THE MULTIPART LYRICAL CRADLE SONG IN GEORGIA

The aim of the present paper is to study the artistic features of the Georgian multipart “cradle song” and to determine the bases of its provenance. In my research I have used existing transcriptions, fieldwork and archive audio-materials and also commercially available recording.

Before starting analyzing “the cradle song” (lullaby) I think it useful to draw the reader’s attention to a homophonic song meant to lull the baby to sleep. In Georgia this very significant part of folklore songs is known by the name “Nana”, and as anywhere else, in this country, too, it is performed by a woman. It is noteworthy that specimens of the same function and of a similar name can be found among many peoples of the Caucasus and the Mediterranean. For example, among Circassians (Adighean) “Nanoued” is the name of a mother’s song; in Armenia the cradle song bears the name “Nanik”; in Azerbaijan it is “Nenni-bala”, or “Nenni-nina”; in Italy and the Basque province in Spain, too, it is called “Nana” (Mamaladze, 1968:81-82). Scholars tend to explain this similarity by pointing to the presence of the ancient cultural traditions, common to this area.

Short phrases, the ostinato character, the rocking rhythm, an unclosed, “open” form (it goes on until the baby falls asleep), unlimited improvisation and simplicity assign a special place to this specimen in the genre system of authentic folklore. I do not call a lullaby a “song” deliberately. People themselves do not perceive it as a complete singing form. During the fieldworks I have heard many a time that “Nana is not a song, it is performed in a low voice, just to yourself, crooning” (Kaladadze, Shvelidze, Zumbadze, 1986). As Elene Lobzhanidze from Racha says “Nana is sung to lull the child to sleep, with “ghughuni” (imitating a dove sound) (Zandukeli, 1977:39).

The tunes of the Georgian lullaby are of two types. The first is characterized by a narrow range, repetitive movement of the melody by tones in secondal cohesion, preserving the same tonic level, moving from one sound to another by sliding, the use of an appeal-exclamation, transferring the voice with the ascending glissando to the highest note (ex. 1, 2). This type of lullaby is comparatively old and is very similar to the melodic formulae of magic incantations. The second type comprises the specimens more highly developed melodically, rhythmically and structurally, and they are chiefly characteristic of the lowland regions (ex. 3).

The repertoire of Georgian women also includes a homophonic or multipart ritual “lavnana”, which has a specific goal – to cure children of infectious diseases. It was
performed by family members or by invited performers who sung and walked around
the child’s bed or around the room, and quite often their singing was accompanied by
playing stringed instruments (panduri, chonguri [long neck lutes] or bowed chumiri).
(for more detail about this see Zambadze, 2005:115-128).

“Nana” (lullaby) and “lavnana” (healing song) are based on the same melody-
formula. The melody, which lulls the child to sleep, is as archaic as “lavnana”. In
the traditional folklore of a society with highly developed agriculture, thinking in melody-
formulae is a typical phenomenon (Zemtsovyky, 1972:185) and various genres of
Georgian musical folklore abound with such intonational formulae (Aslanishvili,

The melody starts at the third degree of a scale (the third can be minor, major, or
neutral) moves up towards the fifth degree, then descends towards the tonic, it is
characterized by a triple metre, soft syncopation, the range of fifth, and moderate me-
loodic movements without jumps. It is melodious and has a clearly defined closed
form (ex. 4).

The functional differences between “Nana” and “lavnana” is mainly manifested in
verbal texts. The simplest specimens of lullabies are sometimes performed without
any words, just on the vowel “a”. In some cases the single word “nana” is repeated
from beginning to end. In cases of the presence of long poetic texts a baby is asked
to go to sleep, the parent is caressing a child, the child’s world, his/her happy future,
historical, social or patriotic motifs are also accentuated. As for the versions of the
healing “lavnana”, their texts are concentrated only on pleasing the “Batonebi” (“masters”,
“lords”) who bring a disease to the child, so the song is aimed at gaining their favour.
The text of a healing song sometimes also mentions a few mythical symbols, like a
gold cradle, flowers, poplar (tree of life), sapphire, wine cellar etc.

