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Cosmopolitan Nationalism under Moderate Totalitarianism: The Situation of Armenian Art Music in the 1970s and Early 1980s

Kosmopolitiškas nacionalizmas saikingo totalitarizmo sąlygomis: XX a. 8–9-ojo dešimtmečio pradžios armėnų muzika

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Abstract

The implications of Brezhnevian ‘stagnation’ for cultural development, particularly in Soviet Armenia, were mixed. For different reasons the period of the 1970s and early 1980s in Armenia turned out quite propitious for the development of refined art music. Its major adherents, having consciously distanced themselves from the obsolete nationalist paradigm represented by Khachaturian and his immediate followers, managed to combine strong feelings of national identity and attachment to the native tradition (especially to its more archaic strata) with full awareness of modern developments and sometimes with a really original, wholly individual approach to avant-garde techniques. Some of them, first of all Avet Terterian (1929–1994) and Tigran Mansurian (b. 1939), gained a certain international recognition and are considered national classics. For both, as well as for their lesser known colleagues, such as Martun Israelian (b. 1938), Ashot Zohrabian (b. 1945) and Yervand Yerkanian (b. 1951), the period in question was, perhaps, particularly happy and productive. Importantly, their works, though often sounding rather unconventional and showing no concessions to the dogmas of the ruling ideology, were never banned from performance or publication. Now, from the perspective of several decades later, the best of the Armenian art music of that short, but eventful epoch is perceived as a major and meaningful cultural achievement – indeed, as a voice of a highly cultivated community, though remote from main international centres, but by no means ‘provincial’ as regards to the professionalism of its representatives and the artistic importance of their oeuvre.

Keywords: Armenian music, nationalism, tradition, modernism, non-conformism, Avet Terterian, Tigran Mansurian, Aram Khachaturian, Ghazaros Sarian, Edvard Mirzozian, Yervand Yerkanian, Ashot Zohrabian.

Anotacija

Brežnevinės stagnacijos pasekmės kultūros raidai, ypač Sovietų Armėnijoje, buvo nevienareikšmės. Dėl skirtingų priežasčių XX a. 8-asis dešimtmetis ir 9-ojo pradžia armėnų rimtajai akademinėi muzikai buvo gana palankūs. Pagrindiniai šios muzikos kūrėjai, sąmoningai atsiriboje nuo atgyvenusios muzikinio nacionalizmo paradigmos, atstovaujamos A. Chačaturiano ir jo artimiausių sekėjų, ne tik sėkmingai puoselėjo stiprų tautinės tapatybės pojūtį bei tautos muzikines tradicijas (ypač archajiškesnes), bet ir perėmė moderniąsias muzikos meno tendencijas, retkarčiais išties originaliai ir savitai panaudodami avangardinę techniką. Kai kurie iš šių kompozitorių – visų pirma, Avetas Terterianas (1929–1994) ir Tigranas Mansurianas (g. 1939) – pelnė tarptautinį pripažinimą ir yra laikomi nacionalinės muzikos klasikais. Abiem jiems, kaip ir jų mažiau žinomiems kolegoms Martunui Israelianui (g. 1938), Ašotui Zohrabianui (g. 1945) ir Jervandui Jerkanianui (g. 1951), aptariamam laikotarpiu buvo ypač sėkmingas ir produktyvus. Svarbu, kad nors šių kompozitorių muzika buvo dažnai neįprasto skambesio ir nesitaikstė su valdančiųjų ideologijos dogmomis, jos atlikimas ir leidyba niekada nebuvo uždrausti. Žvelgiant iš kelių dešimtmečių perspektyvos, geriausi armėnų akademinės muzikos kūriniai, parašyti tuo trumpu, bet kūrybingu laikotarpiu, gali būti laikomi dideliu ir reikšmingu muzikinės kultūros pasiekimu – tai lyg balsas ypač kultūringos visuomenės, nutolusios nuo pagrindinių pasaulio kultūros centrų, tačiau dėl jos kūrėjų profesionalumo ir jų darbų meninės vertės – jokiū būdu ne provincialios.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: armėnų muzika, nacionalizmas, tradicija, modernizmas, nonkonformizmas, Avetas Terterianas, Tigranas Mansurianas, Aramas Chačaturianas, Ghazaros (Lazaras) Sarjanas, Edvardas Mirzozianas, Jervandas Jerkanianas, Ašotas Zohrabianas.

