

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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CAUCASUS MUSIC

OVERVIEW

Music is a naturally occurring human behaviour passed down orally. With the invention of alphabets it became possible to record music through a musical notation system that used letters to represent musical notes.

Music has always been an important cultural and social bond between people. Besides serving religious and spiritual needs, music both entertains and unites the listeners. Music is not restricted by time, place or class of people. People in all times, places and from every age and social class have enjoyed music.

Many cultures in the world had their own musical styles generated from ancient times before the invention of written language. There are ancient depictions and artifacts discovered in the Caucasus region demonstrating the historical roots of music in the region.

With the conversion to Christianity, music began to contain religious hymns and chants in the South Caucasus. With the spread of Islam, zikr rituals became part of the musical culture of Muslim peoples in the North Caucasus.

Sometimes the music in the Caucasus changes from one region to another, but sometimes they share the same tunes and instruments. Each culture has developed their own music independent of one other. They created secular music for special occasions and for the military.

Classical music arrived in Transcaucasia at the end of the 19th century. Music schools were opened, and symphony orchestras were created. The genre of instrumental music was developed.

The Soviets regarded folk music highly and encouraged folk singers by awarding prizes. During the 1930s folklore was used to promote patriotic and communal activities.

However, the Soviet artistic institution *Proletkult* declared war on the cultural heritage of all Soviet nations, and during Stalin's repressions in the 1930s, thousands of musicians were arrested, exiled and executed for being enemies of the people.

ANCIENT PERIOD

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: According to the Greek historian, Xenophon in the 3rd century BCE, Georgians sang secular, military songs while performing round dances.



Archeologists have discovered a wind instrument, the *Salamuri* in Mtskheta 2nd millennium BCE which is the earliest evidence showing that a musical system in Georgia existed.

Salamuri

In the 1st century BCE, the Greek historian Strabo wrote that the Georgians performed multi-voiced chants as they went into battle.

ARMENIA: Armenians have a long tradition of singing songs, both secular and religious. Movsēs Xorenac'i made comments on the ancient ceremonial hymn for the birth of the god Vahagn dating back to the 3rd millennium BCE.

There were songs sung by *Vipasans* in ancient Armenia in the 1st millennium BCE that were later called *Gusans*.

AZERBAIJAN: The Caucasian Albanian culture had polyphonic choral songs. The three most ancient musical instruments found in the Caucasus were found in the Mingachevir Water Basin - a *tutak*, *ney* and *zurna* made of bone or clay.

NORTH CAUCASUS:

CHECHNYA: Polyphonic music arose in the Vainakh land in the pre-Christian era. Polyphonic singing was part of their rituals to appease the spirits. The music of the Vainakhs included songs that were secular, for the dance and military.

Questions:

1- What common features did music of different cultures of the Caucasus share?

Readings:

1- Erkvanidze, M., "The Georgian Musical System", 6th International Workshop on Folk Music Analysis, 15-17 June, 2016.

2- History of development of music <https://azerbaijan.az/en/related-information/256>

3- Petrosyan, A.& Bobokhyan, A., "Music in Prehistoric Armenia", *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, April 2015, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 259-265.

POST – CLASSICAL PERIOD

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: Georgian music was mostly choral and polyphonic chanting. Polyphonic singing in Georgian music dated back to the introduction of Christianity.



Georgian hymnography: In the 10th century, monks like Ioane-Zosime developed Georgian hymnography.

With the adoption of Christianity in the 4th century, the foundation was laid for sacred music which was performed as part of rituals in Georgia. In the 10th century, Ioane Minckhi was one of the most distinguished hymnographers.

Changi: A bronze statue dated to the 6th century BCE, points to the ancient use of a musical instrument, the *Changi*, in Georgia.

Bronze statue, 6th BCE

ARMENIA:

Psalms: With the adoption of Christianity, monks began to write psalms (religious poems set to music) and sermons. The first psalms were written by the monk Mesrop Mashtots and the patriarch Sahak Partev. The

Priest Komitas, composer Stepanos Syunetsi and Hovhan Odzetsi further developed psalms during the 7th and 8th centuries.

