

Gvantsa Ghvinjilia (Tbilisi State Conservatoire, Georgia)

The Issue of Spiritual Revival in Post-Soviet Georgian Music **(Drawing on the Example of Eka Chabashvili and Maka Virsaladze)**

The article deals with the problem of spiritual revival in post-Soviet Georgian music that is linked with the complex processes in Georgian society, culture, and art. All these are an echo of the Russian annexation and occupation, the civil war (unequivocally provoked by Russia), and the loss of territories, continued to this very day in the form of a “creeping occupation“ in the conditions of a hybrid war. As musical expression always reflects the contemporary political and social problems of a country and the inner, spiritual state of the nation, it is, therefore, an unmistakable witness to any historical and cultural processes.

The importance of the research is determined by the fact that it fills a gap that exists in the field of post-Soviet music research by reflecting the tragic consequences of the civil war, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, and other historical cataclysms in the area, which inspired a special interest in religious and spiritual topics. It should be emphasized that neither the civil war nor the occupation of Georgian territories (Samachablo, Abkhazia), taking place as a logical consequence of the Russian annexation and occupation narrative, found a direct reflection in post-Soviet music, but those pains resulted in an increase of sensitivity towards religious themes and spirituality in general, which represents a creative reflection of Georgian composers on current events.

Historical, comparative, and critical scientific methods are used in this study.

The article examines two compositions on religious themes by post-Soviet Georgian composers: Maka Virsaladze's Liturgical Symphony (2010) and Eka Chabashvili's bilingual (with Latin and Georgian text) Requiem (2012–2016). These compositions have not yet become the subject of musicological research, especially regarding the posed problem. The article seeks to undertake this task and at the same time fill the existing research gap about the music of Maka Virsaladze and Eka Chabashvili. It is the research on the abovementioned issues that constitutes the study's scientific relevance and originality.

The goal is related to solving the following subtasks:

1. Analysis of the issue raised in the article in its historical perspective, for which we will consider the impact of annexation and occupation on Georgian music in general.
2. Evaluation of the attitude of the first Georgian composers towards Georgian church music.
3. Investigation of the reasons for an increasing interest in religious themes in post-Soviet Georgian music and assessment of the relevance of works dedicated to religious themes in the music of two post-Soviet composers: Maka Virsaladze and Eka Chabashvili.

Introduction

There is not a single event in the history of Georgian culture that does not require a global perspective, especially when it comes to the discourse on the influence of the Russian annexation and occupation on Georgian music, which led to some very unfavorable processes in Georgian music, including its post-Soviet period. The scientific papers and publications of Georgian scholars—Givi Orjonikidze, Lado Donadze, Marina Kantaradze, Inga Bakhtadze, Nana Sharikadze, Rusudan Tsurtsunia, Maka Virsaladze—mainly discuss topics such as the methodological framework for the study of the problems of musical identity, the attitude towards the Georgian church music and its perspectives in relation to art music, or religious themes in post-Soviet Georgian composers' music.

The fact that religious themes occupy such a prominent place in the Georgian music of the post-Soviet period is due to two important reasons. The so-

cial and political events of the 1990s, the civil war, the war with Russia, and the loss of territories led to the experience of spiritual catharsis and to the dominance of religious themes in arts including music. The second reason is related to the fact that at different stages of the history of Georgian art music, composers either did not have access to samples of church music and did not know Georgian chant well (19th century), or were forbidden to write sacred music (Soviet Georgia). Because of this, among the stylistic sources of Georgian art music, the stylistic layer of folk music dominated over church music sources. Both of these phenomena were related to the annexation of Georgia by Russia, who implemented the policy of russification of Georgian culture and began to suppress Georgian church music. After the occupation of 1921, this time the communist ideology, imposed on Georgia by Russia, banished religion, and led to the marginalization of religious themes and national church music. Accordingly, the stylistic layer of Georgian church music could no longer serve as a source of inspiration for composers' creative thinking. Because of these facts, it is necessary to embark on a historical excursion, which might shed additional light on the study's research problem.

