

Eka Chabashvili's Symphony-exhibition *Khma*— the New Compositional Paradigm

Abstract. The musical output of the famous Georgian composer Eka Chabashvili, who appeared on the creative scene in the post-Soviet period (1990s), is distinguished by its music genre variety and conceptual depth. Due to the intensity of the implementation of scientific innovations in music, the subject of research in the composer's music is the peculiarities of multimedia thinking, the aesthetics of eco-music, and the musical interpretation of scientific innovations. The article refers to her syncretic experimental multimedia project—symphony-exhibition *Khma* (The voice). The work aims to remind the listener of the ontological essence of music and, according to the composer's belief, creates vibrations with sounds that help listeners to integrate into a unified cosmic communication network with the help of multidimensional media. To convey this idea, the composer has naturally changed the traditional compositional approach. The product is distinguished by the following features:

1. The performer and the listeners coexist in a single creative space.
2. The new configuration of the interaction between the composer, the performer, and the listener actively involves the latter in the performing process, which at the same time means participation in creating music from scratch during each session.
3. The performer-instructor of this project performs the function of a traditional mediator (presents the composer's concept to the listener). The instructor plays the harp, reads rhymes, paints, or writes on a whiteboard, thereby giving the guest of the session an example of how to engage in the performance, which means mechanical involvement in the creative process.
4. A certain "scenario" of the work envisages the interaction between music, visual art, lighting, and science through associative-metaphorical connections, which generates a multimedia hybrid form.
5. In order to integrate the listener into "the music of the universe," the composer tries to move him/her away from everyday reality, which activates meditateness and improvisation as the principle of thinking. As a result, the time continuum problem is solved in a novel way.

Thus, the in-depth analysis of a work reveals that the composer's choice of genre—a multimedia performance, which is called a symphony-exhibition—corresponds exactly with the raised goals and objectives.

Keywords: multimedia music hybrid genre, quantum physics, new compositional approach, installation, eco-music.

1. Introduction

The musical output of the famous Georgian composer Eka Chabashvili, who appeared on the creative scene in the post-Soviet period (1990s), is distinguished by its music genre variety and conceptual depth. Due to the intensity of the implementation of scientific innovations in music, the subject of research in the composer's music is the peculiarities of multimedia thinking, the aesthetics of eco-music,¹ and the musical interpretation of scientific innovations.

Chabashvili's syncretic multimedia project—symphony-exhibition *Khma* (The voice) is of exceptional importance for Georgian music. As it was mentioned by Maia Tabliashvili (2021), "it is remarkable that symphony here is rethought with its primary meaning, co-sounding, it is characterized by conceptual contents, philosophical features, and wide scales of sense. What about the hybrid component of the symphony, here the process of development of the composition becomes an 'exhibition' by its essence, we have spectators in the process of performance of the opus" (25). This experimental performance (guide-performer Nino Zhvania) was presented in the form of sessions at the Georgian Composers' Union (organized by the Modern Professional Music Art Development Center, with the support of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia, 2018) and at the Georgian Technical University, Faculty of Informatics and Control Systems (2022). The performance was presented to the listeners in the following way: six installations (houses) were placed on the stage, which embodied micro worlds and symbolized important moments of human existence:

- **The house of the family** (the variety of household items) was presented in the form of useless household items. This installation gathers together discarded old things. A rope is wrapped around the figures of

¹ Eco-music is related to ecomusicology, that is an area of study that explores the relationships between the natural environment and sound. Ecomusicology encompasses a variety of academic disciplines including musicology, ecology, ecocriticism, biology, anthropology (Allen and Dawe 2016, 2). Ecomusicology as a field of study is traced back to Canadian composer, writer, music educator and environmentalist Raymond Murray Schafer (1933–2021). He uses the term *soundscape* to explain the sonic nature of a particular physical environment (Schafer 1994).

a man and a woman, which is the symbol of the umbilical cord that connects them to the fruit of their love—the child.

- **The house of feelings** (useless emotions and feelings) was presented in the form of a sound sculpture.
- **The house of health** (cure, by-products of medical treatment) reminds us that our lives are accompanied by illnesses that we must defeat.
- **The house of mind** (unwished thoughts and ideas) is the black installation of color, which symbolizes the evil thoughts that have invaded our minds and that we must expel from our minds.
- **The house of employment** (waste products of employment and bureaucracy) refers to the daily routine and stress associated with earning funds.
- **The house of homeland and identity (emigration)** is represented by a drawing board and paints and suggests that an emigrant should transfer certain information (drawing, writing, letters) to the canvas so as not to forget the language. A figure or inscription drawn by anyone is given the same symbolic importance here as figures and calligraphy in Chinese painting.

