgian chant is strictly three-part, which is regarded as the symbol of the Holy Trinity. There are two basic styles of Georgian chant; simple mode, with plain scale and ornamented mode, when a chanter diversifies the tune to add more solemn colouring to the piece. The styles of three basic schools of chant have survived to this day: Svetitskhoveli (aka *Karbelaant kilo*, the Karbelashvilis' mode), Gelati and Shemokmedi, related to the renowned monasteries in Georgia. Georgian chants were notated at the turn of the 19th -20th centuries. The Svetitskhoveli mode has survived thanks to the renowned chanters of the Karbelahsvili family: Vasili (later Bishop Stepane), Polievktos, Pilimon and others (**Figure 04**);



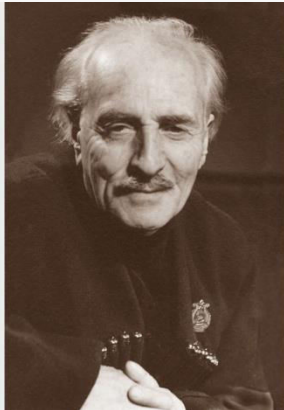
Karbelashvili Brothers
 referred to as Kartli-Kakhetian. In ornamented variant top and bottom voices basically move monotonously, parallel to each other, whilst the middle voice is mobile. The chants of Gelati School, i.e. Imeretian-Gurian style chants were documented by the renowned chanters Anton Dumbadze, Ivliane Nikoladze, Razhden Khundadze, Dimitri Chalaganidze, Aristovle Kutateladze were notated by Pilimon Koridze (**Figure 05**)



Famous Georgian opera singer, a soloist at Teatro alla Scala. Ekvtime Kereselidze (**Figure 06**)
 Pilimon Koridze



Ekvtime Kereselidze preservation of the recorded material. Large number of chants were also recorded by Razhden Khundadze. Chants of Shemokmedi School are connected with the names of Anton Dumbadze, Melkisedek Nakashidze, Nestor Kontridze, Varlam Simonishvili, Dimitri Patarava and Artem Erkomaishvili (**Figure 07**).



Artem Erkomaishvili yle chants were documented by the latter on magnetic tape in 1965.

Due to social-political upheavals, religious changes, technical progress certain genres were lost, shifted-replaced, but despite this the songs of lullaby, healing, hunting, work, wedding, lament, weather change, cult-ritual, glorifying, feast, lyrical and other genres have survived to this day. In Georgian folk music male and female repertoire are time-regulated, which is determined by their diverse activity in the socium. This does not exclude joint music-making/playing in family life, at village gatherings, in work process, at the wedding and mourning. Georgian female music was lesser popular until recently. No less interesting is children's folklore, but, sadly, it is lesser

documented and studied, as the scholars' attention was always directed towards most complex and highly developed forms of music.

Alongside genre diversity and co-existence of different epoch cultural layers, Georgian folk music attracts the attention of specialist and amateurs for the multitude of dialects (about 20 including historical provinces of Georgia). **Khevsureti** is distinguished among East Georgian mountain regions in single- and two-part simple songs with descending melody, characteristic songs are: "*Perkhisuli*", "*Mtibluri*" (**Figure 08**).



The Khevsurian with Panduri

havi more common is drone two-part singing and performance with melismata; characteristic songs are: "*Pshauri*", "*Kapia*", "*Jvari tsinasa*", "*Samaia*", "*Gvrini*". **Tushetian** song has more developed melody, encountered here are descending sequentias, melismata, vibrato (especially in cadence). Particularly distinguished are Tushetian women's songs; this is the only part of the country where there are no fewer women's songs than man's. Characteristic examples are: "*Metskhvaris simghera*", "*Meitis simghera*", "*Dala*", "*Korbeghela*", "*Deda mogikvdesa*". More developed, synchronic (chord) three-part singing is common in the provinces of **Khevi** and **Mtiuleti**. Similar to most mountain region songs these are characterized in loud, strained articulation, slow movement. Characteristic examples are: "*Dideba*", "*Smuri*", "*Gergetula*", "*Lomisis jvrisa*", "*Namgluri*".