The great injuries that Georgia suffered after its annexation by Russia (1801–1917), all related to the latter's colonial policies enforced in an attempt to withdraw Georgia from the European cultural and mental space, included linguistic russification against the nation's will, replacing the Georgian language with Russian in the educational process, as well as neglecting Georgian church music and painting Georgian churches white. As the musicologist Rusudan Tsurtsunia stated:

In 1801, Russia annexed Georgia. The abolition of the Georgian kingdom and the autocephaly of the Georgian church was followed by the politics of replacing Georgian culture with its Russian counterpart: a ban on the Georgian language in educational institutions, on conducting divine service, and on singing Georgian chants.¹

The fate of church music turned out to be particularly painful because it has always been a core part of Georgian identity. According to the composer Maka Virsaladze:

¹ Rusudan TSURTSUMIA, "Rethinking the Soviet-Era Georgian Music," in: *Music in Post-socialism: Three Decades in Retrospect* (Belgrade: Institute of Musicology of the SASA, 2020), 70.

Georgian church chants became not only an integral part of Georgian music but also an essential part of Georgian culture.²

The annexation dealt a crushing blow, first of all, to Georgian church music.

The culture of church singing faced a special danger from the beginning of the 19th century, when in 1801 the center of singing—Telavi Seminary—was closed and, together with the introduction of the Russian liturgy into the Georgian Church, Georgian singing was also stopped.³

During the tsarist and the Soviet periods, Georgians still had to fight to preserve their European values. Despite the close connections between Russian and European culture, the philosophical concepts of the Slavophiles emphasized the idea of Russia belonging not to the Romano-Germanic, but to the Greco-Byzantine type. Both Russian and European thinkers sensed this difference:

For the Central Europeans, Russian domination meant isolation from what the Central Europeans considered their philosophical and cultural home: Western Europe and its Christian religious traditions.⁴

It is significant that Georgia also distanced itself from the Greek-Byzantine Christian roots when Christianity was nationalized, and it did so from the very first stages of that process. What specific event turned out to be a threat to the identity of Georgian music after the Russian annexation? It is common knowledge that any national composition school is based on national roots. When the time was ripe for the foundation of a Georgian composition school, the first Georgian composers knew only folk music and they did not have any opportunity to make use of the tradition of church polyphony as the basis for a composition school as it was not well known to them. The restoration of Georgian church music and its scientific research did start in the 19th century, and the representatives of the new composition school, along with the researchers of Georgian Orthodox chant culture, also researched that music style. Why

² Maka VIRSALADZE, “Choral Compositions (with Orchestra and *A Cappella*) on Religious Themes in the Oeuvres of Nodar Mamisashvili, Eka Chabashvili and Maka Virsaladze,” in: *Music—the Cultural Bridge: Essence, Contexts, References* (Wrocław: The Karol Lipiński Academy of Music in Wrocław, 2021), 81.

³ Inga BAKHTADZE, *Georgian Culture—the West* (Tbilisi: Publishing House “Kronographi,” 2001), 341.

⁴ Zbigniew BRZEZIŃSKI, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic* (New York: Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 1997), 7.

did this happen? The Georgian liturgy was suppressed and replaced with its Church Slavonic counterpart, and Georgian chant was replaced in educational programs by Russian chant. The Russian Church also introduced grandiose line-ups of performers into Georgia churches, which made Georgian hymns lose the original semantics associated with their chamber character (where each of the three voices had a soloistic function). In this situation, Georgian chant found itself in danger of extinction. Although the national liberation movement of the 19th century spearheaded a search for Georgian hymns and their transfer to the European notation system, many manuscripts were destroyed. Therefore, Georgian secular music came to the foreground in the second half of the 19th century. As the three-part Georgian Orthodox chants were forced out of the Georgian church after the Russian annexation, that style became practically unknown to the first Georgian semi-professional composers before the foundation of the Georgian composition school.

What was the reason? Although the issue of the restoration of church music had been on the agenda since the 1860s, the process of restoration, recording and publishing of church music became more intensive only in the 1880s. This one factor prevented the opportunity to turn to the realm of church music as a symbol of national identity. Another reason should be mentioned here as well. 19th-century Georgian musicians mostly studied and worked in Russia and Europe and returned to Georgia late in their careers. So, for example, the composer Alois Mizandari (1838–1912) lived in Russia, then in Europe, and returned to Georgia only in 1868. The composer Andria Karashvili (1857–1925) moved abroad in 1873, studied in Russia and Poland, and returned to Georgia only in 1893. Ia (Ilia) Kargareli left to study in Russia in 1889 and returned to Georgia only in 1895. The composers who returned late to the Georgian scene were mostly interested in the introduction of Russian and European music genres and forms in Georgia, as well as in Georgian folklore, but church music did not become the focus of their creative attention. At the same time, one should take into account the already mentioned important fact: the issue of the restoration of Georgian church music had been discussed since the 1860s, but the intensive process of its research and recording started only during the eighth decade of the 19th century.⁵

⁵ Lado DONADZE, *The History of Georgian Music* (Kartuli musikis istoria), in the Georgian language (Tbilisi: Publishing House “Ganatleba”, 1990), 72.