According to the laws of physics, these installations create their gravity, vibrate and contain information. Accordingly, while looking at them, the listener does not get verbal information, these installations and sounds in the hall give a chance to connect with certain energy-informational fields and get energy-informational knowledge. Because the knowledge derived from the work is related to energy, people with a hearing impairment are also given the opportunity to be part of this process. In listeners' minds, the main events of existence, deposited as archetypes in the unconscious, should rise to the surface: illness, work-related routine, emigration, the negative focus of the mind, and others.

2. Three Sources of Music

Music played in the exhibition space is represented by several layers: after approaching the installations at a certain distance, an optical-sensor system that emits sounds is automatically activated; at the second layer, a recording of planet sounds;² the third layer is related to a 10-minute improvised composition, which should be performed by the guide-performer on the decoratively painted sculpture-instrument, a modified harp, placed in the middle of the stage, according to the composer's instructions. On this instrument, the guide-performer and then the listeners play with a stick, hand, or wooden hammer. The harp has metal bells attached to it, which emit high frequencies in order to clear personal, family, and collective karma. Additionally, there is a device called the *termenvox* (assembled by physicist Zaal Azmaiparashvili), which responds to the movement of the hand. A ventilator is placed below the strings, from which a jet of air is directed towards the strings and provokes interesting sounds. The installation of this device in the harp, as well as the strings sounded by the force of air friction, introduces an element of eco-music and associatively connects us with the Greek Aeolus, which produces sound as a result of oscillations of the wind.

Instruments added to this “musical aquarium” are played by the guide and can also be played by the listeners, if desired. The additional musical-intonational layer comprises phonetically interesting verses containing spell-like content. These poems are related to the ancient Georgian healing ritual with a medical function and are also associated with shamanic rituals. In the context of the work, these texts are perceived as a single musical-verbal layer, as the verbal text takes on a musical quality during the process of reading. Since these texts do not completely convey the semantics of poetry, similar to the musical-poetic patterns of the shamanic ritual, their aesthetic aspect is of less importance.

It is not by chance that the multi-media artist and cross-disciplinary scholar Denita M. Benyshek appreciates these poems not as examples of artistic thinking: “It is an exclusive language, therefore the text and the rhythms are not meant to please human beings” (Benyshek 2014, 176). Poems are read first by the guide, and then by the listeners if they wish. All these musical layers used in the work are perceived as extra-linguistic information, while the raising of the voice, increasing the tempo, and making pauses while reading the texts, is considered paralinguistic communication.

² A recording of planet sounds is available on Youtube; see Cosmic Universe (2019).

3. Rebus Principle

A lighting system has also been installed in the hall, which has created a very mystical atmosphere. Before the beginning of the session, the listeners are given a piece of paper on which the graphic images of the installations are drawn and they have to match the titles of the installations written on the same piece of paper to the graphic images of the installations. This introduces a kind of a rebus principle into the work. There is also an influence of the principle of internet video games, where the player must find hidden objects in various virtual spaces, thus the performance resonates with the video game industry's booming era that started in the 2010s. Like many video games, in which there are stable elements (sounds, player, number of levels to complete) and mobile elements (different options and intensity of passing levels), in this performance, we also have stable parameters (guide, music, lighting, sound recordings) and mobile parameters (an invariant sound palette in each session, always a different sequence of viewing installations by the listener).

These stable and mobile features symbolize the paradox of our existence—the secret of the eternity of the universe lies in its changeable mode. After all, the noosphere is constantly renewed against the background of the immutability of certain phenomena. This effect is enhanced by the principle of polyphony when each component of the performance is in a constantly renewed, contrapuntal relationship with the others.

4. The Process of Listening to the Composition as an Act of Wandering

The movement of the listener between the installations is based on the principle of aleatory: the viewer is not required to follow a determined route while viewing the installations. The viewers move spontaneously in space and may return several times to any installation. As far as each installation and the symbol embedded in this exhibition are equally important for human existence, no installation or the symbol associated with it have priority. They are not connected in a cause-and-effect manner. Therefore, this is not a work based on the principle of theatrical dramaturgy, but rather, a multi-centered composition.