The psalms produced by Grigor Magistros, Petros Getadardz, Hovhannes Sarkavag, Hovhannes Erznkatsi and Nerses Shnorhali between the 11th and 12th centuries, are considered the masterpieces of this genre.

Sharakans (Chants): In the 7th century, Barsegh Chon, Anania Shirakaci and Komitas Aghtstsi were the first writers of a collection of sharakans called *Chonyntir sharaknots*. Armenian music reached its level of highest development between the 10th and 14th centuries. Mesrop Mashtots and his students wrote Sharakans sung in masses, and in the 12th century *Sharakans* were composed by the hymn composer Nerses Shnorhali.

New Musical Notation - Khazes: An Armenian special system of music notation was developed called *Khazes* (Haza) by Stephanos Syunetsi in the 8th century.

Gusans: *Gusans* were travelling bards who performed music and sang epical songs.

The names of ancient song types were mentioned by Movses Khorenatsi in the 5th century such as the songs called *qnarakan qerdutyun* (sacred, heroic, moral and entertainment songs), the songs called *erg banitsn* (story-telling songs), and the songs *paruts* and *tstsots* (small lyrical songs).

AZERBAIJAN:

New Musical Notation: A new system of musical notation found in the *Treatise on Music* was created by Sefieddin Urmavi in the 13th century.

Mugham: *Mugham* was developed based on the traditional Persian musical modal system *dastgah*. In the 15th century, the singers of the *Mugham* sang the *gazals* (odes) of Fuzuli, Habibi and Khata.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: One of the most important features of Vainakh folk music was polyphonic singing which could be performed in both religious and secular songs. Usually, the songs were performed without musical instruments.



Dechig-pandur: Some of the songs were accompanied by an instrument called a *dechig-pandur*, a three-stringed plucked instrument.

Phandar: A three-string plucked musical instrument, the phandar was similar to the panduri, used in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

Pandar

Illii: In the 13th century, the songs performed by bards included heroic ballads, *Illii* (or *illancha*), which were performed by male singers and depicted the struggle for freedom.

Yish: *Yishs* were comic, romantic, and melancholic love ballads sung by women. The lyrics were written by the singers themselves.

Nazmanash: The religious *nazmanash* (hymns) were performed by both male and female singers.

Questions:

1- What were the shared characteristics of the songs in the Caucasus?

Readings:

- 1- History of folk music <http://polyphony.ge/en/georgia/georgian-traditional-music/history-of-folk-music/>
- 2- Razmadze, N., "Georgian *Changi*", *Етнологко-антрополошке свеске* 27, (н.с.) 16, 2016.
- 3- Erkvanidze, M., "The Georgian Musical System", 6th International Workshop on Folk Music Analysis, 15-17 June, 2016.
- 4- History of development of music <https://azerbaijan.az/en/related-information/256>
- 5- Petrosyan, A.& Bobokhyan, A., "Music in Prehistoric Armenia", *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, April 2015, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 259-265.
- 6- Roudik, P.L., *Culture and Customs of the Caucasus*, Greenwood Press, 2009.

EARLY MODERN PERIOD

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: Till the 18th century, Georgian artists were under the influence of Middle-Eastern styles since Georgian aristocrats regularly spent time in Persia and the Georgian kings had professional musicians like the Armenian musician *Sayat Nova*.

Ashughs:

Sayat Nova: Nova was an Armenian court poet and musician of King Erekle II who wrote poems and performed them in Georgian, Armenian, and Azeri languages in Persian melodies.

Sayat Nova

Besarion Zakarias dze Gabashvili (Besiki): The Georgian poet Besiki was also a musician at the court of King Erekle II. He sang his songs accompanied by the *saz* and *tar* and used oriental poetry such as the *mukhambazi* and *baiati*.



Starting from the 18th century, Georgian music came under Russian and European influences and many foreign musicians travelled to perform in Tbilisi.

During the reign of king Archil II great contributions to the musical culture were made with his *Dghisa Da Ghamisa Gabaaseba* (Conversation between Day and Night) and *Sarke Tkmulta* (The Mirror of the Told).

Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani: The Georgian scholar Orbeliani wrote his dictionary *Sitqvis Kona* (The Dictionary of Georgian Modes and Idioms) which also included musical terminology and many important sources on Georgian music.

Vakhushti Batonishvili: Batonishvili authored the *Geography of Georgia* (Sakartvelos Georgapia) which included some information about Georgian musical culture.

ARMENIA:

Gusans: Folk music singers, *gusans*, continued to perform in Armenia. One of them was *Sayat-Nova* (*Harutyun Sayatyan*) who was a poet, singer and composer.

Sharkans: *Sharkans* were hymns or prose written in *khaz* (a system of notation) and sung with rhythm and pitch. Many women like Khosrovidukht of Goghtn and Sahakdukt of Siunik contributed to the development of *sharkans*.

Ashughs: The ashughs were the heirs of the gusans. The most notable ashugh was Sayat Nova (*Harutyun Sayatyan*) who was the first folk-song writer and performer.

In the 18th century, the ashughs were fully connected with the Armenian national school of ashughs.

AZERBAIJAN



Abdalgulabli Valeh.

Mugham: Mugham was performed by *khananda* (a singer) and *dastgah* (a trio). During this century, *tasnifs* (songs) were also included to mughams.

Khananda

Ashiqs: The art of the ashiq was usually performed in coffee houses in all the major cities of east and west Azerbaijan in Iran. The most prominent ashiqs were Khasta Gasim and

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA:

Illli: Heroic ballads *Illli* were also performed by male singers in the 18th century, depicting the struggle for freedom, their battles for protecting their land and community.

Questions:

1- What type of polyphonic music became widespread in the Caucasus?

Readings:

- 1- <http://polyphony.ge/en/georgia/georgian-traditional-music/history-of-folk-music/>
- 2- Roudik, P.L., *Culture and Customs of the Caucasus*, Greenwood Press, 2009.
- 3- Jaimaukha, A., *The Chechens, A handbook*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.

19TH CENTURY

SOUTH CAUCASUS

GEORGIA: Classical music arrived in Transcaucasia at the end of the 19th century. Symphonic orchestras and a branches of the Russian Musical Society were established in Baku and Tbilisi.

Ioane Batonishvili: At the beginning of the 19th century, Ioane Batonishvili published the comprehensive *Kalmasoba* and *Musikis Sakhelmdzghvanelo* (Music Manual) and gave detailed information about the Georgian musicians of ancient times, secular and sacred music, and the structure of the Georgian choir.

Davit Machabeli: In the second half of the 19th century, Georgian national music began to revive with the restoration of church hymns and folk songs. In his *Kartvelta Zneoba* (the Morality of the Georgians) Machabeli discussed preserving Georgian traditional chants.

Committee for the Revival of Georgian Chant: In 1860, the *Committee for the Revival of Georgian Chant* was established in Tbilisi. The Committee tried to revive the ancient traditional musical culture by transcribing and publishing church hymns, and providing valuable information about Georgian chants.



Georgian Folk Ensemble: The Georgian Folk Ensemble was established by Meliton Balanchivadze in 1882 and the first concert was held in Tbilisi.

Georgian Choir: The first ensemble was established in Georgia in 1885 and became part of the national liberation movement against the Russian occupation.



Tiflis Imperial Opera Theater: The first opera theater was built by an Italian architect Giovanni Scudieri, who had come to Tbilisi from Odessa in 1851. Italian opera singers and ballet dancers performed the operas of Russian and the European composers. In 1874, the theater completely burned down and was reopened in 1896.

Tiflis Imperial Opera Theater

Meliton Balanchivadze: Balanchivadze was an opera singer and composer who wrote his first Georgian opera called *Daredzhan Insidious* in 1897.

ARMENIA:

In Armenia, the genre of instrumental music was developed and there were medium size instrumental ensembles and symphony orchestras like the *Sinanyan Orchestra* (1861-1896) in the mid-19th century.

Sghomon Sghomonian: Sghomonian was an Armenian priest, musicologist, composer, arranger, singer, and choirmaster, who is considered the founder of the Armenian national school of music. He is recognized as one of the pioneers of ethnomusicology.

