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**PERFORMANCE INTERPRETATION OF GEORGIAN
CHURCH CHANTING IN LITURGICAL PRACTICE
(ON THE EXAMPLE OF KARTLI-KAKHETIAN CHANTING)**

Hello and welcome! My name is Beka Bidzinashvili. I'm a PhD student in the Doctoral Programme of Musicology at Tbilisi State Conservatoire, specializing in church music. This presentation is part of my doctoral research and is dedicated to the study and practical application of musical thinking and performance issues in church music. The research process is not yet complete; therefore, the goal of the presentation is to pose the issue of using melismas in Kartli-Kakhetian chanting and to share the results of the research with the audience. A crucial factor in the formulation of the research problem and its solution, is my long experience and the background of a practicing singer-chanter and choirmaster, as well as the environment in which I live and work. My daily contact with Kartli-Kakhetian chanting over the years has led me to the conclusion that chanting "Karbelashvili mode" from notations lacks naturalness; the mentioned notations do not fully reflect the performance characteristics and stylistic features of Kartli-Kakhetian chanting to be considered. Specifically, we assume that the Kartli-Kakhetian chanting, just like singing, **sounds unnatural without melismas**. The absence of melismas is the reason for performing hymns in equal meter, which creates a sense of monotony.

Based on performance practice and experience, the hypothesis needs scientific substantiation. Therefore, I started delving deeper into the issue. It can be said, that For the study, of key importance were the notated hymns of liturgy published by Dimitri Arakishvili in 1905¹, the majority of which he transcribed from Tbilisi singers. What is particularly important for us is that several hymns were also obtained from Karbelashvili brothers. The examples passed down from the Karbelashvilis, which are presented with melismas in Arakishvili's notations, turned into the starting point of our research journey.

Sheet music, audio materials, archival materials, and expedition sources served as the basis for the research.

When working on the notated recordings, it is extremely important to consider several factors, such as the knowledge and experience of both performer and transcriber, as well as whether audio media was used in the process of transcription; a phonograph in the case of our research. Considering these factors, we systematized the notated recordings

¹ D. Shughliashvili dedicated interesting research to this collection, and presented at the 2nd International International Symposium in 2005.

and identified three cases of hymn transcription:

First, transcription of hymns by the bearers of oral tradition (this is the notated material of the Karbelashvili brothers). It is known that they themselves studied the notation system and wrote down into notes what they chanted). Second, transcription of the audio material recorded on the phonograph. This includes the Dimitri Arakishvili's notated recordings. Third aspect involves transcription of musical material from tradition bearers right in the performance process by those knowledgeable in notation. In this case, I refer to the recordings of Pilimon Koridze and Ippolitov-Ivanov.

The paper discusses the methodology used by Arakishvili and the Karbelashvilis in the process of recording the hymns.

The Liturgy recorded by D. Arakishvili is particularly enriched in terms of melismas, which can be explained by the fact that he transcribed directly from the audio recording, and captured not only main melody but also the performance characteristics.

In the variants notated by the Karbelashvili family (in the published collections of Vespers and Matin hymns by Vasil Karbelashvili), we sometimes encounter notes written in fine print within the cadence of a hymn, which is an attempt to capture the melismas. In addition, our attention was drawn to the notation symbols used in the notated examples, which is an interesting interpretation of the conditional signs for documenting melismas. Instead of a horizontal line indicating the duration of the notes, a single (or two parallel) wavy line is presented.

In the archival materials of Vasil Karbelashvili², we found a notation entry containing a conditional sign (which is not confirmed in the published examples), which Vasil Karbelashvili refers to as “chakvra.” This sign caught our attention because “chakvra”, or accent, is indeed a necessary technique component for performing melismas. It is impossible to perform melismas perfectly without accent. Therefore, the used term “chakvra” reflects an attempt to capture certain performance characteristics.

Consequently, Arakishvili and the Karbelashvili brothers had different approaches to the documentation of musical text.

