

Performance issues of Ajarian traditional music and dance

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Abstract

Georgia is a rich country with musical and choreographic traditions. Ajara – the region, on the example of which I will discuss music and dance performance issues - is a distinguished region due to the patterns that can be found of one, two, three or four-part songs, choreographic groups and individual performers.

Transferring folklore onto the stage since the end of 19th century, resulted in a few changes of performance. For instance, Settlement of principals of European polyphony and Academic chorus, unification of song and dance ensembles, change of the manner of singing and loss of characteristic features typical to folk song.

As for the dance, with complying of individual performing dance mode in existence, with interfere of choreographs and unification of different traditional dances in one composition was created large-scale, nowadays very popular Ajarian dance - *Gandagana*, also traditional round dance *Khorumi* and its versions were transformed into mass dancing patterns.

In the report will be discussed history of performing Ajarian traditional music and dances, performing tendencies and principles spread in 19th-20th centuries and established today, repertoire issues, influence of stage practice on the country-side's traditional performing, process of hereditary renewal, actualization of folklore and "producing" new creative product from it.

Keywords: performance, dance, music, performing tendencies.

My interest in the topic derived from the themes of the 4th International Post-Graduate Forum for Studies in Music and Dance. Additionally, my interest was sparked according to my specific observations, as a young researcher, practicing choirmaster and performer on the processes ongoing in folk song and dance performance since the 19th century. It is interesting to consider the issue from this standpoint, as the activities for safeguarding, seeking for, preservation and popularization of folk heritage, carried out at various times differently affect the performance of traditional music and dance.

Folk songs and dances of our country always inspire foreign listeners and spectators. Georgia, rich in traditions of polyphonic music and choreography, is the home for vocal

polyphonic culture. In 2001 UNESCO⁵⁴ proclaimed Georgian polyphonic singing a Masterpiece of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Noteworthy is foreigners' increased interest in the research and practical study of Georgian traditional music. In many countries of the world there are ensembles performing Georgian traditional music, they often invite Georgian choirmasters to teach them in their countries or visit Georgia to learn traditional examples on the spot. It should be noted that they give preference to traditional repertoire, not modernized folklore. As for dance, foreigners are mostly familiar with the variants of folk dances arranged for scenic performance and accordingly their attention is directed towards that. In several countries there are Georgian dance studios, where they teach arranged choreographic examples.

Ajara⁵⁵ - the region, on the example of which I discuss music and dance performance issues - was under the Ottoman rule for almost three centuries from the 17th century, which resulted in the change of faith by local population. From 1877-1878 the Ottoman rule was replaced by the aggressive policy of Russian Empire. Despite the inevitable communication with other peoples and intercultural processes, it is still possible to find music and dance tradition bearers⁵⁶ in Ajara today.

The research of the Ajarian's cultural and ethnographic life (Matsaberidze 1962) and performance of folk examples on the stage started in the second half of the 19th century - to this testifies Ajarian songs and dance "Khorumi" performed by the Ajarians at the concert in Likhauri village (Guria)⁵⁷ in 1889 (Iveria 1889). Researchers consider transference of folklore to the stage preconditioned the disappearance of some traditional genre examples. But in my opinion, at the same time this was a new stage of their existence without the social function they had in everyday life. This is when folklore acquires a new meaning and aesthetic function. Proceeding from the fact that Ajarian folklore was part of all-Georgian heritage, its performance tendencies developed similar to those ongoing in common Georgian performance (Surmanidze 2012).

It is known, that folk art is a changeable, live process and naturally it changes together with people's development. But in the 20th century it went beyond the frame of preserving the tradition and approximated professional art. A number of state structures (e.g. House of Folk Art 1930) including the State Ensemble of Ajarian Song and Dance that has existed since 1921 (Komakhidze 1999) created in Ajara at the time aimed to seek for and popularize folk examples. However, on the one hand, the processes directed towards the preservation of traditional heritage had positive results; on the other hand, they were

⁵⁴ The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

⁵⁵ The Autonomous Republic of Adjara, is a historical, geographic and political-administrative region of Georgia.

⁵⁶ People who live in an authentic circumstance and have a folk knowledge.

⁵⁷ Neighbouring region of Ajara.

followed by the changes in performance. Ethnomusicologists and ethno-choreologists consider the 20th century was a significant stage in collecting vocal and choreographic examples, but they also note that imitation of European culture resulted in the modification of traditional examples, and introduction of the principles strange for authentic folklore (Chanishvili 2002; Garakanidze 2007).

Scenic performance of folklore was oriented towards the consolidation of masses, for this purpose created were large folk choirs, dance ensembles, united song and dance ensembles, supplied with scenic costumes, but restricted in making independent decisions (Jgenti 2005). Their repertoire was under strict control, and unfortunately folk art was the best means to propagate Soviet ideas. At that time, it was topical to arrange folk examples with the motivation to preserve and popularize the tradition, to create dance performances and musical compositions by the examples obtained directly from tradition bearers, often tradition bearers themselves were involved in these activities. Local folklore was rethought on a larger monumental space, locally disseminated repertoire was transferred to the state folk song and dance ensembles. Their performance manner and style were often distanced from the features of rural performance, but, thanks to them Ajarian examples were performed not only at national celebrations, but at international festivals as well, dances *Gandagan*⁵⁸ and *Khorumi*⁵⁹ are best examples of the aforementioned.