After the foundation of the Georgian professional composition school, the so-called Georgian Art Music, some representatives of this new generation were actively interested in Georgian church music, for example, Zakaria Paliashvili, who created a Georgian liturgical mass. One very interesting case is worth mentioning, namely Niko Sulkhaniashvili's chorale (O Lord, Lord). I can't disagree with Maka Virsaladze's opinion regarding this work—"the work is not associated with any particular religion or canonical genre."⁶ As a matter of fact, Niko Sulkhaniashvili, filled with a desire to overthrow tsarism and full of hope for gaining independence, conceived this chorale as the anthem of independent Georgia. Therefore, he gave this composition a symbolic meaning; he created a stylization of the Georgian church a cappella tradition without any citation, thus conveying the idea and desire of bringing Georgia back to the proper Christian values. It was no coincidence that the Georgian modernist composer Nodar Mamisashvili called this chorale a Georgian madrigal.⁷

So, the fact that general European professional musical thought was assimilated by Georgian composers only from the perspective of the country's peasant folklore did not express the full artistic and aesthetic phenomenon of the Georgian musical heritage.

The occupation of Georgia (1921), which meant not only the occupation of the territory, but at the same time implied bringing Georgia under the Communist "ideological umbrella" of Russia, culminated in the establishment of the Soviet Socialist regime and the country's isolation from the Western world. It stopped the process of further integration of Georgian music with contemporary European music and prevented the artistic development of the first generation of composers. Therefore, the Georgian compositional language was limited to tonality until the 1960s. Both the officially approved musical system and the ruling political party of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Communist Party, had no alternative. Allegedly, Romanticism was legitimized as a consequence of the annexation of Georgia. However, it is hard to agree with this claim since the professional composition school was established in 1918 so the language of musical Romanticism was a natural choice at that time. Others view the

⁶ VIRSALADZE, "Choral Compositions," 81.

⁷ Gvantsa GHVINJILIA, "Niko Sulkhaniashvili's Lost Opera, Versions and Conjectures," *Art Science Studies* 85 (2020 No. 4): 43, <https://dziebani.tafu.edu.ge/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Art-Science-Studies-4-85-2020.pdf>.

occupation as the main factor that prevented the first generation of Georgian composers from growing and advancing in their profession.

The Soviet regime again attacked the Georgian Church in 1924, and the fate of thousands of Georgian hymns transferred to musical notation was once more in danger. Fortunately, a large part of those hymns were saved by Georgian musicians at great effort and often at the risk of their lives. Because the Christian religion was replaced with militant atheism, Socialist realism, the Georgian composer again lost the right to write works of religious content in general. The Christian religion, which emphasized individualism and freedom of will, came into confrontation with the totalitarian state and was perceived as a threat to the regime. It should be pointed out that the use of folk music as the stylistic basis for musical compositions was supported by Soviet cultural policies, while the use of church music was forbidden. As the musicologist Rusudan Tsurtsumia stated:

One layer of the artistic content of the best examples of Georgian music of the 1920s–1950s is linked to national tradition, although, for ideological reasons, the semantically expressive world of old professional ecclesiastical music practically does not participate in it.⁸

The situation changed in the 1960s, a period called the “small renaissance” of Georgian art. The illusory opening of the “Iron Curtain”, which had isolated Georgia and other Soviet republics from the developments in the world’s art music, provided the 1960s and 1970s generations with the opportunity to discover for themselves dodecaphony, serialism, aleatory technique and sonoristics, as well as the music of Stravinsky, Bartok, or Penderecki. The so-called “thaw period” of the 1960s enriched national music with stylistic pluralism. The main Soviet trends came to be questioned, which led to the emergence of “unofficial music”.

The renewed interest in religious themes in Georgia as well as throughout the Soviet Union played an important role in the process of the stylistic development of composers and the shift in their worldview. It is hard to disagree with P. Schmelz’s opinion that religion played a vital role in the ongoing stylistic development of Soviet composers of the 1970s and 1980s.⁹ The Georgian

⁸ TSURTSUMIA, “Rethinking the Soviet-Era Georgian Music”, 74.