In addition to the fact that you physically move through the conditional framework of this space like a fairy tale hero, you also travel through it mentally. It is a journey through your unconscious, which is a lot like entering a cave filled with uniquely shaped stalagmites and stalactites each time. A journey through this exhibition space may evoke associations with the wandering hero of the Romantic era, but this is only a superficial resemblance. If the wandering of the Romantic hero is related to escaping from society and oneself, in this work, the ontological journey is an encounter with oneself.

5. A New Type of Interaction between the Composer, the Performer, and the Listener

Chabashvili breaks the stereotype of the traditional relationship between the composer, the performer, and the listener, according to which the performer and the listener have autonomous functions. In this kind of approach, the audience listens to the music and cannot get involved in the process of creation or in the performing activities. The listener sits before the performer as passively as parishioners who stand before the icon, gazing at the saint's face, which signifies the symbolic connection of soul to soul. The function of the listener is only to evaluate the composition and mostly the performance, to derive pleasure and knowledge from the music. The interaction is kept to a minimum. Instead, Chabashvili offers the listener a new configuration and maximum interaction in the performance. The functions of listeners and performers are practically equalized: the listener is a participant in the music-making process. During each session they are involved in the process of creating and performing the music, resulting in an ever-new sonic palette and invariant combinations of timbre and sonic sequences.

The traditional model of placement of the listeners and performers in the space was established in Cretan-Mycenaean, and then in Greek theater. In Chabashvili's piece, the well-known distribution of space—the *orchestra* (literally “dancing place”) and the *theatron* (the seating area section of ancient Greek, Roman, and Byzantine theater)—is also being destroyed. The entire space reserved for the exhibition is a single creative stage.

I should especially highlight the role of the guide-performer, a kind of instructor, who, by playing the harp, reading poems, and drawing, gives listeners a personal example to follow, and shows how they can be involved in the process of making music. In this respect, the guide has the function of a solipsist, a medium. The guide-performer transmits the greatest energy and intensifies the impact of this performance on the listeners.

6. A Cross-disciplinary Interaction of Music with Several Fields of Art and Science as a Basis for Multimedia Music Genres

With these new compositional approaches and forms of self-expression and strategy, not only the traditional form of the stage ecosystem is changing, but also the stereotype of the perception of the content and mission of music. According to the Romantic worldview, music is considered an artistic space for the expression of human personal feelings and emotions. However, it undermines and reduces its ontological essence, namely that music shares the same content as the universe.

A kind of scenario of the work envisages a cross-disciplinary interaction of music, visual art, lighting, and science (in particular, medicine, which introduces signs of art therapy), which is possible thanks to associative-metaphorical connections between them. This gives rise to a completely new direction of compositional self-expression in art—a multimedia hybrid form. It is obvious that the mechanical synthesis of art fields cannot manage to create multimedia.

Multimedia is a principle of thinking when the characteristics of different art fields obey the specificity and principle of thinking of a single art field. Clear examples of this are Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin's *Prometheus*, the painting of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, the dramaturgy of Tennessee Williams, the prose of Jorge Luis Borges, and others.

7. Chabashvili's New Compositional Strategy, Compositional Approach, and Goals

Chabashvili is one of the few Georgian composers for whom multimedia thinking is a universal creative method. In the multimedia composition *Khma*, the fields of art and science do not serve each other, but they unite for the following goal—to take the listener to the state of meditation and to make spectators feel the force of music. Not only the role of the composer, performer, and listener is equalized, but all installations, instruments, and sound recordings of this performance have the same value, thanks to which the composer symbolically breaks the sometimes absurd system of setting priorities in our existence.

The author of the performance has clearly defined the concept and goals of the work. Chabashvili tries to remind us that music is the language of the world, a kind of chronicler, and it is as old as the universe itself. The composer implies “the music of the universe” that dates back to the ancient Greek era. The composer's intention is to remind us that in this pragmatic and consumerist world, human beings have long been disconnected from the basic communication language of earthly nature. A human is valuable first of all as a human being even beyond his/her social and political identity.

For this purpose, Chabashvili establishes specific conditions in the performance that resemble the initiation process. First of all, the composer tries to revive the idea and principle of esoteric rituals, in which music is used as a language of communication with the universe. According to such beliefs, ritual is valuable because the collective syncretic action gives birth to a unified energy.