These scaly dances - very popular in concert practice were created via combining several traditional dances common in everyday life and movements of individual performers. The dance *Gandagan* was given the name for the abundance of sideway movements. It bases on several dances and movements (*disqirme*⁶⁰, *topaloini*⁶¹, *qolsama/mkharuli*⁶², *shekhtomilai*⁶³, *tutulinana*⁶⁴, *qarshiberi*⁶⁵, *tarnanino*⁶⁶, *jaqdanina*⁶⁷, *padiko/patiko*⁶⁸). According to the choreographer's initiatives, some of the women's dance moves were added to men's moves, so this version of the dance redefined and gave a love-dance attribution to it. Today many variants of *Gandagan* are performed on the stage, they mostly comprise two parts - relatively slow women's *Tarnanino* and swift *Mkharuli*. This dance created by choreographer Enver Khabadze for the Ajara State Ensemble of Folk

⁵⁸ Popular Ajarian dance, created via combining several traditional dances.

⁵⁹ A traditional round dance, transformed into a mass combative dance.

⁶⁰ Breaking the knee.

⁶¹ Dance of a lame.

⁶² Dances of arms.

⁶³ With jumping.

⁶⁴ Women's dance.

⁶⁵ Dance of women standing face to face.

⁶⁶ Women's dance.

⁶⁷ Humorous.

⁶⁸ Theatrical Dance where man dressed up as women dance with other men. Partners try to invite women to dance, while one of them tries to get rid of competitors with a stick.

Song and Dance, was first performed on the stage in the 1940s. *Gandagan* is still so popular, that it is included in the repertoire of almost all children's and youth, municipal or state ensembles throughout the country.

Another Ajarian example of scenic choreography is *Khorumi* - a traditional round dance performed by three, five or seven dancers, is a combination of several variants (Khikhadziruli, Tskhmorisuli, Naghvarevis Khorumi, Tsablanas khorumi, Kobaltas Khorumi, Ghorjomuli, Kobulehuri, Zeda Makhuntseturi, Ortabatumuri and others)⁶⁹. It was transformed into a mass combative dance, which develops in the following dramaturgy: I - appearance of the warriors, looking for the place to camp; II - spotting the enemy's camp; III - battle, attacking the enemy; IV - victory, triumph, or helping the wounded warrior. Traditional *Khorumi* is performed by odd number of performers with the accompaniment of *chiboni* and *doli*. However, according to some data, in the past it was accompanied by singing. *Khorumi* has a distinguished musical-rhythmic count 5/4, 5/8. Sometimes *Khorumi* ends in festive dance marching called *Gadakhveuli Khorumi*, though there are other variants as well when the dance ends in the withdrawal of the wounded from the battlefield⁷⁰. Bronze figurines of dancers dating back to the VII-VI centuries B.C. testify to the existence of the dance similar to *Khorumi*, Ethno-choreologists think that they reflect one of the moments of *Khorumi* dance - breaking the circle in half-sitting position, the first figurine shows the moment of the right-side reconnaissance, when the leader is spying on the enemy (Gvaramadze 1957). In addition to *Gandagan* and *Khorumi* other dances such as *Qolsama/Mkharuli*, *Gadakhveuli Khorumi*, *Ohoi Nana*, *Lazuri* (with added women membership and movements) have been arranged for stage performance.

Ajarian folk music and dance have been significantly affected by the Olympiads - periodically held all over the country from 1927, their positive side was to show the traditions of the province. However, such Olympiad-inspections had their performance criteria, which basically implied the activities intended to make strong impression on the audience. Obviously, musical-choreographic traditions of our region were presented on the stage by mass and scaly musical-choreographic examples created from folk material, whilst authentic folklore coexisted in everyday life. Application of folk motives and combination of various musical and dance examples under specific title became more topical after World War II. The activities of that time had ideological propagandistic function: e.g. there appeared songs about homeland, native region, districts, political and historical figures.

⁶⁹ Variations of dance 'Khorumi', depending on the performing where the dance is spread across regions.

⁷⁰ The confreres withdraw a half-recumbent warrior from the battlefield.

I think, the strive towards scaly and scenic showiness resulted in the inculcation of the principles of European polyphony and academic choir, performance of vocal-dance examples by large ensembles, performance of the examples with dynamic nuances, adjustment of vocal repertoire to choreographic ensembles. Application of *garmoni*⁷¹, *davuli*⁷², *zurna*⁷³, group of homogeneous instruments and lately folk-instrumental band in addition to traditional musical instruments - *doli*⁷⁴, *chiboni*⁷⁵, *chonguri*⁷⁶ as accompaniment to Ajarian songs and dances served the purpose to achieve the sound to the mass taste. Extension of voice-part performance by several singers echoed the afore-mentioned criteria⁷⁷. As well as the tendency of transforming three-part songs into four-part examples, when Ajara is distinguished in unique three and four-part folk examples of free-contrast polyphony. These factors also determined the necessity of conducting the singing process.