⁹ Peter J. SCHMELZ, *Such Freedom, if Only Musical/Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 268.

composers of the 1960s (Mamishashvili, Kancheli, Nasidze, Svanidze, Gabunia, Kvernadze) and of the subsequent two decades (Bardanashvili, Nadareishvili, Bakuradze, Shaverzashvili) were intensely interested in sacred music and mystical themes. In addition to the revival of interest in works of religious content, some of the Georgian composers turned their attention to other related topics, for example Nodar Mamishashvili was drawn to the technology of Georgian Orthodox bell casting.

He is the maker of Georgian church bells, having devised the alloy formula of the Holy Trinity Cathedral bells and calculated their acoustics.¹⁰

It can be said without exaggeration that the cultural and political mission of the ‘Warsaw Autumn’ had a revolutionary significance for Georgian music, as well as for the music of the entire post-Soviet zone, as it brought together the most important events in world music into a single festival space. The Georgian composers who came to the festival had an opportunity to listen to avant-garde music and to master new techniques. Here they witnessed the relevance of religious themes in 20th-century Western music.

Likewise, transnational music practices have inevitably left a deep imprint on the formation and development of national music cultures.¹¹

The period of the transition of Georgian music from its Soviet past to the path of European integration (the 1990s) was the time when Georgian music had a chance to position itself on the world’s music map as a music of an independent country. Musical works of that period featured a mixture of styles and dialogue between different historical eras, so characteristic of postmodernism. The composers of the post-Soviet period tended to be even more distressed than Soviet composers because, living in fear and uncertainty about the future, they faced both old and new challenges, and many of them, unable to tolerate the status quo, ended up emigrating. In the transition period (1990s), when great efforts were needed to overcome this crisis, a collective instinct of self-preservation came into play, which gave rise to the need for a mystical perception of

¹⁰ Maka Virsaladze, “Nodar Mamishashvili’s Passion as an Example of Mixing Old and New Elements in 20th-Century Georgian Sacred Music,” *Journal of the International Society for Orthodox Music* (2020 No. 3, January), 286. <https://journal.fi/jisocm/article/view/88740>.

¹¹ Rūta STANEVIČIŪTĖ, “Baltic Musicological Conferences: National Music Historiographies and Transnationalism,” *Muzikologija* (2019 No. 26): , 76.

the world, for spiritual transformation as well as for catharsis as a way of salvation. That is the reason for the intense longing for sacred and mystical themes, full of collective survival codes, in the Georgian music of that era.

These post-Soviet times of crises drew attention to spirituality and religious themes.¹²

The dominance of religious and mystical themes in post-Soviet Georgian compositional output is a sign of the nation's return to genuine spiritual consciousness.

What follows are reflections on religious topics in the music of two Post-soviet Georgian composers—Maka Virsaladze and Eka Chabashvili.

Among the composers of this generation, the most distinguished representatives of the decade of the 1990s, Maka Virsaladze and Eka Chabashvili, started a new era in Post-Soviet Georgian music and appeared on the country's musical scene during the most difficult economic and political period. The spirituality of the composers of the 1990s has different roots, as this generation experienced civil war and a loss of territories. As might be expected, the great spiritual trauma brought them to religious topics. The yearning for mysticism and sacred themes in their music is intensified by their own spiritual desires. The freestyle approach of both composers makes it possible to manipulate many different European compositional techniques along with an authentic model of Georgian hymns.

Maka Virsaladze's Liturgical Symphony (2010)

Before analyzing Virsaladze's liturgical Symphony, it should be mentioned that the composer created several *a cappella* chants drawing on the Georgian Orthodox style, as well as psalms for orchestra, mixed choir, solo vocalists, and a reader (1995), which are based on excerpts from the Psalms of the Biblical David in the ancient Georgian language. These compositions are characterized by their meditative mood. They feature the techniques of textural ostinato and poly-ostinato, and include polystylistic insertions, which symbolize the idea of permanence. In terms of the musical language, Virsaladze uses a combination of atonality and polymodality, with a chord system that consists of diatonic and

¹² Nana SHARIKADZE, *An Introduction to Georgian Art Music: Sense-Making through Music* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023), 149.

chromatic clusters, as well as chords commonly used in traditional Georgian music.