Sghomon Sghomonian

Gusan Sheram: Sheram was a *gusan* (poet-musician) and *ashug* (folk musician). He was the founder of the modern *gusan*.

Makar Grigori Yekmalyan: Yekmalyan was an Armenian composer, teacher and choirmaster who graduated from the Echmiadzin seminary. He wrote the *Patarag*, the Divine Liturgy, in 1892.



AZERBAIJAN: In the second half of the 19th century, *majlises* (musical gatherings) were held in Baku, Shamakhi and Karabakh.

Uzeir Hajibeyli: In the 19th century, the composer Hajibeyli made valuable contributions to Azerbaijani music with his operas *Leyli ve Mejnun* and *Koroghlu*.



Uzeir Hajibeyli

Khanande: Khanande were the singers of *Mugham*. A trio musicians who played the *tar* (long-necked plucked lute), the *kamancheh* (bowed musical instrument) and the *daf* (tambourine) accompanied Khanande singers. Usually, the khanande played the *daf*. The most prominent singers were Haji Husu and Cabbar Karyagdioglu.

Haji Husu and Mir Mohsun Navvab: *Husu* was a mugham singer, and *Navvab* was a poet and musician. Together Haji Husu and Mir Mohsun Navvab established a musicians' association in Shusha in the 1880s and discussed the current issues related to mugham. They also created a circle to train young singers. Navvab wrote a book called *The Art of Music*.

Jabbar Karyagdioglu: Khananda Karyagdioglu recorded 500 Azerbaijani folk songs and his own 250 songs, and he authored a book called *Azerbaijan Folk Songs*.

Ashuq music: Ashuq music continued to develop. Ashiq Ali and Ashiq Alasgar were highly regarded ashuqs of Azerbaijani folk songs.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA: Chechen professional music culture began in the mid-19th century. The first notation of Chechen folk songs was compiled and recorded by a Russian officer Ivan Klinger, who spent several years in captivity in Chechnya and was followed by other officers and writers throughout the 19th century.

Nazm: The *Nazm* was a genre of religious songs in between the phases of the *zikir* ceremonies during the Caucasian wars fought against the invaders, the Russians.

Questions:

1- What are the typical characteristics of instrumental music in this period?

Readings:

- 1- Roudik, P.L., *Culture and Customs of the Caucasus*, Greenwood Press, 2009.
- 2- Georgian Chant History <http://www.georgianchant.org/history/>
- 3- Jaimaukha, A., *The Chechens, A handbook*, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.

20TH CENTURY

SOUTH CAUCASUS



GEORGIA: Classical music arrived to Georgia at the end of the 19th century. Symphonic orchestras and a branch of the *Russian Musical Society* (Tbilisi State Conservatory) were opened in Tbilisi.

Tbilisi State Conservatory

The Tbilisi Philharmonic Society: The Society was established in 1905. It began to perform Russian and West European operas in the Georgian language.

Zachary Paliashvili: Paliashvili served as a director of the Tbilisi Philharmonic Society from 1908–1917. In 1922, he became the chief conductor of the Tbilisi Opera Theater. He directed the Tbilisi Conservatory from 1919–1932, and was the author of the operas *Abesalom and Eteri* (1919), *Dusk* (1923), and *Latavra* (1928).

Dimitri Arakishvili: Arakishvili was a Georgian composer who collected traditional music and 500 folk songs during his travels from 1901–1908. In 1918, he became the director of the Tbilisi Conservatory. He was well-known with his first book on *Georgian folk music* published in 1916 and his second book *East Georgian Folk Songs* published in 1948. He was also the director of the Union of Georgian Composers since 1932. He was the author of the opera *Tqmuleba Shota Rustavelze* (1914).



Meliton Antonovich Balanchivadze: Balanchivadze founded the *Kutaisi Music College* in 1918 and became the director of the Department of Music of the Georgian Commissariat of Education, directed the Batumi School of Music and the Kutaisi Music College from 1921–1937. He made valuable contributions to the development of modern Georgian opera. He wrote the first Georgian opera, *Tamar the Wily* later renamed into *Darejan the Wily*.