The extrovert, lush, somewhat ‘kitschy’ idiom of Aram Khachaturian (1903–1978) has long served as the musical visit card of Armenia. Khachaturian’s lead was followed by the next generation of Soviet Armenian composers represented, in particular, by Aleksandr Harutyunian¹ (1920–2012), Edvard Mirzozian (1921–2012) and Arno Babajanian (1921–1983) – all three pupils of the outstanding Muscovite composition teacher Genrikh Litinsky (1901–1985) and faithful spiritual disciples of Khachaturian, with

whom they were in close contact during their student years in Moscow. All three started their professional careers in the late 1940s, around the fateful year 1948. Their most successful early works – Mirzozian’s String Quartet (1947), Harutyunian’s *Cantata about the Motherland* (1948) and Trumpet Concerto (1950), Babajanian’s *Heroic Ballad* for piano and orchestra (1950) and Piano Trio (1952) – are among the few relatively fresh and viable pieces of music created in the Soviet Union in the sombre final years of

Stalin's reign, when the opportunities for expressing one's originality in art was compulsorily reduced and some stylistic diversity could be reached chiefly through the use of elements of a certain local tradition.

Subsequently Harutyunian and Mirzoian, as well as Shostakovich's pupil Ghazaros (Lazar) Sarian (1920–1998), whose first important works date from later years, became leading figures of Soviet Armenia's musical scene not only as composers but also as teachers and administrators². Being in charge of the republic's musical politics, they continued to exploit and promote the frankly nationalist manner, unavoidably influenced by Khachaturian and enriched with additional disciplining impulses coming especially from Shostakovich and Bartók (as, for instance, in Mirzoian's Symphony for string orchestra and timpani of 1956–62, remarkable for its Bartók-like polyphonic development and dramatization of folk-like material). All the mentioned composers, as well as a number of others with similar backgrounds (such as Litinsky's pupil Adam Khudoian, 1921–2000, and Khachaturian's pupil Edgar Hovhannisian³, 1930–1998), however original and imaginative, worked largely within the conventional system of musical forms and genres rooted in the 19th and early 20th century.

Meanwhile, new tendencies emerging in Soviet music during the so-called 'thaw' and 'stagnation' periods, when the Iron Curtain was lifted a bit to let in the achievements of the Western avant-garde, stimulated some composers to look for novel modes of musical utterance. One of such composers was Avet Terterian (1929–1994). Born in Baku, he moved to Armenia in 1951 and in 1952–57 studied composition at the Yerevan Conservatoire under Mirzoian. Terterian began his career as a loyal follower of his teacher's tradition. During the 1950s and early 1960s, he composed patriotic cantatas and chamber music in a reasonably traditional style. The opera *The Flaming Ring*, staged in Yerevan in 1967 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution, represents the summit of early Terterian. Its libretto is based on Boris Lavrenëv's narrative *The 41st*, one of the paragons of Soviet literature of the 1920s; the narrator comments upon the action reciting the October-inspired verses by the great Armenian poet Yeghishe Charentz. As to the music, it testifies to the composer's growing interest in novel techniques (experimentation with tone colours, twelve-tone rows), as well as in the peculiar version of 'minimalism' – involving long, prevalently slow rhythmic ostinatos, sustained notes, chords and tone clusters, reiterations of concise narrow-range motifs – that will become a hallmark of Terterian's stern, unadorned mature style, fuelled by his ambition to revive the deepest, the most archaic layers of his genetic memory.

The beginning of the 'true' Terterian dates from 1969 – the year of his four-movement First Symphony scored for an unusual ensemble of brass, percussion, piano, organ and bass

guitar (eleven performers in all). Since then, the symphony became his preferred genre. In two decades, Terterian wrote eight scores bearing this title. The Second appeared in 1972, the Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth followed in relatively quick succession (1975, 1976, 1978 and 1981), and the last two were completed in 1989. The composer himself confessed that all his symphonies from the three-movement Second onwards came to his mind in a finished form, as if in a dream (Terterian 1989: 181).