Performance characteristics of audio recordings are the most reliable source for research. Naturally, they have found their place in our research³. Among the audio recordings there are: the recordings of the Kashueti choir - the Divine Liturgy and Vespers-Matins service; the recordings of Levan Mughalashvili's⁴ choir; monophonic recordings of Bishop Grigol Tsertsvadze, which, as he notes, he learned at David-Gareji; The recordings made in 1903 “Shen gigalobt” by Tsamtsishvili's choir and Father Estathe Beladidze's

² Repository of the National Center of Manuscripts, V. Karbelashvili's Archive Fund

³ These are the recordings made in the early 20th century after the 1940s, approximately 100 audio tracks that include examples of both Kartli-Kakhetian songs and Kartli-Kakhetian chants.

⁴ (Levan Mughalashvili, in addition to being a good choirmaster is said to have served as a deacon with Polievktos Karbelashvili.)

“Sultatana” and “Tsmindao ghmerto”, which I myself recorded during the expedition. The recently discovered audio sequences from old Georgian films, “Kajana” and “Arsena” turned out to be extremely important. In “Kajana” walking around the church is accompanied with chanting Kartli-Kakhetian “Ghirs ars cheshmaritad”, and “Shen khar venakhi” is chanted in the wedding scene of “Arsena.” Example 4, audio collage.

I will present fragments of two hymns from these recordings, where evident is the use of melismas.

Thus, observation of the mentioned audio material confirmed the validity of our assumption regarding the existence of melismas in Kartli-Kakhetian performance tradition. Delving into the recordings, their comparison and analysis revealed diversity of melismatic elements, ecclesiastical manner of performance using melismas, and connection to Kartli-Kakhetian performance tradition. Parallel to studying the notated and audio materials, I conducted expedition work: interviewed and recorded the clergy and tradition bearers, as the information preserved by old folk singers and clergy through auditory memory reveals a direct connection with the performance issues of the research material. Among them, noteworthy is what my teacher, the late Andro Simashvili⁵ used to say: At the end of “Artanuli Alilo” first voice descends as if chanting. After such explanation, when singing this phrase, he would slightly lower his voice, sing the melismas in a relatively simple mode, and finish the song with calm and serene performance. His statement highlights the connections between singing and chanting, which was confirmed by our analysis of the musical material: the mentioned section of “Artanuli Alilo” is a cadential formula prevalent in ecclesiastical chanting, encountered in the hymns of the Divine Liturgy and the litanies.

Chanting and folk singing are two distinct yet closely related phenomena of Georgian traditional music. Over centuries, sacred and secular cultures influenced each other, and chanting and singing coexisted. This is indicated by Karbelashvili brothers, and is confirmed by the research of contemporary Georgian musicologists. As it is known, the tradition of folk singing is very strong in Georgia; until the mid-20th century, thold way of life was followed here – people sang together during work, and singing was an inseparable part of life in general. As for chanting, had it not been for the artificial disruption of its tradition, we would have much more knowledge about its performance features.

Considering close connection between singing and chanting in Georgian tradition, research into the performance issues of ecclesiastical chanting and use of melismas; musical thinking through formulas surviving in people’s memory was revealed during interactions with tradition bearers. This prompted me to search for common segments and formulas in songs and hymns. The research has shown, that in established performance practices, common melodic archetypes transform in various ways within the traditions of singing and chanting. In folk singing, we often include melismas, which is an inherent feature of

⁵ Prominent Kakhetian choirmaster and singer (1924-2019)

singing. As for chanting, we sing with moderate additions of melismas.

Although the living tradition of chanting has been lost and has not reached us, people's memory preserves the information about the performance of church chanting, which becomes evident in the process of verbalizing the performance techniques by chanters. In this process, they distinguish between the performance features of chanting and singing. Andro Simashvili used to point to the performance of a segment from a hymn, when teaching, and urged us to moderation in singing. After conducting the research, Andro Simashvili's statement "It should be chanted" acquired greater significance.