I think that the general similarity of the situations of the lullaby and the healing
song (baby in bed), and also an indirect semantic connection between them (peaceful
sleep is an essential condition for a child’s health) result in a general musical-aesthetic
similarity; they also underline the resemblance of the intonational and verbal formulae,
the proximity of the metric-rhythmic picture, the calm, moderate tempo, and a soft
manner of performance. All these features sometimes result in a neglect of the exist-
ing differences between these genres and causes confusion between the titles of these
two functionally different specimens.

As I have already mentioned above, in Georgia, along with the specimens of
monophonic lullabies there are also a multipart lullabies. It is not a genre of traditional
devotional folklore, it is not meant to put the child to sleep, it should be grouped with
the lyrical songs and may be performed by both men and women, or by mixed
ensembles.

It is difficult to say when did the multipart lullaby become a part of the family
musical tradition. Unlike the monophonic specimens, which were performed several
times each day, multipart lullabies could have been performed only on exceptional
occasions, like during childbirth rituals, or when the baby was first put into the
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The Cradle. Also, when gathered to do some collective work, it would not have been difficult for the relatives and neighbors to perform a lullaby as a multipart song. Therefore the family musicking may be considered to be one of the ways of facilitating the emergence of the multipart model.

The second way leads us to the choral traditional music concerts which started at the end of the 19th century. This small part of women’s traditional folklore, which, as scholars suggest, may be dated to the remote past, was not forgotten or lost by men (in the folklore ensembles of that period only men took part), on the contrary it was preserved in the intonational fund and used in multipart lyrical compositions. Undoubtedly this process was greatly promoted by the national liberation movement, which brought to the foreground the foremost obligation of the Georgian mother—to bring up heroes selflessly devoted to their motherland. In the first official choir of Georgian traditional song, known as “Lado Agmashvili Choir,” only men sang (they also had a female group, which performed only once and was disbanded). Multipart male versions of lullabies (Kakhetian “Nana” and Megrelian “Nanina”) were included in the program of the choral performance in 1894–1895 (Lekishvili, 1961:50, 57–58). It is noteworthy that the polyphonic lullaby was among the first genres that Georgian men performed on the concert stage.

The first transcribed examples of multipart lullabies appeared by the end of the 19th century. In the first issue of the journal “Nobati” in 1884 an example of a three-part lullaby with the text by Ilia Chavchavadze, and recorded from Romano Dzamashvili, was published (Dzamashvili, 1984: 16). In a songbook of Georgian folk songs, assembled by Zakaria Chkhikvadze for educational purposes, there are two examples of polyphonic lullabies, with texts written by Ilia Chavchavadze and Akaki Tsereteli (Chkhikvadze, 1896:3,15).

Sometimes the reason for men performing a lullaby was the socio-cultural environment where women lived. In the 1930s a Georgian composer Shalva Mshvedlidze recorded a two-part specimen of the Adjarian lullaby (ex. 5) from men in the village of Gurdzavli, because according to local custom he had no right to meet local women (Mshvedlidze, 1932:2/33). Over the centuries this region of southwestern Georgia had been under Turkish sway and the Moslem religion forbade women to meet strange men, the more so to sing in their presence.

In different regions the musical language of multipart lullabies is based on the compositional principles of the polyphony characteristic of different provinces.

In 1919–1921 Giorgi Svanidze recorded specimens of drone diaphony from Kartlian women. The stanzas are separated by spoken phrases based on a melodic jump on the fifth (ex. 6).

A two-part specimen, recorded by M. Jordania in Kakheti, in 1961, is also very interesting; it is very similar to the “lavanas to be performed at God’s court” (ex. 7).

In the village of Pari in Svaneti in a two-part lullaby, sung by the members of one family (recorded by Sh. Mshvedlidze), it is easy to notice a similarity to chordal unit polyphony characteristic of this province (ex. 8). The Svan, settled in Kakheti, members
of “the Zedashe” ensemble perform the three-part lullaby to the accompaniment of
the chuniri (bowed lute) and the change (harp) (audio ex. 1). Lately a four-part
version of the “Svan nanaila” (nanaila – Svan name for lullaby) also appeared in the
repertoire of the ensemble “Pesvebi” (Roots) (ex. 9).

The two-part “nana” recorded by the composer David Toradze in the Racha pro-
vince, definitely represents a recording of the two upper voices of the three-part
version; in the parenthesis I have given the bass sounds (I-VII-I) supposedly to be
performed by the bass part. In this version the top part follows the supposed bass
part in an octave (ex. 10).