Only one among Terterian's symphonies, the Third, is constructed according to the customary three-movement 'fast–slow–fast' scheme, thus, at least externally, resembling a traditional symphonic cycle. All the symphonies beginning with the Fourth (with offstage harpsichord *ad libitum*) are one-movement. Almost every symphony makes an impression of a slowly creeping and, from time to time, painfully burning stream of lava. Some of Terterian's idiosyncrasies – such as his love of prolonged tones or tone clusters, often treated according to the Schoenbergian principle of *Klangfarbenmelodie* (a 'melody' of changing timbres) (Savenko 1996: 329) – are conditioned by the primordially monophonic nature of Armenian music: a chord or a tone cluster usually appears as a 'thickened' version of the initial monophony. The non-European (oriental) essence of Terterian's symphonies, especially beginning with the Fourth, is emphasized by their contemplative, static character; the music unfolds in slow waves, with powerful 'apocalyptic' climaxes on their crests. The symphonies are rich in spatial effects, in some cases requiring the use of previously recorded material (as, for instance, in the Sixth Symphony, with a choir reciting the letters of the Armenian alphabet, or in the Fifth, with a recorded sound of church bells). The archaic colour is often reinforced due to the inclusion into the orchestra of some unusual or exotic timbres. The most notable examples are the wordless modal psalmody of an uncultivated male voice in the middle movement of the Second Symphony, the mournful solo of *duduk* (Caucasian reed instrument) against a pedal tone held by another *duduk* in the second, dirge-like movement of the Third, the exclamations of two *zurnas* (shrill oboe-like instruments) in the same work's finale. In the Fifth Symphony, the Armenian Church censer *burvar* is used as a percussion instrument, while in the Seventh an important role is played by the oriental tambourine *dap*. The Eighth Symphony features two female voices sounding wordless in the background.

Especially remarkable is the intensely vibrating solo of the bow string instrument *kemancha* in the Fifth Symphony. The whole work, lasting between forty and fifty minutes, is based on the tone *a flat*. At the beginning it is played by *kemancha*, with microtonal inflections characteristic of this instrument. Then the pedal tone passes to other instruments and, as usual with Terterian, changes its colouration and intensity, 'thickens' becoming a tone cluster and then

Figure 1. Avet Terterian's Fifth Symphony (1978), *kamancha* part

returns to unison, is suppressed by other sounds and short motifs and then reappears from the depths of the orchestral texture. In short, the note *a flat* functions as an axis around which the entire work is formed. The key moment occurs around the point of the golden section, when the *kamancha*, returning after a long inactivity, intones against the *a flat* pedal a very simple melody, at first in an uncertain mode, then gradually approaching the Aeolian mode, which is especially widespread in traditional Armenian music – see Figure 1 (NB: the half-tone and whole-tone shifts in the part of *kamancha*, taking into account the peculiarities of the instrument's technique, must be read as *glissandi* accompanied by intense vibrations rather than as discrete moves by tempered intervals). To preserve the air of elusiveness, the composer notates the motif chromatically ($b^1 - b \text{ flat}^1 - a \text{ flat}^1$) rather than diatonically ($b^1 - a \text{ sharp}^1 - g \text{ sharp}^1$ or $c \text{ flat}^1 - b \text{ flat}^1 - a \text{ flat}^1$). And yet the ear that is accustomed to Armenian music will easily discern here a familiar archetype; the line of the solo instrument is approaching its more 'ordered' version, whose scheme is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The scheme of *kamancha* melodic line, Avet Terterian's Fifth Symphony (1978)

Thus, in the middle of the symphony, the mystery of the birth of music from a single sound is enacted. If Claude Lévi-Strauss is right and the main subject matter of archaic myths is the conversion of nature into culture (in Lévi-Strauss's terms – of the 'raw' into the 'cooked'), then the central idea of the symphony, where the process of slow, almost painful crystallization of a relatively 'cooked' melodic line from a 'raw' sound is presented in such a graphic way, must be acknowledged as deeply mythological and even cosmogonic.