All the afore-mentioned significantly changed the performance manner of vocal and choreographic examples, overlapping in Ajarian examples the musical and choreo-dialectal features typical for this part of the country.

The tendencies introduced to the region's leading concert locations also affected rural folklore. Ensembles functioning at the houses of culture in the villages as well as tradition bearers tried not to lag behind the ongoing creative performance process. They actively participated in the events, thanks to which many folk examples were revealed at the time and were thus preserved, though the activities of those days put traditional art too, within the frame.

The impact of performance tendencies introduced in the past century on rural folklore was so big that even people's understanding of folklore notion changed. The performance tendencies strange to folk art provoked unintentional disregard of folk features among tradition bearers, its negative results are still obvious. Over the time, it became difficult to distinguish folklore and the product of scenic performance.

For instance, the practice of voice duplication in songs and shift of individual movements to mass, confined improvisation. When a dancer or singer makes movements or performs a song together with mass improvisation as well as variance is lost. Besides, combination of different song and dance variants practically reduced the possibility for a folk example to exist as a variant, which was later manifested in the homogeneity of repertoire.

⁷¹ Keyboard instrument similar to piano or button accordion .

⁷² A large double-headed drum that is played with mallets, is used in the folk music of Turkey.

⁷³ A wind instrument, it accompanies dances, wrestling matches, wedding ceremonies and festivities in neighboring countries of Georgia - Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

⁷⁴ A widespread percussion *instrument* all over Georgia, It represents a small wooden cylinder, both sides of which are covered with leather.

⁷⁵ Traditional Ajarian bagpipe.

⁷⁶ A four-string lute.

⁷⁷ Traditionally, each voice part is sung by one performer, bass - by several.

*Tavkatsi*⁷⁸ and *Tavmosame*⁷⁹ were transformed into the notions of conductor and choreographer, there appeared authors of songs and dances, of music accompanying dance, authors of dance movements. Anonymity of folk source was lost. Choreographers and conductors with special education were in charge of rural performers. Tradition bearer performers are still members of different ensembles. My experience of working with tradition bearers has shown that in the past the performers, whose performance manner was frequently changed by conductors, lost their skill to direct song and to properly perform a folk example. Disregard and negligence of genre and other peculiarities is still a problem today - one-choir performance of the example for two choirs, alteration of slow and swift sections of the song, application of European composition principles and scenic arrangement of dance.

I think mass performance of voice-parts and movements resulted in the simplification of polyphonic forms in song and frequent repetition of the established “movements” in dance on the background of the unique polyphonic examples existing in the region’s folk heritage.

Of all the tendencies inculcated in the 20th century performance manner is still topical and catchy. It does not proceed from the peculiarities and character of Ajarian songs and dances, but is oriented towards improved, academic performance of the examples.

In Ajara today vocal and dance folklore is viable, which alongside uninterrupted development of the tradition also implies its modern thinking, preservation of the surviving tradition and efficiency.

In Ajara today the process of hereditary renewal, actualization of folklore and “producing” new creative product from it, is going on unlike the practices of the 20th century. Currently noticeable are the attempts of eluding last century’s tendencies and consideration of the features, naturally characteristic of folklore in the authentic environment. For instance, municipal and local state ensembles are actively involved in the revival process of Ajarian songs, with the participation of young singers and choirmasters (including me) together with old generation. As a result, in the scenic practice of the last decade the number of Ajarian songs and their variants has significantly increased, there also appeared the songs and their variants never performed before. Frequent occurrence is syncretic⁸⁰ performance of songs by folk singers with the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments. Vocal ensembles have started reviving dance instrumental pieces and syncretic links between music and its corresponding dance movements which were weakened.

⁷⁸ The performer, who directs the song.

⁷⁹ The performer, who directs the dance.

⁸⁰ Performing of song together with dance movement.

Ajarian folklore will long remain the cultural heritage which meets modern aesthetic demands, even though it is being learned, revived and rethought anew not only via oral transmission⁸¹, but also via musical collections, audio-video materials, books, performance propaganda and special learning by folk ensembles, television projects play important role in this too. Today these examples organically merge with daily and concert practice. As if the forgotten tradition is returning to people, thus continuing second life, being introduced anew in new historical epoch.

As for the performance of folk dance, observed here is the superiority of scenic choreography tendencies and performance style, however luckily, beyond the dances widely introduced in scenic practice there are different folk variants and individual movements from various districts, gorges and often villages. Many dance movements found among tradition bearers, in archival materials, in the repertoire of municipal ensembles require proper attention.

In my opinion, cultural policy of the state significantly determines relevant activities in relation to folklore. Setting the safeguarding-revival-popularization of folklore as a priority, scientific study and suitable understanding of past values in the present by corresponding institutions will be positively reflected on the performance of traditional song and dance in future.

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⁸¹ Descended from generation to generation.