Knowledge in the peculiarities of melismas typical for Kartli-Kakhetian song helps us on the difficult path of studying the peculiarities of melismas in Georgian chanting, which I deepened through the research conducted for the Master's degree⁶ (2018), which dealt with revealing the performance diversity of Kakhetian songs. In the process of studying the peculiarities of performing melodic ornamentation – also known as *melisma* – it is crucial to determine whether *melisma* is a spontaneous combination of sounds or a deliberate melodic line. This issue is the subject of special research in chanting, and we will attempt to clarify the matter through the example of the living, oral, polyphonic tradition of singing: a good singer is thoroughly acquainted with melody, masters the technique of melismas precisely, which is reflected in his clear comprehension of the shape of each *melisma*, its variants, and their diversity. When singing he freely uses these melismas, consciously embellishing and enhancing the song, thereby strengthening emotional expression. In coordination with the second soloist, they strive to create new, more refined and interesting figures. Good singers know exactly what freedom they have when improvising and embellishing a song with melismas, and they will not exceed the limits or violate the rules and laws, developed over centuries and characteristic of Kartli-Kakhetian songs. Similar to singing, a thoughtful approach to the performance of melismas is also evident in chanting, which I will explore in my future research. When listening to the audio recordings of chanting, it becomes clear that the chanter has the knowledge about melismas, When listening to the audio recordings of chanting, it becomes obvious that the chanter has the knowledge of melismas, understands the technique of performing each *melisma*, and its diversity, and when chanting, whatever phrase is sung, he can embellish and adorn the hymn. Indeed, further research is needed to determine the relation between the types of melismas in chanting and singing; however, at this stage, I can already note that there are both common and distinct melismas in Kartli-Kakhetian singing and chanting. Common melismas are characterized by short turns. Main difference is in the amount of melismas used in folk songs. Secular folk singing is freer, possesses greater freedom and individuality, and accordingly, there is more freedom in the performance of

⁶ Master's thesis "For the Study of Kakhetian Song Tradition (Based on the Examples of Telavi, Shilda, and Arthana Songs)." B. Bidzinashvili, 2018.

melismas. Chanting is more modest and has greater inner depth, and therefore the melismas in chanting are simpler. With more clarity our thoughts are illustrated on the slide, which shows the notated examples of different melismas with a common pattern, which are typical of Kartli-Kakhetian style of singing and chanting; these are my transcriptions of audio recordings.

Example 1, 2:

The first example is the most common melisma characteristic of Kartli-Kakhetian singing. When singing a melisma, transition from one note of main melodic line to the neighboring note occurs through rapid singing of additional notes. In the presented musical example, the first notes of melisma are marked with a small line above, which I have conditionally used to present the performance technique that Karbelashvili refers to as “chakvra”, as I have mentioned in the paper. Perfect melisma in Kakhetian song requires two of the so-called “chakhra” (accentuation), for which the sound must be “choked”/“broken” in the throat. Example. At this time, the performance is much freer. As for chanting, as our observations have shown at this stage, it has only one “chakvra”, i.e. one accent is needed for melisma to sound more moderate and restrained.

In the second example, two melismas come from pattern. These melismas are found in almost the same notation of the Divine Liturgy recorded by D. Arakishvili, indicating the accuracy in the documentation conducted by composer and ethnomusicologist, D. Arakishvili.

The opinions we have expressed need additional argumentation, while the posed issues require further research and deepening for performing Kartli-Kakhetian ecclesiastical chanting with greater perfection. In the next stage of the research, the study of melismatics will be conducted not only in relation to folk songs but also in the context of local chanting traditions of other Christian countries.

Melisma is one of the most important means of embellishing and adorning a hymn, without which the performance of Kartli-Kakhetian chanting lacks fullness. At the same time, singing with melismas requires great professionalism and caution in order to maintain the characteristics of ecclesiastical liturgical music. It is clear that ancient chanters, who learned chanting through a living tradition, were well aware of all the performing nuances of Kartli-Kakhetian ecclesiastical chanting, including a thoughtful and orderly system of melismatics, which is so necessary and important for correct and natural performance