Terterian's symphonies, alluding to the most profound essentials of the native tradition and at the same time utterly untraditional as regards their thematic substance, design and sound, perhaps have something in common with no less mythological and cosmogonic conceptions of Giacinto Scelsi (1905–1988), of whose works Terterian in the 1970s was, of course, unaware.⁴ His model of symphony was too individual to be emulated by other composers, at least in Armenia. Though as People's Artist, conservatoire professor and secretary of the Composers' Union Terterian was a high-ranking member of the official Soviet hierarchy, and all of his symphonies were premiered without any delay almost immediately after their completion,⁵ he had no direct disciples, continuators of his creative principles.

A more versatile, flexible and, in the final account, influential artist is another major Armenian composer of roughly

the same generation, Tigran Mansurian (b. 1939), who from the late 1960s gravitated towards the non-conformist group within the community of Soviet composers, represented in particular by Andrey Volkonsky, Edison Denisov, Alfred Schnittke, Valentin Silvestrov and Arvo Pärt.

Mansurian was born in Beyrouth – an important centre of the Armenian diaspora – and in his childhood had time to study at a French school there and to taste the city's lively cosmopolitan atmosphere. In 1947, his family, together with thousands of ethnic Armenians from the Middle East attracted by Soviet propaganda, moved to Soviet Armenia. In 1965, he graduated from Sarian's composition class at the Yerevan Conservatoire. The four-movement orchestral Partita, presented by him at the finals, betrays the young composer's dependence not so much on Khachaturian, Mirzoyan and other 'sanctioned' native authorities, as on Debussy, Bartók and Stravinsky. Arguably, Mansurian was the first not only in Armenia, but in the whole Caucasus to study scores by Schoenberg, Webern, Boulez, Berio and Stockhausen. His elegant essays in serial technique and pointillism – Piano Sonata (1967), two cycles of *Arabesques* for chamber ensemble (1969–70), Three Pieces for piano (1970) and *Intérieur* for string quartet (1972) – testify to his sympathy with the transparent and refined lyricism of Webern and Boulez. The first page of Mansurian's Piano Sonata, shown in Figure 3, may serve as an illustration of his early manner. In some important works written later, the elements of serial thinking and pointillism remain as peculiar 'tints' in the extremely subtle, richly differentiated neo-impressionistic palette. Against the background of Khachaturian's lush, extroverted manner serving as the principal model for Armenian composers, Mansurian's restrained and prevalently quiet music appeared as a stimulating new word.

The image shows three staves of musical notation for piano. The top staff is labeled 'Piano' and includes the instruction 'Tempo colla costruzione della musica'. The score is filled with intricate rhythmic patterns, including many sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and rests. Dynamic markings such as *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, and *pp* are used throughout. Tempo markings include 'tempo', 'accel.', 'rit. tempo', and 'meno mosso'. The notation is dense and characteristic of serialist or pointillist techniques.

Figure 3. Tigran Mansurian's Piano Sonata (1967)

Mansurian's major works of his most productive period, which fell between the 1970s and the early 1980s, include orchestral *Preludes* (1975) and *Night Music* (1980), concertos for cello (1978), violin and cello (1978) and violin (1981) with string orchestra, and *Tovem* for 15 instrumentalists (1979). In the *Preludes*, the colours are for the most part bright and delicate, the passages between sections are smooth, the rhythm is supple, strong accents are avoided. The 15–20-minute long work consists of seven loosely connected episodes of increasing length and, for the most part, of increasingly dense texture. Each of the episodes is built as a 'prelude' to the next one; the final 'prelude', by far the longest and initially the most tightly structured of all, disintegrates at the end into discrete patches, returning to the insecure aura of earlier sections. The whole work – a capital example of what could be referred to as 'open form', that is a form ending, figuratively speaking, with suspension points rather than with a full stop – can be easily characterized in the same terms as its distant antecedent, Debussy's *Jeux*: the piece, whose 'appealing features' include:

[t]he often fragmentary nature of the material, the frequent changes of tempo, the non-developmental form [...] [and] the discontinuities; 'works as a nonlinear progression', its sections being 'not self-contained, because they point towards goals <...> not within their boundaries; that these goals [...] may not appear at all in the piece, renders [its] temporal world [...] complex and fascinating. (Cramer 1978: 189)

A certain influence of *Jeux* can be seen also in the external appearance of the score, with its bunches of heterophony and juxtapositions of layers differentiated in terms of tempo-rhythm, timbre and register.

