

## Synthesis of Georgian Ethnic Rituals and European Music Traditions in Sulkhan Nasidze’s Symphonic Triad: A Study of National Identity and Universal Themes

**Abstract.** This article explores the symphonic triad—*Pirosmani*, *Passione*, and *Dalai*—by Sulkhan Nasidze, a distinguished 20th-century Georgian composer. His symphonies reflect the philosophical and aesthetic dimensions of ethnicity, particularly through the integration of archaic Georgian rituals and European musical traditions. This research is focused on two key aspects: (1) identifying the layers of ethnic culture that resonate with a 20th-century composer, and (2) examining how ethnic music and folk traditions can be integrated, transformed, and reinterpreted within modern compositional frameworks.

Using historical and comparative research methods, the study concludes that blending the traditions of European music and Georgian ethnic elements are fundamental to Nasidze’s compositional style; *Pirosmani* depicts Tbilisi’s multicultural musical backdrop. In *Passione*, Nasidze connects mourning and burial rituals from Georgia’s mountainous regions with the European Passion genre. In *Dalai*, the composer focuses on the Tusheti funeral ritual, reimagining it through the features of the symphonic genre. Nasidze’s works are centered on reviving ethnic rituals, not merely as cultural artifacts but as vehicles for exploring universal human themes such as life and death, thereby giving new global significance to local Georgian cultural practices.

**Keywords:** Sulkhan Nasidze, multiculturalism, European music, ethnicity, rituals, symphony, Georgian folk music.

### Introduction

The significance of ethnicity and folk traditions in Georgian art music ever since its origination has been profound. On the one hand, ethnic-based music helps to preserve cultural heritage, while on the other hand, it allows Georgian music to establish a unique position within the cultural diversity of European music. Among Georgian composers of all generations who expressed the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of ethnicity and interacted with both local and global cultural contexts in their music, a prominent figure of the Georgian composing school, a representative of the “Sixtiers,” Sulkhan Nasidze<sup>1</sup> stands out as one of the foremost. This article will highlight the aesthetic and technical possibilities of incorporating ethnicity into 20th-century Georgian music using the specific example of the symphonic triad:<sup>2</sup> *Pirosmani*,<sup>3</sup> *Passione*<sup>4</sup> and *Dalai*.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the significant contributions of Georgian musicologists to the study addressed in this paper, the synthesis of national and European musical traditions in Nasidze’s music remains a key area of research, primarily explored by Givi Orjonikidze. His work emphasizes the idea that folklore is an artistic reflection of reality—it is both archaic and modern, containing universal archetypes, and can serve as a rich source of inspiration for contemporary composition. The theoretical methodology of this research is also grounded in the scientific articles from prominent Georgian musicologists, including Rusudan Tsurtsumia (2023), Dodo Gogua (2016), Marina Kavtaradze (2014, 2017), Tamaz Gabisonia (2023), Nato Zhghenti (2004), and Tinatin Dolidze (2012), providing a comprehensive framework for study analysis.

Nasidze profoundly combined the unique, distinctive compositional style precisely by synthesizing elements of both ethnic and European music. His perspective on European, national, and ethnic cultures is captivating. According to the composer, every national culture enriches global civilization and culture with its unique qualities. Nasidze says that “nationality is a constituent element of the composer’s individuality. Within a single, universal human culture, each national culture finds its own distinctive expression” (Nasidze 2023b, 106).

<sup>1</sup> Sulkhan Nasidze (1927–1996), a renowned Georgian composer and pianist, received numerous honors, including the Shota Rustaveli State Prize and the title of People’s Artist of Georgia, etc. He served as chairman of the Georgian Composers’ Union (1992–1996) and artistic director of the Georgian Philharmonic (1974–1990). Nasidze excelled in symphonic and instrumental music, composing eight symphonies, five string quartets, concertos, the oratorio *My Homeland* (1967), and the ballet *Orpheus* (1973), along with film music.

<sup>2</sup> In Givi Orjonikidze’s book *ქვიშაღარი დარჩება* [The Sand Will Remain] and *Issues of Musicology: Essays on the History of Georgian Music of the 60s–90s of the 20th Century*, which is used as a textbook at the Tbilisi State Conservatoire, these symphonies are frequently referred to as the “Symphonic Triad” or, less commonly, as a triptych.

<sup>3</sup> See RamShemqmnaAdamianad (2013) for the recording of this composition.

<sup>4</sup> See Nasidze, Sulkhan (2021a) for the recording of this composition.

<sup>5</sup> See Nasidze, Sulkhan (2021b) for the recording of this composition.

It should be emphasized that national roots play a fundamental role in shaping his compositional ideas. To realize them, Nasidze strives to harmoniously integrate national and European musical traditions, drawing on the experience of European music; ethnicity plays a pivotal role in shaping Nasidze's compositional style, as it provides a sense of belonging and continuity with the past traditions of Georgia. According to Gogua, Sulkhan Nasidze considered folk music as a powerful phenomenon that profoundly influences Georgian compositional thinking, permeating and shaping the entirety of Georgian musical thought (Gogua 2016, 126). For Nasidze, ethnic culture functions as source of inspiration, as a mode of being, as a sign of identity: "Georgian musical folklore is such a powerful phenomenon that it dominates Georgian musical thought. It has filled the space of Georgian musical thought" (Nasidze 2023b, 84). Nasidze asserts that it is impossible for a Georgian composer to overlook national folklore, which he regards as the richest source and an invaluable treasure of musical inspiration: "Georgian musical folklore is so powerful, distinctive, and unique that no Georgian composer can escape its profound influence during their creative development. It can be said that every positive creative endeavor in our country, regardless of its ambition to introduce something new, has, in one way or another, drawn upon the rich foundation of national musical folklore" (Nasidze 2024, 69). Along with folklore as a phenomenon in general, Nasidze was also inspired by specific artists and considered their art to be the basis of his creativity: "I consider Niko Piroshmanashvili,<sup>6</sup> Vazha-Pshavela,<sup>7</sup> and Georgian folk songs to be my teachers" (Nasidze 2024, 30). The symphonic triad, which is the subject of this article's research, was directly inspired by Piroshmani's paintings and Vazha-Pshavela's writings.