Two East Georgian lowland provinces **Kartli** and **Kakheti** have mostly common repertoire. But Kakheti is distinguished in long table songs, representing particular phenomenon with modulation and structural complexity. Free, melismatic development of two upper voices on the background of bass drone it is typical for Kartlian songs: "*Lazare*", "*Chona*", "*Metivuri*", for Kakhetian songs: "*Chakrulo*", "*Grdzeli kakhuri mravalzhamieri*", "*Shemodzakhili*", "*Turpani skhedan*", "*Tamar kalo*", "*Alilo*".

The tradition of three-part singing is fragmentarily preserved in south Georgian province of **Meskheti**. Interesting are two-part songs "*Okromchedelo*", "*Gegutisa mindorzeda*", "*Mravalzhamier*", "*Mukha tsontsilebs*".

Three-part, synchronic-parallel monotonous and boisterous songs of the West Georgian mountain province of **Svaneti** are considered as one of the most distinguished phenomena of Georgian folk music (**Figure 08**).



Svans with Chuniri and Changi

...dance performance; encountered are cult songs such as “*Lile*”, “*Kviria*”, “*Jgrag*”, “*Dala kijas*”, “*Tamar dedpal*”, dirge “*Zari*”, the province of **Racha** is distinguished in calm round-dance songs, the examples of this province are “*Dalie*”, “*Maghlamtas modga*”, “*Kvedrula*”, “*Alilo*”, “*Aslanuri mravalzhamieri*”, “*Zruni*”, “*Korkali*”. West Georgian lowland province of **Imereti** is known for urban three-part Europeanized style songs of later origin; however there is also a large number of old style songs; characteristic songs are: “*Tskhenosnuri*”, “*Mgzavruli*”, “*Chona*”, “*Mravalzhamier*”, *naduri* songs. The musical index of **Megrelian** songs is particular lyricism. Frequent is a woman and man singing with *chonguri* accompaniment. Distinguished examples are “*Odoia*”, “*Chela*”, “*Ocheshkhvei*”, “*Harira*”, “*Sisa tura*”. In **Guria** polyphonic songs are performed quickly and with improvisation, especially complex is the structure of trio songs, which, with the sequence of separate phrases, show clear relation to chants. Distinguished Gurian examples are “*Chven mshvidoba*”, “*Tsamokruli*”, “*Maspindzelsa mkhiarulsa*”, “*Shvidkatsa*”, “*Khasanbegura*”, “*Shavi shashvi*” and *naduri* songs (Figure 10).



Gurians

west Georgia represents a more archaic layer, but some examples have no less complex structure than Gurian ones. Here particularly popular are groomsmen's songs, "*Vosa*", "*Chaghma chaqrilo venakho*", "*Khasanbegura*" and instrumental pieces on *chiboni*. Peculiar single-part melodious folk music similar to Megrelian is characteristic of *Lazeti*, most part of which is modern day Turkey (Megrelian and Laz languages also have linguistic similarities). Most well-known songs are: "*Helesa*", "*Heyamo*", "*Destane*", "*Chuta nusa*", "*He, asiye*".

Urban music constitutes another interesting layer of Georgian traditional music. The location of Georgia determined political, commercial and cultural relations between the peoples of different nationalities. In Tbilisi – the capital city of Georgia various ethnicities lived since ancient times; their cohabitation resulted in the integration of cultures and formation of two (eastern and western) branches of urban music. Western branch is the merge of Georgian traditional three-part choral tradition with European musical instruments (mandolin, guitar), Italian operatic art, Russian salon, Soldiers', students' music. Eastern branch applies the tradition of playing oriental instruments (*tar*, *saz*, *kemenche*, *zurna*, *duduki*, *daira*, *zarb*) (**Figure 11**);