A perfect example of Maka Virsaladze's compositional skills and spiritual inclinations is her liturgical Symphony (2010). In this composition, there are cases of using collage in a polystylistic fashion, including quotations from W.A. Mozart's Piano Fantasy (KV 397 in D minor) in the second part and fragments of J.S. Bach's chorale prelude (in F minor) for organ (BWV 639) in the fourth part. The use of the collage technique (Mozart's and Bach's motifs and the composer's own choruses) and of the characteristic chords of Georgian chants indicate Maka Virsaladze's intention to convey the idea of dialogue of different historical periods. The idea is clear: people of the past and modern eras alike seek spirituality. (Bars 53–55). Liturgical Symphony has hidden programmatic content. It conveys the mystery of one of the Christian sacraments—the rite of communion. If we juxtapose the parts of the symphony with this ritual, the first part symbolizes the spiritual readiness of the congregation for communion, and the following parts correspond to the three parts of the liturgy—the act of preparation of bread and wine for the Eucharist (Proskomedija); the Liturgy of the Catechumens; and the Liturgy of the Faithful.

The first part plays the role of a kind of preamble, in which one can hear the imitation of the sound of two oriental instruments, *zurna* and *duduki*, common for the multicultural Tbilisi of the 19th century. The influence of Gia Kancheli's music is also evident. In the first part, Mozart's motif flashes for a moment and is later repeated in imitation by different instruments in the second part. In the second part, the juxtaposition of sonorous clusters and Mozart's motif symbolizes an attack of a hostile force against a childlike naive soul. There is an obvious hereditary connection with the masterpiece of the Georgian composer Sulkhan Nasidze (Concerto for Violin, Cello, and Chamber Orchestra, 1982). In Nasidze's work, a motif full of childlike naivety appears as a symbol of a lonely artist. It is confronted by the aggression of the surrounding world, in which it is not difficult to recognize the repression of the violent Soviet system. In the case of both composers, this 'battle' is conveyed by the polyphonic mixing of different stylistic layers. The imitation of bell-ringing (triangle) is a reference to the calling of the congregation to the church. At the end of this part, the music is abruptly stopped. Overtones are lost in space, just as an unanswered question is followed by the emptiness of common sense.

In the introduction of the third part, the semantics of Georgian chant comes to life. The fourth part corresponds to the finale of the communion ritual when Christians are reunited with Christ. Maka Virsaladze wants to convey a Christian's inner struggles before establishing a mysterious relationship with God. An audio recording of Maka Virsaladze's two choruses (Alma Mater in Latin; Holly God in Georgian) layered on top of each other, should be played from the beginning of this movement. Complex chord sounds, parallel octaves, and perfect fourths and fifths combine to create the style of traditional Georgian chant. It does not contradict the orchestra's atonal sonority. In the finale, Bach's motif does not feel like an invasion of foreign material but is prepared logically. When it appears for the first time, it can be perceived as a momentary thought in the listener's mind, although the motif can be heard later. With this collage, the composer wants to symbolize the completion of the ritual, after which the soul of the believer experiences bliss. The sound of the orchestra is also lost somewhere in peace and silence. Maka Virsaladze's Liturgical symphony is evidence of the composer's spiritual aspirations.

Eka Chabashvili's Requiem (2012–2016)

Religious themes also serve as inspiration for Eka Chabashvili. As the composer Maka Virsaladze points out—"she has composed seven *a cappella* chants (2005) in the Orthodox style, as well as a chant to Our Lady of Iveria (2006)."¹³ In the context of the problem posed in the article, the composer's hymns dedicated to the Mother of Jesus (Lady of Iveria) should be mentioned first. The idea to compose them came on the Feast of the Virgin Mary years ago and she wrote hymns for every church feast of the Mother of Jesus (September 21, August 28). These hymns provided a certain basis for Eka Chabashvili's bilingual (with Latin and Georgian texts) Requiem, which is one of the landmarks of modern Georgian music. According to the composer—"Requiem is a 21st-century human plea to the Lord for protection from the evil that lies inside the soul."¹⁴

Requiem (2012–2016) is written for orchestra, chorus, organ, three sopranos, baritone, and tenor, and combines the elements of the Catholic-European musical tradition and Georgian Orthodox music. A result of the composer's

¹³ VIRSALADZE, "Choral Compositions," 84.

¹⁴ VIRSALADZE, "Choral Compositions," 84.

artistic research, the work contains the message 'No to Terrorism!' and is a memorial to those innocent souls who die because of war, terrorism, hunger, or poverty. In order to develop a compositional strategy, Eka Chabashvili relied on Mozart's Requiem (KV 626), and Stravinsky's *Requiem Canticles* as genre models inspired by mourning rituals. From the structural point of view, Stravinsky's Requiem was of great influence, but if the foundation of Stravinsky's dramaturgy lies in the unusually expanded orchestra, the dramaturgy of Eka Chabashvili's work is based on a choral framework, which indicates the unconscious influence of the national choral epic.