The greater number of polyphonic (three-part) lullabies occurs in the Samegrelo
province, the province where lyricism is the chief characteristic element of musical
performance style. The characteristic traits of the Megrelian specimens are the
descending type of the melody, which bears affinity to the intonational world of funeral
dirges. The multipart Megrelian specimens abound in the features characteristic of
secondary, “stage” folklore – the use of dynamic nuances (pianissimo, crescendo,
diminuendo, and ritardato). In Garaqaniadze’s opinion concentrating attention on the
dynamic nuances in the secondary performance may have stemmed from the influ-
ence of European choral music (Garaqaniadze, 2007:118). There are cases of singing
with a closed mouth, and using such a complicated song structure as alternating a
trio with a choir.

The three-part lullabies, widely established in choral practice, are present in the
recordings of the 1930s. The practice of naming multipart lullabies according to their
regional identity, which is very characteristic of stage folklore, must have originated
during this very period. The performance of the multipart “nanina” at variety con-
certs at Soviet art festivals of folklore music, discs with its recordings and its fre-
quent airplay facilitated its popularization; on the other hand this newly found popu-
ularity played a negative role as in the repertoires of many different choirs and in family
ensembles only one, the most popular variant of lullabies, were established. This
similarity is observed even in their notated transcriptions. The three-part lullabies,
recorded at different times in Guria by Kote Potskhverashvili, Grigol Chkhikvadze,
Anzor Erkomaishvili, Nana Valishvili and in Imereti by Edisher Savitski, bear great
similarity to one another (ex. 11-15). In my opinion, they are different interpreta-
tions of the same song, based on a traditional foundation and subsequently popularized by
means of concerts and the mass media. This is how Vano Mchedlishvili’s version of
“Kakhetian lullaby”, Nino Togoniadze’s “Kartlian lullaby” became widespread. Avxenti
Megrelidze’s “Gurian lullaby” became very popular because it was used in Siko
doltsi’s early Georgian classic film “Dariko”.

Especially interesting is the study of multipart lullabies in Guria, a province well-
known for the most contrapuntal polyphonic thinking.

The specimen that has survived as “Guruli nana” (Gurian lullaby) reveals the
influence of Avxenti Megrelidze, the master of Georgian choral art (1877-1953).
He arranged a lullaby he had heard from his mother Melinki Bolkvadze for the ensem-
ble of women chonguri-players (Moistrapishvili, 2005:274).

The ascending movement from the third of the A scale and the range of the fifth attest to its association with devotional-ritual chant. Though an unusual fact for traditional everyday life – playing several chonguris together, the alternating of the solo-singer with the duet against the background of the chonguri accompaniment, performing the bass part with a closed mouth, inserting recitative phrases between the stanzas, the cadences resulting from the unison leading of the high voices - all these features reveal the artificial character of the item, specially created for a stage performance of the academic choral program (Megrelidze, 1986: No 1).

In Gurian versions of the multipart Lullaby the verbal text is suitable for the ritual of putting the baby into the cradle for the first time.

“İlias nana” (İlia’s lullaby) is attested as one of the names of the lyrical multipart cradle song in Guria. In this version the Georgian poet İlia Chavchavadze’s well-known poem is used as the verbal material. Avxenti Megrelidze reworked this specimen as well on the basis of the lullaby melody performed by Irakli Gujabadze, living in Supsa in the 40s of the last century, but this lullaby is much closer to traditional musical thinking than the above-mentioned “Gurian Nana” remade by the same choir-master. By the traditional chords present in the three-part choir, with the refined, technically very complicated and elegant accompaniment of the chonguri, this lullaby is acknowledged as a brilliant specimen of patriotic lyrics (see the notated supplement). The refrain, inserted between every two stanzas, makes it a special form (bars 16-20).

The lullaby recorded in 1988 by ethnomusicologists Nana Valishvili from the People’s Artist of Georgia, the leader of the ensemble “Iadoni” Giorgi Salukvadze (1919-1990), stands apart from other versions. This version (ex. 16) begins with a comparatively long, 8-bar chonguri intro. The middle part of the instrumental texture represents the tune of the Gurian childbirth round-dance song “Mze shina da mze garet”. This song was recorded in 1902 by Dimitri Araqishvili as a lullaby (Araqishvili, 1908, No. 1). The triple metre with a soft syncopate reveals the connections with a round dance.