Georgian Urban Oriental Ensemble olyphonic thinking single-part nature of oriental instruments are replaced by the traditional performance corresponding to traditional three-part one. Most Georgian songs are performed with exclamations and nonsense syllables – meaningless words today. However, distinguished should be the stage differences of their application. Besides, scholars presume that ancient refrains (*haralo, hari harale, varalo, harulalo, harira, heida, iriaho-uruaho, adila, rasha, nanina, valalme, olelile*, etc) fossilized with tunes originated in remote past, in Sumerian, Urartian, Greek world. Some of these are presumed to be the names of deities, and their mention could have protective function. At the same time, also noticeable is the use of such sound complexes in highly developed songs, where they appear as a sort of verbal material and means to insert the tune in meter-rhythmic frame.

The geographic, anthropological and culturological peculiarities determine the Georgians' manner of singing. Still surviving here are original ways of singing: in chest voice, glottal, nasal, falsetto singing, with open sound, with exclamation, with humming, with glissando, etc. Together with national character and mode of life the traditional methods of sound formation established the singing aesthetics, characterized with valiant, restrained, cheerful, haughty mood. in Georgia Instrumental music is basically applied as accompaniment to singing. Like ancient cultures, the instruments have different functions: communication between nature and universe, signaling, religious-sacral, for communication with spirits, hunting, combative and healing, in the process of instrument-making the Georgians strictly followed traditional demands of musical aesthetics; this is why despite centuries-old history of metal processing, most musical instruments were made of natural material – particular tree species and skin of domestic animals. Of Georgian musical instruments noteworthy is three-string fretted lute *panduri* , traditionally disseminated in East Georgia.

Also rather widespread is the modern modification of *panduri*, the so-called “classical *panduri*”, which has chromatic fretting unlike “folk *panduri*”. The songs of West Georgian lowland regions are often sung with the accompaniment of four-string fretless *chonguri*. This is the most virtuoso instrument in today's Georgia. Bowed instrument *chianuri*//*chuniri* has survived in Racha, Svaneti and Tusheti. A harp-like *changi* is only encountered in Svaneti. *Gudastviri* // *chiboni* has survived only in Racha, Achara and Kartli. Georgian wind instruments are a bugle-like wind instrument - *Sankeri* // *Oqe*// *Ochandinoni*, *stviri*, single-piped *salamuri* and pan-pipe *larchemil*//*soinari*. Of percussion instruments noteworthy is a membranophone- *doli*. Keyboard-wind accordion was introduced in Georgia from abroad, the Georgians changed its tuning and name (Georgian *garmoni*, *tsiko-tsiko*). In the province of Tusheti *garmoni* replaced traditional instruments *panduri* and *chianuri* and became the musical symbol of the region.

Georgian song is mostly three-part; two- and single-part examples are documented in work and cult genre, most of these are performed by women. In three-paer songs bottom voice is always called bass. Most frequently the song is started by middle voice *mtkmeli*, which must have been the leading voice in two-part singing. Top voice is mostly referred to as *modzakhili*, however in

Georgia there other names of voices: *gamqivani*, *bokhi*, *tsvrili*, *tsqeba*, *shemkhmobari*, *shelaparikeba*, *pitskhi*, *mimqoli*, *kivani*, *mubne*, *mazhogh*, *mechipashe*, *gemachqapali*, etc. Georgian song follows the law individual performance of top voices on the background of choir-bass. Though, often bass part is sung by one singer, especially in the province of Guria. Frequent is choir antiphonal performance particularly in cult and ballad round-dance songs. Lesser encountered is responsorium, especially in work and dance songs.

Basic compositional principle of Georgian folk polyphony is contrast or parallel movement of top voices based on bass drone, synchronic and mostly parallel movement of voices, alternation of unsteady ostinato phrases, contrast movement of all three voices. However, these principles mostly interact simultaneously or alternately. Interesting is the specific high voice *krimanchuli* (a variety of ostinato yodel) common in the province of Guria.