The ensemble piece *Tovem* (roughly: 'Incantation'), may be regarded as a counterpart to another work by Debussy, the *Prelude à l'Après-midi d'un faune*. Its form is rather 'closed', its mood somewhat ritualistic, with a climax in the area of the golden section; the elaborate contours of melodic lines, played for the most part by woodwinds, bring up associations with the arabesque-like ornamental patterns of Armenian medieval visual arts. The four-movement *Night Music* and all the three concertos contain lengthy meditative sections, are rich in dramatic peripeteia and moments of emotional outbursts; their themes are outlined more sharply than in the *Preludes* and *Tovem*, the rhythms are basically clear-cut, though not without refreshing irregularities. Most of Mansurian's major scores end on a quiet serene note, one of a few exceptions being the three-movement Concerto for cello and strings, crowned with an energetic grotesque finale.

In his most important vocal compositions of roughly the same period – *Four Hayrens of Nabapet Kuchak*⁶ for voice and piano (1967), *The Gift of the Rose* and *The Moon Playing a Pipe* for soprano, piano, flute and cello to words

by 20th century Armenian poets Hovhannes Zarifian and Razmik Davoian (1974–76) – Mansurian appears as a devoted champion of age-old national heritage and follower of Komitas.⁷ His best settings are free of any pathos and sentimentality; the declamation is strict and clear. Like Komitas, Mansurian is able to express the genuinely Armenian spirit in an extremely laconic manner, using a minimum of faultlessly chosen characteristic intonations.

By the mid-1980s, Mansurian's social status had changed considerably. The time when he was seen as an opponent to the musical establishment, as the most independent and, perhaps, the most European of all Armenian composers, had remained in the past. Now he was one of the central figures of Armenia's musical life and an unquestionable authority for many of his younger colleagues, whose work was marked by his strong influence. He won a nationwide fame due to

his tuneful, appealing music to films and theatre performances. Since the mid-1980s, his manner has become more traditional, somewhat 'neo-classical', showing a pronounced tendency to highlight the national element and the nostalgic mood – as in the two string quartets (1983, 1984), the vocal cycles *Sunset Songs* and *The Nairi Land*⁸ to words by Hamo Saghian and Vahan Terian (1984–85), the cycle of five Bagatelles for piano trio (1985), to say nothing about his more recent works, often of religious inspiration, written already in post-Soviet Armenia. Though Mansurian's name became known outside Armenia relatively early – the first performers of his scores of the 1960–80s include such great champions of Soviet non-conformist music as the pianist Aleksey Lyubimov, the cellists Karine Georgian and Nataliya Gutman, the violinist Oleg Kagan and the conductors David Khanjian and Gennadiy Rozhdestvensky – his rise to

Figure 4. Ashot Zohrabian's *Games of Boomerang I* (1973)

was not especially severe, can be confirmed by the pages from Zohrabian's *Games of Boomerangs* and Yerkanian's *Song of Songs*, shown in Figures 4 and 5, respectively: both works appeared in print in the 1970s despite their blatantly avant-garde writing and the Biblical text (sung in Classical Armenian) used in the latter one. It goes without saying that these and other composers, who ventured to deviate from the safe path of traditional nationalist self-expression, were competent members of the Armenian Composers' Union; its long-term leader Mirzoian (he was the Union's head from 1956 to 1992) proved to be liberal enough to give free rein to such 'deviations', while in some other Soviet provinces the musical policy could be considerably more restrictive.

At a certain moment, the company of Armenian 'modernists' was joined by the veteran Ghazaros Sarian. Son of the great Armenian painter Martiros Sarian (1880–1972) and, as was mentioned above, disciple of Shostakovich, he taught composition at the Yerevan Conservatoire from 1950 until the end of his days and in 1960–86 was its rector. One of the most enlightened, erudite and free-thinking Armenian musicians of his generation, he was not an especially prolific composer. His best known work, the four-movement 'symphonic panel' *Armenia* (1966), based on the cycle of his father's landscape paintings, is still of a 'folkish' inspiration, though orchestrated with an almost impressionistic finesse. In the Violin Concerto of 1973 he still remains faithful to the nationalist tradition, but his one-movement Symphony of 1980 is radically different from anything in his earlier output: an intensely dramatic piece of music, written in an unexpectedly advanced idiom having no parallels in the Armenian music of that time (Edgard Varèse or Roberto Gerhard seem to be the closest analogies – the more so as in Sarian's symphony, not unlike some major works by these two composers, a paramount role is played by the percussion group).