Meliton Antonovich Balanchivadze

Konstantine Potskverashvili: Potskverashvili worked as a director of the State Academic Choir of Georgia between 1921–1935. He was the author of the operas *Manana* and *Armazi*, symphonic works *Overthrow of Idols* and *Amirani*, chorus songs *Song of Victory*, *Lashkruli*, *Adjarian Makruli*.

Vano Muradeli: The Georgian composer Vano Muradeli wrote patriotic songs about his motherland. He composed the operas *The Great Friendship* (1948) and *October* (1961). He became the director of the Composers' Union of Georgia in 1938–1939.



Rustavi Ensemble: Rustavi Ensemble was a folk music ensemble established by a folklorist and singer Anzor Erkomaishvili in 1968. He united singers from various parts of Georgia to create choirs and a repertory of regional folk music.

The ensembles Rustavi and Georgian Voices were particularly active in presenting rich polyphony of various regions of Georgia to western audiences.

National Anthem: The first Georgian national anthem, *Idide marad chveno samshblor* composed by Otar Taktakishvili was created in 1946 and used till 1991.

The second anthem, *Dideba zetsit kurtkheuls*, was created after the declaration of Georgia's independence in 1991.

ARMENIA:

Komitas (Sghomon Sghomonian): The priest, composer and musicologist Komitas was the founder of the Armenian national school of music and father of ethnomusicology. He became the director of the Gevorgian Seminary choir. He collected, transcribed and annotated Armenian folk songs, and published a book consisting of 50 folk songs titled *One Thousand and One Songs* in 1903.

Armen Tigranian: Tigranian was a composer and conductor, and author of the five act opera *Anush*. His second opera *David Bek* was composed in 1940. He also wrote *Leily and Mejnun*, and *Eastern Dance* for symphonic orchestra.

Sergei Zakharovich Aslamazyan: Aslamazyan was a composer, and a co-founder and a member of Komitas Quartet in 1925 - 1968. He composed the *Suite on Armenian Folk Songs* for string quartet in 1950, and *Variations on a Theme by Paganini* for string quartet in 1961.

Artemi (Harutyun) Ayvazyan: Ayvazyan was a composer, conductor, and founder of the Armenian State Jazz Orchestra. He was the head of the Armenian State Estrada (Jazz) Orchestra till 1956.

Arno Babadjanian: Babadjanian was the follower of the Westernization trend combined with folkloric traditions in Armenia. Babadjanian wrote the *Heroic Ballade* for the piano and orchestra, and *Armenian Rhapsody*, for two pianos.

Aram Khachaturian: Khachaturian was another proponent of the Westernization of Armenian music. He wrote the Armenian state anthem, and composed the ballets *Gayane* in 1942 and *Spartacus* in 1956. He also wrote three symphonies and three concertos.

AZERBAIJAN: In the early years of Soviet rule, the government attempted to cut funding for the opera and ban it as being a symbol of bourgeois culture, but later this policy was annulled.



Azerbaijani intellectuals like Uzeyir Gadjiyev and Khadija Gayibova showed great resistance against this policy. Those arrested were charged with conducting anti-Soviet activities, pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism, or spying for foreign intelligence services.

Khadija Gayibova: The first woman pianist Khadija Gayibova was one of the founders of the Azerbaijan State Conservatory. Gayibova was arrested, accused of spying for Turkey, sympathizing with Musavat, conducting counter-revolutionary activity and sentenced to execution by firing squad.

Khadija Gayibova

Ashugs: The performances of Ashugs accompanied with musician with three-string violin, an eleven-string guitar, and a drum continued in the 20th century. The most popular song competitions among the ashugi called *dyishme*.

Azerbaijani songs were mostly performed solo, since choral music was not popular in Azerbaijan.

Mugham Mugham is Azerbaijani modal system that has its roots in the Eastern musical culture.

There were mugham assemblies like *Mejlis-Faramushan* in Shusha, *Beytus-Safa* in Shamakhy and *Music Assembly of Mahmud Aga* in Baku.