In Georgia great attention is paid to participatory feast – party, with its traditional regulation: *tamada*– leader of the party, sequence of toasts and their accompanying songs. This is why the share of table songs is fairly large. Particularly noteworthy is the genre and performance manner *ghighini*, which is basically linked with feast and implies improvisational polyphonic singing in low voice.

There is also alrge number of *magruli* songs – traveling wedding songs, which are considered as prototypes of the examples of many other genres. Ancient layers of Georgian song are especially revealed in work and cult-ritual genres. Very interesting are long work songs *naduri* encountered in the provinces of Guria and Achara, partly in Imereti, with four-part complex polyphonic tissue. Among cult songs most numerous is Christmas song *Alilo* (derived from „halleluia“), which is encountered in almost all parts of the country. Also popular are songs with lyrical-love content, as well as ballads and humorous verses.

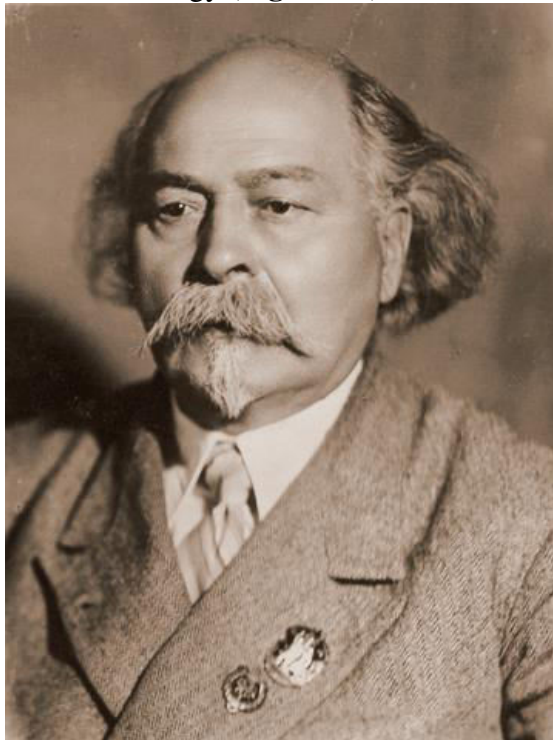
Georgia widely opened door to European and Russian music. Schools founded at the end of the 19th century, laid foundation to musical education, training of national specialists. At the same time as a result of the activation of national-liberation movement Georgian patriots, foreseeing the threat of disappearance of native culture, paid particular attention the notation and popularisation of songs and chants.

Published were first collections of Georgian folk song notations: „*Samshoblo khmebi*“ („Native Voices“) by Mikheil Machavariani, 1878, „*Salamuri*“ („Flute“) by Zakaria Chkhikvadze, 1896, „*Kartuli khmebi*“ („Georgian Voices“) by Andria Benashvili, 1886, „*Kartuli sakhalkhi simgherebi*“ („Georgian Folk Songs“) by Ia Kargareti 1909. The concert of first Georgian ethnographic choir (direcor Lado aghniashvili, conductor Czech musician Josef Rátil) was held in 1885(**Figure 12**).



Lado Aghniashvili's "Kartuli Khoros"

The activity of Dimitri Araqishvili (1873 -1953) – the founder of Georgian school of ethnomusicology (**Figure 13**)



Dimitri Araqishvili

in different perspectives on the solid grounds. Valuable is the activity of Georgian composers and musicologists- Zakaria Paliashvili, Meliton and Andria Balanchivadze, Shalva Mshvelidze (**Figure 14**),



Shalva mshvelidze in Guria hvili, Vladimer Akhobadze, Grigol Chkhikvadze, Otar Chijavadze, Mindia Zhordania, Kakhi Rosebashvili, Evsevi Chokhonelidze, Valerain Maghradze, Manana Shilakadze, Edisher Garaqanidze (**Figure 15**),



Edisher Garaqanidze



Joseph Jordania

ity of national musical heritage.