Most of the Gurian multipart lullabies and some Megrelian versions are connected to the choir-master Kitsi Gegechkori, and are performed with the chonguri accompaniment.

According to Artem Erkomaishvili (1887-1967) in Guria lullabies, like the healing songs, were performed in the old 1st (f-a-c-f) and 2nd (f-a-c-e) tunings. In the specimen recorded from Giorgi Salukvadze the chonguri is in the 3rd (f-g-e-g) tuning.

The manner of performing “Nanina” is indicated as “dasaghhighinebeli” (to be performed in a crooning manner, almost humming) (Erkomaishvili, 2005:13). According to Artem Erkomaishvili’s information “Nanina” in Guria was performed like other chonguri songs by the first voice, the “modzakhili” voice (voice that follows) and the bass part (ibid). Generally, the traditional authentic performance of men is characterized by singing in a tense, open, full voice. In the multipart lyrical specimens this is replaced
by a specially softened (possibly imitating women), tender, “sweetened” manner, which, undoubtedly, is conditioned by the specific character of the lullaby genre (mother’s emotions, childish images) and lyrical character.

In Artem Erkomaishvili’s noted collection “Nana” is presented in two variants. The first is a monophonic performance of the multipart lullaby with a chonguri accompaniment and it coincides with the top voice of Avxenti Megrelidze’s “Guruli nana”. The other is a quite different song which is closer to the men’s joyful “Nanina” which is attested to by the developed melodic line, a rather complicated bass part, and the refrain “ovdelia”, alien to lulling songs. The great artist seems to have adjusted the lulling text to “Nanina”, which was similar in its mood to the former song.

A very original specimen was added to the multipart Gurian “Nanina” songs by the ensemble “Georgica” (ex.17, audio ex. 2). The complicated voice leading, the complex chords resulting from the linear development, are a vivid example of the improvisation possibilities of the male trio. It is unlikely that this song could reach such a technical level in the women’s performance (Tsitsishvili, 2007).

The multipart lyrical “Cradle nana” is distinguished by the simplicity of its musical language, structural laconicism and the simple forms of voice-leading. It has predominantly a homophonic-harmonious texture. It is never polytextual, so the same words are always uttered by the all the voices together. There are no wide ascending or descending voice motions on a same syllable. Quite often singing is accompanied by a musical instrument (panduri, chonguri, chumiri, changi). The role of the accompaniment is chiefly determined by the chordal-harmonic strengthening of the melodic line or texture. Sometimes in the instrumental part the exact doubling of the melodic line or a slight transformation of the melody takes place. The whole intonational material unfolds within the limits of one mode. The modulative plan is undeveloped; if it exists it does not go beyond two tonal centres. The bass part plays the role of a harmonic function. Rhythmic freedom is not allowed. A simple, clear-cut rhythm predominates. Cadences frequently occur in the fifth; the melodic principle, based on moderate voice motions without jumps, leads.

Apart from singing by one ensemble there is also a call and response singing – the solo singer alternating with the choir, or the trio with the choir. The songs consist of stanzas.

In spite of the simple structure these specimens are highly emotional and structurally streamlined. The multipart “Nanina” is an original specimen of lyrical singing.
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Notes

1 Editor’s note: the title “People’s artist” was the highest level of governmental acknowledgment from Soviet officials that artists and sportsmen could have in the USSR.

Audio Examples


References


Notated Collections


Example 4. *lavano* (Kartli-Kakheti). Recorded by A. Benashvili, from "Kartuli khnebi"
Example 6. Akvisis Nana (Kartli). Recorded by G. Svanidze. v. Dzvileti, Znauri dist. See archive of Folk State Centre #13/36

Example 8. Akvis Nana (Svaneti). Recorded by S. Mshvelidze. v. Pari, Mestia dist. See archive of Folk Statre Centre #13/36


Example 13. Nana (Imereti). Recorded by E. Savitski. From archive of Folk Stare Centre #5/177


Example 15. Nana (Guria). Arranged by A. Megrelidze. “Sakartvelos Matsne”. P. 15

Example 16. lavmnaa (Guria). Recorded by N. Valishvili. Ozurgeti, 1988
Example 17. *Nana* (Guria). Version of ensemble “Georgica”. Transcribed by M. Khukhunaishvili