By introducing this archaic plaster, Chabashvili unconsciously implements the Freudian idea in listeners—to awaken strong archaic impulses in modern man, characteristic of their archaic pre-cultural consciousness, which are stored in the unconscious in the form of repressed desires due to society's laws and stereotypes (Freud 1930, 69). In the reincarnation of syncretic action, Chabashvili recalls ancient traditions of Georgian folklore. The following characteristics indicate the semantics of the syncretic ritual of the prehistoric age:

1. Spell-type healing poems, which were used in ancient Georgia to charge a sick person with new vital energy.
2. Special lighting creates the mystical effect of twilight, which is related to the newly awakened consciousness at the intersection of day and night.
3. The harp is placed in the center of the installations, which reminds us of the symbol of sacrifice placed at the center of the ritual.

By reviving the elements of the archaic ritual, Chabashvili tries to activate a collective consciousness in the listeners, a unified energy field, and intuition as a reliable way of knowing the world. Thus, through its interdisciplinary structure, the modern multimedia hybrid genre pursues the function of the ancient syncretic ritual—i.e., the exchange of energy that flows between people and the universe. During the initiation, Chabashvili tries to free the listener from the traps of the mind, from thinking about the past and the future by involving the listener in the process of making music (which is encouraged by the guide-performer). In this way, it creates conditions for the perception of the one and only greatest reality—the present existence.

Quintus Horatius Flaccus' aphorism *carpe diem* from his odes (translated as "pluck the day," or live in the present) is worth mentioning in this context.³ It is in the present that the human is truly who he/she is. In Chabashvili's composition, a meeting with oneself is initiated in the style of Jorge Luis Borges, who describes the moment of meeting ourselves as follows: "Any life, however long and complicated it may be, actually consists of a single moment—the moment when a man knows forever more who he is" (Borges 1998, 484).

The rite of initiation by the composer naturally acquires the peculiarities of meditation (the effect, which is enhanced by the recitation of spell-type verses). This kind of meditation, which leads to depersonalization and decommunication, does not mean a decrease in response to stimuli coming from the external environment. On the contrary, this "dissociation" activates these abilities, which brings us back to eco-music. During meditation, the listener sinks into himself, distances himself from external reality, and performs self-reflection.

This leads to different modeling of the time continuum in the listeners' perception, creating the illusion of time slowing down. Indeed, time in quantum physics is already a completely relativistic concept, moreover, according to the latest scientific research, time is also measured in nanoseconds, and the measurement of time (in quantum physics) does not require an exact starting point: "Such a quantum watch offers a unique opportunity to have an absolute timestamp without the necessity to measure time zero" (Ferreira 2022, 1). Thus, there is an attempt to manipulate the spatio-temporal *chronotope*—a regular connection of spatial-temporal coordinates. The term is used in the present article with the same meaning as it has been introduced by Alexei Ukhtomsky in the context of his physiological studies in 1925 (Zueva 2015, 30) and then cultivated in the humanitarian sphere by Mikhail Bakhtin, and leads to the illusion of overcoming the flow of time (Beaton 2010, 59).

The initiation process is aimed at vastly increasing the consciousness of the listener and his worldview. Why is this result so desirable? According to the composer, capacious consciousness already perceives the world not in a fragmented form, but in its natural state—a unified one. Indeed, perceiving the world as fragments is only an illusion and indicates our limited consciousness. This impact on the listener's consciousness gives a chance for a global perception of the world. Moreover, scientific thought recognizes a collective unconscious (a term that Carl Jung used in the book *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1934–55)) existing independently of us. I have in mind the universal consciousness—the collective experience of all souls—that defines its most profound oneness with the divine origin. It refers to kinds of unified informational morphogenetic fields (extracellular information structures). This term was first used by Ukrainian biologist Alexander Gurwitsch (Belousov 2008, 307), i.e., the same as "Akasha"⁴ (this term was introduced to Western science by Rudolf Steiner), which supplies the entire universe with energy (Gidley 2007, 29).