Although theatricality is the compositional thinking method of Eka Chabashvili, the composer takes into account the immanent feature of the requiem, i.e. its rituality. In Eka's Requiem, there is a synthesis of theatricalization and ritualism, thus contributing to the theatricalization of ritual. In the requiem, the visualization of music characteristic of the composer's style is also revealed. With phonetic techniques, imagination is activated, and the listener visualizes the ritual. The vicissitudes of the drama of a sinful soul are not only heard but also made visible—the cry caused by true repentance, the fear of being brought before the judgment of souls, and the path to union with eternity. In addition to visualization, the composer evokes in the listener the emotions that are related to the archetypes of our representations of life after death encoded in the human unconscious.

In the requiem, the greatest importance is given to the verbal text (which is sung and pronounced in Latin and Georgian), bringing one back to the archaic canon of the Georgian hymn, the primacy of the word, and the category of prayer. Words have both conceptual and phonetic meanings (phonosemantics). Repetition of certain keywords or the polyphonic mixing of texts obscure the perception of their meaning. This increases the magical power of the word and conveys the function of a ritual spell. For Eka Chabashvili, it is not essential to maintain the framework of musical form with events that are dynamically developing in time. The composer manipulates the sonoristic spaces, helping them to transcend the boundaries of the intelligible sound space of the world and diluting them into the sound of the Universe.

Eka Chabashvili's eleven-part requiem begins with a prologue and ends with an epilogue. The action unfolds in the following scenario. It is natural that Georgian church canons are not preserved in this requiem, although this is not at all equivalent to distancing oneself from the truth. Eka Chabashvili tried

to convey the mystery of the immortality of the soul and the Christian path, including the transition from ontological time to eschatological existence. This process is interpreted by the composer with the idea of two doors erected in front of a person. The first door opens and the soul dying in agony stands at the threshold of the Beyond, awaiting judgment. The second door opens after death and the soul gets used to its new state. It shows how the material dimension withdraws from the consciousness of a human being and how the eternal dimension prepares to receive the soul. Pierre Henry's *The Journey* influenced the composer's interpretation of the story of the soul's journey.

Some remarkable moments of this piece of music are included in Prologue (*The Requiem aeternam*), where the composer wants to convey the transition of the soul through the astral spiral corridor connecting the two worlds by means of tone painting.

The story of the soul's journey begins with the prayer *Libera me*. In this movement, the listener's attention is focused on the words spoken in both languages: 'save me'. A human being prays not for life, but for avoiding God's wrath. Chabashvili uses here *Sprechstimme*. The intention of the composer is easy to understand: the pitch of the musical sound loses its meaning, which symbolizes that the singing of the tormented soul turns into a prayer.

The scene (*Tuba mirum*) of the archangel summoning the believers to God's judgment is conveyed by the separation of the soloist from the remainder of the performing group, which clearly shows Mozart's influence. In Eka Chabashvili's Requiem, the weeping of the souls is nowhere to be heard, which may suggest that everyone is silent and waiting for their turn in anticipation of judgment. The narrator's text provides information about upcoming events, reminiscent of the narrator of a documentary film, and perhaps hints at the influence of the modern advertising industry. *Dies irae* is distinguished by its tone-painting devices. Whispers, glissandos, imitation of screams, and clusters in the group of singers symbolize the falling of the frightened souls into the pit. The main idea is embedded in the verbal text: "the threat of eternal death makes people look into the abyss". *Dies irae* is not as terrible in terms of its sound content as it was traditionally conceived in the semantics of the requiem. In the modern era, the accents in the text are heard differently. A 21st-century human is facing a more global ordeal, which goes beyond the boundaries of ordinary human existence with its everyday problems (the world's real and cyber wars, ecological catastrophes, viruses, etc.). Consequently, a contemporary

person is more depressed, and this spiritual state is reflected here by the imitation of a whisper.