To the list of conspicuous Armenian composers with 'modernist' leanings, whose most productive period fell on the 1970s and 1980s, one might add Sarian's pupil Ruben Sargsian (1945–2013), Yeghiazarian's pupils Vahram Babaian (b. 1948) and Eduard Hayrapetian (b. 1949), perhaps also some other names. Now, from the perspective of several decades later, the best of the Armenian art music of that short, but eventful epoch is perceived as a major and meaningful cultural achievement – indeed, as a voice of a highly cultivated community, though remote from main international centres, but by no means 'provincial' as regards the professionalism of its representatives and the artistic importance of their oeuvre. On the other hand, most of the musical output of that time is all but forgotten even in Armenia, largely because of the considerable transformation of public tastes that has occurred since the country gained independence in 1991.

References

- ¹ His name also appears transcribed as: Arutyunian, Arutiunian, Harutiunian, etc.
- ² Babajanian chose a different path: since the second half of the 1950s he made a spectacular all-Union career as a composer of popular songs and variety music, returning to academic musical genres but intermittently.
- ³ Alias Oganessian (in a Russified spelling).
- ⁴ In Scelsi's opinion, Bach and Mozart were rather insignificant composers, for their music could not 'destroy the walls of Jericho' (Scelsi 2006: 133). It seems that if he knew the music of Terterian, he would not say the same about it.
- ⁵ In Armenia they were actively promoted by the talented music director of the Yerevan Philharmonic Orchestra David Khanjian, while on the all-Union scale – especially by the star conductor Gennadiy Rozhdestvensky; during Terterian's lifetime some of his symphonies were more than once heard abroad, especially at the international festivals of contemporary music in Warsaw and Zagreb.
- ⁶ 'Hayren' is a form of medieval Armenian love poetry; Nahapet Kuchak was a poet of the 16th century.
- ⁷ The great Armenian musician Soghomon Soghomonian, archimandrite Komitas (1869–1935), is known, in particular, for his arrangements of peasant songs and church chants, in which he appears not as a faithful 'harmonizer', but as a real creator capable of finding out the most fitting harmonic 'clothes' for every single tune proceeding from its modal structure.
- ⁸ 'Nairi' is one of Armenia's historical names.
- ⁹ By the publishing house *Sovetskiy kompozitor*, Moscow.
- ¹⁰ Misak Metzarentz (1886–1908), Armenian poet.

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Santrauka

Ekstravertiškos, žaižaruojančios, šiek tiek „kičinės“ Aramo Chačaturiano (1903–1978) muzikos įvaizdis ilgą laiką buvo tarsi armėnų muzikinės kultūros vizitinė kortelė. A. Chačaturiano pėdomis pasekė ir jaunesnioji Sovietų Armėnijos kompozitorių karta, kurios pagrindiniai atstovai – Aleksandras Arutiunianas (1920–2012), Edvardas Mirzozianas (1921–2012) ir Arno Babajanianas (1921–1983). Sėkmingiausi jų ankstyvojo laikotarpio kūriniai sudaro dalį negausios ganėtinai gaiviai skambančios ir vertingos

muzikinės kūrybos, sukurtos gūdžiais paskutiniais Stalino valdymo metais. Vėliau A. Arutiunianas ir E. Mirzojanas, taip pat D. Šostakovičiaus mokinys Ghazaros (Lazaras) Sarjanas (1920–1998), kurio pirmieji reikšmingi darbai buvo sukurti vėlesniais metais, tapo pagrindinėmis Sovietų Armėnijos muzikinio gyvenimo figūromis, ne tik kaip kompozitoriai, bet ir kaip pedagogai bei administratoriai. Būdami atsakingi už respublikos muzikinės politikos formavimą, šie muzikai, negalėdami išvengti A. Chačaturiano įtakos, savo kūryboje ir toliau puoselėjo bei propagavo atvirą muzikinį nacionalizmą, tiesa, šiek tiek praturtintą struktūruojančio D. Šostakovičiaus ir B. Bartóko darbų poveikio. Kad ir kokie originalūs ir išradingi, visi minėtieji bei daugelis kitų kompozitorių pirmenybę teikė tradicinėms, XIX a.–XX a. pradžioje įsitvirtinusioms muzikinėms formoms ir žanrams.