Soviet epoch brought the new wave of changes. The laws of Socialist ideology inculcated new thematics, new forms of performance and aesthetics. In Soviet choirs the number of top voice performers considerably increased, which was caused by the necessity of existence of „mass culture“. This initiated the degeneration of improvisation – very important feature of Georgian song, causing the significant change of vocal balance in national choir. Orchestras of folk musical instruments with major-minor scale were created for the musical accompaniment of Soviet mass choirs, which radically contradicted the nature and function of Georgian instruments. Sadly they are still encountered in daily round, due to this many songs and tunes were outshone, some were changed or buried in oblivion.

In Soviet epoch the development of Georgian folk song basically went on with the sign of collectivism. Noteworthy is the activity of the following song-masters (choir-directors)- Kakheti: Dedas Levana (Levan Asabshvili), Sandro, Mikheil, Datashka Kavsadzes (**Figure 17**),



Kavsadze's Choir

A sepia-toned portrait of a man with a beard, wearing a dark, high-collared garment with a decorative, multi-strapped chest piece. He is seated, leaning on a table with a decorative edge, and holding a long, thin object, possibly a pipe or a small sword, in his right hand.

Chavleishvili, Varlam Simonishvili (**Figure 19**),

A group portrait of the 'Kavkazskiy kumyur' (Caucasian Kumyur) ensemble, featuring 15 men in traditional Caucasian attire, including headscarves and patterned tunics, posed in two rows. A large drum and a stringed instrument are visible in the foreground.

tem, Vladimer, Anania and Anzor Erkomaishvili; Imereti:

The state ensembles created in the 1930s continued their activities in Soviet and Post-Soviet times, giving priority to the stylized performance of folk songs and dances. Their repertoire includes folk examples, as well as pieces by amateur or professional composers. From this standpoint is of uttermost importance. Folk ensembles „Shvidkatsa“, „Gordela“, „Pazisi“, „Rustavi“ took mission of popularisation of Georgian folk music and its transmission to young generation in the the 1960s; they performed Georgian peoples' musical treasure at many concert venues worldwide. Particular mention should be made of the merit of Anzor Erkomaishvili – artistic director of the ensemble of Georgian Folk Song and Dance „Rustavi“ in finding sound

archives. He is the founding father of children's collective „Martve“, where several generations got familiarized with national folk music.

The 1980s is a sort of turn in Georgian folk music performance. Some folk ensembles decided to revive authentic performance manner and ayncretic roots. Despite many difficulties Edisher Garaqanidze managed to inculcate the principles different from academism in stage performance by creating ensemble „Mtiebi“ (**Figure 20**). Other ensembles such as „Mzetamze“ (**Figure 21**), „Anchiskhati“ (**Figure 22**),



Mikael Modrekili's nevmaz



Mzetamze



Anchiskhati Choir
 „Kartuli Khmebi“, „Nanina“, „Sathanao“, „Jvaruli“, „Didgori“, „Ialoni“, „Shavnabada“, „Akhalukhlebi“, „Dziriani“, „Soinari“.... Children's folk groups „Amer-Imeri“, „Kokrochina“ more or less followed the path of performance approximated to folk manner, theateralized, indivisible performance of song and dance. Among the notable ensembles of the recent two-three decades are „Riho“, „Odoia“, „Shalva Chemo“, „Sanavardo“, „Tsinandali“, „Meskheta“, „Elesa“, „Keselo“, etc.



Gogochuri Sister's
 Today Georgian music is disseminated basically with stage regulations. There are more or less successful ensembles in different regions. In the last fifty years author's songs on folk motives gradually became popular. Out of these distinguished can be love songs on Tushetian and Kakhetian motives with *panduri* accompaniment, *baia* style oriental melodies, Urban three-part singing saturated with European harmony with guitar accompaniment. Many contemporary performers create new popular compositions based on traditional musical elements. Among them

are: Nugzar Psuturi, Teona Kumsiashvili, Gogochuri Sisters (**Figure 23**), Davit Kenchiashvili, etc.

Nino Makharadze
Tamaz Gabisonia

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