According to the composer's idea, before the opening of the second door (*Rex tremendae*), human beings are given the last chance to realize that they were losing their immortal soul by serving the 'fleeting flesh' in physical life. Therefore, the *Kyrie eleison* section is placed before *Rex tremendae*. One important detail is the fact that it is not humanity in general that appeals to God, but individuals, because the relationship between humans and God is unique in each case. This is what the separation of the soprano soloist from the general context symbolizes in the *Kyrie eleison*. The soprano appeals to God through prayer and the soloist's vocal part. In *Rex tremendae*, the music stops abruptly in the finale, suggesting that the crowd, preoccupied with punishment, did not realize the evil they had done to Jesus Christ. In the next part (*Agnus Dei*), the chamber performing group (an ensemble of soloists) symbolizes the lonely Savior. *Lacrimosa* brings the listener back to the world of the living to mourn those who died. The influence of the Georgian Svan bell tradition is obvious. The movement's two-tone motif is associated with Mozart's *Lacrimosa*. When we cry remembering the dead, we respect them. As long as someone remains in our memory, they are still alive. Only a soul this calm and prepared can find its place in the light. In *Recordare*, glissandos imitate the sound of whistling and the wind, symbolizing the passing of the soul and the beginning of an eternal journey to the 'world beyond'. In the epilogue (*Lux aeternam*), the word 'light', prominent in the text, is enunciated in the solo vocal part, which provides a programmatic hint: eternity has already achieved victory over vanity. The sound effects, imitating the sound of the light switched on and off periodically, are also reminiscent of a human heartbeat. In this way, the composer wants to represent the material world as seen from the spiritual dimension. Eka Chabashvili's intention is clear: for the deceased, the sensual colorfulness of the physical dimension may be perceived through such a rhythmic pulsation.

It is significant that, besides the achievements of modern European music (signs of minimalism in *Benedictus; Rex tremendae*), the influence of traditional Georgian church music was clearly revealed in this Requiem. The chords of the Georgian chants (*Libera me; Benedictus; Gloria*) and the anthemic nature of certain sections of the Requiem bring us back to the archaic atmosphere of the Georgian chanting practice. The unconscious influence of the national traditional polyphonic thinking can be seen in the division of the musical texture

into polyphonic layers, which are formed by interesting combinations and interplay between the verbal text, the chorus, and the orchestra.

In Requiem, the composer wanted to convey some European musical traditions, but primarily her own national consciousness. „She wanted to embed the Orthodox spirit—and in particular the Georgian spirit—in it by using the Georgian text, which in turn led to the sound of Georgian chanting. The composer [Chabashvili 2019] compares the mood of the work with Orthodox frescoes, where only one color or one state of the soul is depicted.”¹⁵ In light of today’s challenges, this work can be perceived as a hymn to our spiritual life in the broadest sense of the word.

Thus, Eka Chabashvili’s requiem combines the traditions of European music and the features of Georgian church music. The fact that the composer acknowledged the traditions of Georgian church music while working on her requiem can be seen as an expression of national identity. It is significant that Eka is interested in the issue of identity not only as a composer but also as a researcher:

Problem of musical identity has become crucial for her as well: open lectures, articles and composer’s writings have been dedicated to the problems of musical genetics and identity.¹⁶

The music of the composers of the post-Soviet generation (the 1990s) reflects a truly axiological perception of religious themes. As concerns their compositional technique, the combination of national (church music and folklore) and European experiences in their music reveals the compositional skills of these composers as well as the vitality of Georgian church polyphony itself. As it turns out, it is a renewable tradition. For the reasons mentioned earlier, Georgian composers did not always have the opportunity to discover this truth.

¹⁵ VIRSALADZE, “Choral Compositions,” 84.

¹⁶ Nana SHARIKADZE, “Eka Chabashvili’s Works through Some Aspects of Musical Identity,” *GESJ: Musicology and Cultural Science* 12 (2015 No. 2): 16.

Conclusion

The conducted research helped to determine the following:

1. Georgia sought a chance to save its heritage of Christianity and pursue rapprochement with European culture through the country's co-believer Russia. When the latter attacked the main pillars of the Georgian identity, this turned into the country's national tragedy. After the Russian annexation, Georgian church music was first to come under attack as the most important delimiter of the nation's identity. The removal of sacred music from the area of composition was not only a battle declared against Georgian hymns but in fact became a barrier keeping Georgians away from any spirituality.
2. The process of restoration of Georgian hymns coincided with the period of activity of the first Georgian composers, but this musical tradition fell beyond the scope of their creative interests as it was practically unknown to them.
3. The Sovietization of Georgia resulted in further marginalization of church music, which was fundamentally incompatible with the official ideology, as manifested by both the elimination of religious and mystical themes in Georgian music until the 1970s, and the disappearance of church music as one of the important sources of inspiration for Georgian composers. The composer Maka Virsaladze draws attention to the annihilation of Georgian church music in the Soviet period and the chronology of the more recent rebirth of interest in it:

In the Soviet atheistic period, it was impossible to create works on religious themes. However, after the late 1970s, the attitude towards artistic workers improved somewhat, and gradually compositions began to appear with titles that were unexpected for that period and with unusual religious themes for Soviet art.¹⁷

4. The music of the post-Soviet composers, apart from its own artistic value, compensates for this deficit and serves as a kind of national catharsis set against the background of many challenges. It seems that traditional church music has always helped Georgians to overcome a great many national traumas.