O vadinamuoju „atšilimo“ ir „stagnacijos“ laikotarpiu, šiek tiek pakilus geležinei uždangai, atsirado galimybė susipažinti su avangardinės muzikos pasiekimais Vakaruose. Tai paskatino kai kuriuos kompozitorius ieškoti naujų muzikinės raiškos būdų. Sovietinės muzikos erdvėje pasirodė naujos tendencijos. Dėl skirtingų priežasčių XX a. 8-asis ir pirmoji 9-ojo dešimtmečio pusė armėnų rimtajai akademinėi muzikai buvo gana palankūs. Pagrindiniai šios muzikos kūrėjai, sąmoningai atsiriboję nuo atgyvenusios muzikinio nacionalizmo paradigmos, atstovaujamos A. Chačaturiano ir jo artimiausių sekėjų, ne tik sėkmingai puoselėjo stiprų tautinės tapatybės pojūtį bei tautos muzikines tradicijas (ypač archajiškesnes), bet ir perėmė moderniąsias muzikos meno tendencijas, retkarčiais išties originaliai ir savitai panaudodami avangardinę techniką. Kai kurie iš šių kompozitorių – visų pirma Avetas Terterianas (1929–1994) ir Tigranas Mansurianas (g. 1939) – pelnė tarptautinį pripažinimą ir yra laikomi nacionalinės muzikos klasikais.

A. Terteriano simfonijos (iš viso aštuonios, parašytos 1969–1989), siekiančios giliausius tautinės tradicijos klodus, yra visiškai netradicinės tematinės medžiagos, kompozicijos ir skambesio požiūriu. Jo simfonijų sandara tokia savita, kad jos nepavyko atkartoti jokiam kitam kompozitoriui, bent jau Armėnijoje. Įvairiapusiškesnis, lankstesnis ir įtakingesnis menininkas – T. Mansurianas – 7-ojo dešimtmečio pabaigoje linko prie sovietinių kompozitorių nonkonformistų grupės, kurios pagrindiniai atstovai buvo Andrejus Volkonskis, Edisonas Denisovas, Alfredas Schnittke, Valentinas Silvestrovas ir Arvo Pärtas. Brandžiausiu kūrybos laikotarpiu T. Mansurianas neužėmė jokių įtakingų pareigų, tačiau dėl savo muzikos patrauklumo ir asmeninės charizmos tapo tikruoju, nors ir neformaliu, „progresyviojo“ Armėnijos muzikų bendruomenės sparno lyderiu. Tarp tuo laikotarpiu sukurtų armėnų muzikos šedevrų minėtina A. Terteriano Penktoji simfonija (1978) bei T. Mansuriano „Preliudai“ (1975), „Užkalbėjimas“ („Tovem“, 1979) ir „Nakties muzika“ (1980).

A. Terterianui ir T. Mansurianui, kaip ir jų mažiau žinomiems kolegoms Martunui Israelianui (g. 1938), Ašotui Zohrabianui (g. 1945) ir Jervandui Jerkanianui (g. 1951), aptariamam laikotarpis buvo ypač sėkmingas ir produktyvus. Svarbu tai, kad nors šių kompozitorių muzika buvo dažnai neįprasto skambesio ir nesitaikstė su valdančiųjų ideologijos dogmomis, jos atlikimas ir leidyba niekada nebuvo uždrausti. Žvelgiant iš kelių dešimtmečių perspektyvos, geriausi armėnų akademinės muzikos kūriniai, parašyti tuo trumpu, bet kūrybingu laikotarpiu, gali būti laikomi dideliu ir reikšmingu muzikinės kultūros pasiekimu – tai lyg balsas ypač kultūringos visuomenės, nutolusios nuo pagrindinių pasaulio kultūros centrų, tačiau dėl jos kūrėjų profesionalumo ir jų darbų meninės vertės jokiū būdu ne provincialios.