Some Azerbaijani singers performing mugham during the Soviet period were Alasgar Abdullayev, Gulu Asgarov, Nariman Aliyev, Hagigat Rzayeva, Yavar Kalantarli and Zahra Rahimova.

Fikret Mashadi Jamil oghlu Amirov: Amirov was a composer who was the founder of symphonic mugam which was based on traditional folk songs.

He wrote symphonies *Shur* (1946), *Kurd Ovshari* (1949), *Azerbaijan Capriccio* (1961), *Gulustan Bayati-Shiraz* (1968), *The Legend of Nasimi* (1977) and an opera, *Sevil* (1953).

Uzeyir Gadjiyev: In the early 20th century, Azerbaijani musicians began to blend Azerbaijani folk songs with the Western music genres. Uzeyir Gadjiyev was able combine Eastern and Western traditions and became the first composer of classical music and opera. Under the influence of the Russian opera, he included songs from Russian operas by Ivan Glinka in his works in 1908.

The founder of the Azerbaijani opera Gadjibeyov composed his first opera, *Leyli and Majnun*, then the second opera *Sheikh* in 1909. The other operas he wrote were *Rustam and Sohrab* (1910), *Asli and Karam* (1912), *Shah Abbas and Khurshid Banu* (1912), *Koroglu* and *Harun and Leyli* (1915). Gadjibeyov also wrote the musical comedy *Arshin Mal Alan* in 1913, and composed the *National Anthem* of Azerbaijan in 1944. During the second half of the 20th century, with the initiative of Gadjibeyov, tar and kamancha performances reached a higher level of development.

Kara Karayev: In the 1930s, Karayev combined the elements of the Western classical music with the elements of traditional Azerbaijani music and included folkloric instruments into the symphonic orchestra.

Muslim Magomaev: Magomaev was an composer and conductor. Magomayev wrote his first opera *Shah Ismail* under the influence of European opera written on the basis of an Azeri folk epic. He composed his second opera *Nargiz* in 1935 which consisted of Azerbaijani folk songs. Magomayev also wrote 15 rhapsodies. He gathered 300 Azerbaijani folk songs in a book called *The Collection of Azerbaijani Folk Songs*.

Afrasiyab Badal oglu Badalbeyli: Composer Badalbeyli was the writer of librettos for the Azerbaijani opera *Bahadir va Sona* and the ballets *Giz Galasi*, *Garaja Giz* and *Gizil Achar*. Between 1950–1960, he wrote books on the history and development of classical music in Azerbaijan such as: *Discussions on Music* and *Musical Dictionary*.

NORTH CAUCASUS

CHECHNYA:

Ch'oedargoi (Bards): *Ch'oedargoi* were bards who composed and performed songs (including *illi*) like folk singer Imam Alimsultanov. Many songs were also written by the bard Baudin Suleimanov.

Said-Emin Umarovich Dimayev: Folk musician, accordion (komuk or kekhat-pondur) player, and composer Dimayev served as an artistic director of the Chechen-Ingush State Philharmonic Society. He wrote chamber music, film music, overtures, and folk music.

Chechen-Ingush Philharmonic Society: Music schools opened in Grozny and in other towns in Chechnya under Soviet rule. In 1936, the *Chechen-Ingush Philharmonic Society* and the *State Song and Dance Ensemble* were established. Musicians combined traditional Vainakh music with the Western classical music and gave public performances.

Questions:

1- What caused the Soviets to stop regarding opera as a bourgeois form of entertainment?

Readings:

1-Olson, L., "Soviet Approaches to Folk Music Performance: Revival or Appropriation?", *The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research*, 2000.

2- Huseinova, A., "Stalin's Era and the Struggle of Azerbaijani Composers", *Azerbaijan International*, Summer 2006 (14.2), pp. 56-65

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3- Bagirova, N., "Azerbaijan's first professional female pianist Khadija Gayibova", *IRS Heritage*, 45, AUTUMN 2020 www.irs-az.com

4- Roudik, P.L., *Culture and Customs of the Caucasus*, Greenwood Press, 2009.

5- Jaimaukha, A., *The Chechens*, A handbook, RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.