Conclusion

To summarize the results of the conducted research, we must touch upon the following circumstances:

1. Eka Chabashvili's desire is to return a sense of the wholeness of the universe to the listener, in which there are no longer secondary sounds—all of them are part of a single cosmic harmony.
2. Chabashvili's compositional strategy and method serve the purpose of allowing the listener to fully mobilize the mind and free it from barriers (sources of discomfort, aberrations, mental traps, stereotypes), which can help to perceive the world from a new perspective and gain the condition of happiness.⁵
3. The changes in the listener's consciousness at the end of the session take an ontological advantage over the impression received from the installations.
4. The composer indicates that art is not separated from the universe. For this purpose, she tries to create the vibrations of sounds that would harmonize with the vibrations of the universe. According to the composer's belief, this is what will help the listener to become a space-energetic person and to connect to the unified communication network of the cosmos as the largest energetic process.
5. In order to achieve the set goal, Chabashvili's compositional strategy envisages initiation with the following scheme: implementation of the ritual, and rethinking of the temporal continuum. By guiding this

³ It is a well-known phrase from Quintus Horace's *Ode* 1, 11.

⁴ Akasha (Sanskrit: आकाश, IAST: *ākāśa*, lit. "appearance," "space")—in Indian religions, a special type of space, approximately corresponding to the European concept of "ether" (Iannone 2001, 30).

⁵ As the listeners who visited this multimedia performance session several times were students and colleagues of the Tbilisi State Conservatoire, I interviewed each person, and they noted being overcome by a state of happiness immediately after the end of the session, which took place from November 30 to December 8, 2018, in the hall of the Georgian Composers' Union.

initiation, the composer recreates the archetype of the archaic initiation ritual. This very mission of the artist has been implied in the words of an American art critic Jerry Saltz: “All art is a kind of exorcism and communion. Artists are like shamans living at the edges of our village, making things that might be useful to us” (Saltz 2022, 1). Obviously, the initiation of the spiritual and mental change in the listener’s mind depends on his or her desire and readiness.

Thus, the composer’s choice of genre—a multimedia performance, which is called a symphony-exhibition—corresponds exactly with these goals and objectives.

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Ekos Chabashvili simfonija-paroda *Kbma* – nauja kompozicinė paradigmą

Santrauka

Žymios kartvelų kompozitorės Ekos Chabashvili, iškilusios posovietiniu laikotarpiu (XX a. 9-ajame deš.), muzikinė kūryba išsiskiria žanrų įvairove ir conceptualia gelme. Kompozitori būdingas mokslo naujovių diegimas muzikoje nurodė straipsnio tyrinėjimo kryptis: tai multimedija pagrįsto mąstymo ypatumai, *ekomuzikos* estetika, mokslo naujovių muzikinė interpretacija. Daugiausia dėmesio skiriama jos sinkretiniam eksperimentiniam projektui – simfonijai-parodai *Kbma* („Balsas“). Kūriniu siekiama klausytojui priminti ontologinę muzikos esmę ir, kompozitorės įsitikinimu, garsais kuriamas vibracijas, kuriomis jam padedama integruotis į bendrą kosminį komunikacinį tinklą, pasitelkiant daugiamates medijas. Siekdama perteikti šią idėją, kompozitorė modifikuoja tradicinį komponavimo metodą. Kūrinys išsiskiria šiomis savybėmis:

1. Atlikėjas ir klausytojai sugyvena vienoje kūrybinėje erdvėje.
 2. Nauja kompozitorės, atlikėjo ir klausytojų sąveikos konfigūracija aktyviai įtraukia pastaruosius į atlikimo procesą, o tai reiškia ir dalyvavimą kuriant muziką nuo pat pradžių per kiekvieną seansą.
 3. Atlikėjas / instruktorius šiame projekte atlieka tradicinio tarpininko funkciją (kompozitorės koncepciją pristato klausytojui). Instruktorius groja arfa, skaito eiles, piešia arba rašo lentoje ir taip sesijos svečiams pateikia pavyzdį, kaip galima įsitraukti į atlikimą, t. y. aktyviai dalyvauti kūrybiniame procese.
 4. Tam tikras kūrinio *scenarijus* numato muzikos, vaizduojamojo meno, apšvietimo ir mokslo sąveiką per asociatyvias metaforų sąsajas, kurios sukuria daugialypės terpės hibridinę formą.
 5. Siekdama integruoti klausytojus į „visatos muziką“ kompozitorė stengiasi atitraukti juos nuo kasdienybės, o tai suaktyvina meditatyvumą ir improvizaciją kaip mąstymo principą. Dėl to naujoviškai sprendžiama ir laiko kontinuumo problema.
- Taigi nuodugni kūrinio analizė atskleidžia, jog kompozitorės pasirinktas multimedijos žanras, kitaip įvardijamas kaip simfonija-paroda, taikliai atitinka išsikeltus tikslus ir uždavinius.