¹⁷ VIRSALADZE, "Choral Compositions," 82.

The works written by Maka Virsaladze and Eka Chabashvili on religious themes are important for Georgian music not only from the point of view of spiritual values, but also considering their compositional innovations and modern compositional techniques. In the context of the ever-evolving and globalized society, the music of these two composers manages to strike a delicate balance between national and global identities. The global context is represented by the use of European musical genres, forms, stylistic features, and compositional techniques, while nationalism is defined by the sacred codes of the Georgian church and its traditional polyphony, which, although suppressed by the Russian imperial policies of colonization and later by Soviet ideology, still managed to survive and became an important pillar of values for Georgian post-Soviet music.

References

- Bakhtadze, Inga. *Georgian Culture—the West*. Tbilisi: Publishing House “Kronographi,” 2001.
- Brzeziński, Zbigniew. *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic*. New York: Basic Books, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 1997.
- Donadze, Lado. *The History of Georgian Music*. (Kartuli musikis istoria), in the Georgian language, Tbilisi: Publishing House “Ganatleba”, 1990.
- Ghvinjilia, Gvantsa. “Niko Sulkhaniashvili’s Lost Opera, Versions and Conjectures.” *Art Science Studies*, No. 4 (85): 39–58. <https://dziebani.tafu.edu.ge/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Art-Science-Studies-4-85-2020.pdf>.
- Schmelz, Peter J. *Such Freedom, if Only Musical/Unofficial Soviet Music during the Thaw*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Sharikadze, Nana. *An Introduction to Georgian Art Music: Sense-Making through Music*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023.
- Sharikadze, Nana. “Eka Chabashvili’s Works through Some Aspects of Musical Identity.” *GESJ: Musicology and Cultural Science*, No. 2 (12) (2015): 15–19.
- Stanevičiūtė, Rūta. “Baltic Musicological Conferences: National Music Historiographies and Transnationalism.” *Muzikologija*, No. 26 (2019): 75–89.
- Tsurtsunia, Rusudan. “Rethinking the Soviet-Era Georgian Music.” In: *Music in Postsocialism: Three Decades in Retrospect*. Belgrade: Institute of Musicology of the SASA, 2020: 67–87.
- Virsaladze, Maka. “Choral Compositions (with Orchestra and *A Cappella*) on Religious Themes in the Oeuvres of Nodar Mamisashvili, Eka Chabashvili and Maka Virsaladze.” In: *Music—the Cultural Bridge: Essence, Contexts, References* (Wrocław: The Karol Lipiński Academy of Music in Wrocław, 2021): 81–88.
- Virsaladze, Maka. “Nodar Mamisashvili’s Passion as an Example of Mixing Old and New Elements in 20th-Century Georgian Sacred Music.” *Journal of the International Society for Orthodox Music*, No. 3 (January) (2020): 285–294. <https://journal.fi/jisocm/article/view/88740>.

Summary

The article analyzes the consequences of the Russian annexation of Georgia in post-Soviet Georgian music. In the relationships with Russia, Georgia saw a chance of re-integration with European culture, viewed as its natural intellectual environment, but this was rendered impossible by Russian and Soviet policies. As Georgian Orthodox chants were driven out of the Georgian church, this layer musical tradition was unknown to the first Georgian composers, which prevented the opportunity to explore this source as a symbol of national identity when new professional music appeared. The second Annexation of Georgia at the time of the establishment of the Soviet socialist regime, along with the ensuing isolation of the country from the Western world, precluded any further integration with contemporary European music. Georgian composers remained within the limits of the tonal language of Romanticism (1920s-1950s). The generation of the 1960s and especially the 1990s had to overcome the backlog and detachment from recent developments in European music. Post-Soviet Georgian music reflected not only secondary Soviet traumas but also all the pain inflicted on the nation by the Russian annexations, usually accompanied by a fear of an uncertain future. All of that gave rise to the need for a more mystical perception of the world and, as a result, religious themes dominate post-Soviet Georgian music.

Keywords: Russian annexation, Russian occupation, post-Soviet music, religious music, Georgian music, National identity, Liturgical symphony, Requiem.