Drawing on his experience with European music, he chose the symphony genre to bring his artistic ideas to life, incorporating elements of the European Passion genre—such as dramaturgical construction around a narrative path of suffering, death, mourning, lamentation, and the search for the true meaning of life and death. Thus, he envisioned the modern ideal of Georgian music in the seamless fusion of national traditions with European musical genres and forms.

As Nasidze's Symphonic Triad has not been previously analyzed in this context, the article offers fresh perspectives on the work. To achieve the set goals, the analysis examines two key aspects: (1) identifying which elements of ethnic culture are significant to the Georgian compositional school as a whole, and (2) investigating how aspects of ethnic music and folk traditions are adapted, transformed, and combined with the traditions of European music in Nasidze's Symphonic Triad (*Piroshmani*, *Passione*, and *Dalai*).

Through historical and comparative research methods, the study concludes that ethnic elements play a pivotal role in Nasidze's style, fostering a deep connection to the traditional heritage of his homeland.

Since the synthesis of national and European elements in Nasidze's music embodies a defining characteristic of Georgian music as a whole, a brief historical overview will precede the analysis of the Symphonic Triad. This overview will underscore how Nasidze's work represents a remarkable phenomenon, deeply rooted in and emerging from the rich traditions of this synthesis within Georgian musical history.

### 1. The role of ethnic traditions in Georgian art music during its formation and the Soviet era

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the formation of the Georgian art music school relied heavily on the synthesis of national and European musical thought. This fusion was crucial for establishing a European-style school of composition, while simultaneously grounding musical expressions in the rich traditions of Georgian ethnic music. This blend of traditional elements and European compositional techniques created a distinctive Georgian art musical tradition that honors both the ethno-based expressions of national identity and broader, international forms. In 19th-century Georgia, Aloiz Mizandari, Andria Karashvili, and Ilia Kargareteli were already actively engaged in composition; however, their music relied exclusively on European traditions, which hindered the emergence of an original national school of composition. The formation

<sup>6</sup> Nikoláy Piroshmanashvili or Niko Piroshmani, referred to as Nikala (1862–1918) was a self-taught Georgian painter and a prominent figure in the genre of naïve art. Renowned for his simple yet deeply evocative style, Piroshmani's works vividly captured the essence of Georgian culture and rich folk traditions. Piroshmani's works have been exhibited internationally, including in Kyiv, Warsaw, Paris, Vienna, Nice, Marseilles, Tokyo, Zurich, Nantes, Turin, Istanbul, Vilnius, and Basel, with notable shows at the Louvre (1969) and the Foundation Beyeler (2023–2024).

<sup>7</sup> Vazha-Pshavela, born Luka Razikashvili (1861–1915), was one of Georgia's greatest poets, writers, and public intellectuals. An active participant in the national liberation movement, he was a proponent of liberal ideology and a passionate advocate for the humanistic ideal of friendship between people of different nationalities. He collected and published examples of folk poetry, along with publicistic letters of ethnographic significance.

of the Georgian compositional school—commonly referred to as Georgian art music—occurred precisely through the fusion of European harmonic traditions with Georgian national musical stylistics, a synthesis that embodied the artistic aims and ideals of classical Georgian composers such as Meliton Balanchivadze, Dimitri Arakishvili, Niko Sulkhaniashvili, Zakaria Paliashvili, and Viktor Dolidze.

First of all, we should emphasize that Georgia is a country with a rich *a cappella* tradition, a phenomenon of great significance for Georgian identity and the foundation of Georgian art music. As Tsurtsumia stated, for Georgians, singing is as vital a means of expression as language itself, as “it can express all human experiences—from joy to tragedy—all the while a part of existence from the birth of a new life to the end of life” (Tsurtsumia 2023, 8). Both branches of Georgian traditional music—folk songs and orthodox chants—are not important only by means of intonation as the basis of Georgian art music, but also for awakening national consciousness in 19th-century Georgia. According to Gabisonia: “Traditional Georgian music is distinguished by a clear, original expressiveness from among the stylistic manifestations of world ethnic music. Therefore, it is not surprising at all that the main arteries feeding general Georgian music culture are Georgian singing and chanting” (Gabisonia, 2023, 246). According to ethnomusicologist Brian Fairley, even the first Georgian professional chorus, *ქართული ქორო* (Kartuli Khor), primarily performing Georgian folk songs and contributing to the development of Georgian art music, was formed as integral part of the 19th-century nationalist revival movement (Fairley 2023, 21).

In the 1920s–1950s, after the establishment of Communist ideology, individuals were viewed primarily as members of a collective communist society, rather than as autonomous beings with personal identities and desires. Under the conditions of total ideologization and standardization of art, the themes and methods of expression were unified within this collective socialist system. The musical tonal system allowed no alternatives, and the melody of a musical work had to be based either on the melodic and rhythmic-intonational formulas of the mass revolutionary song or on the obligatory use of folklore. In both cases, this highlighted the strong connection between art music and the ordinary Soviet citizen, as well as their peasant origins. Starting in the 1960s, when Soviet culture was granted more freedom and allowed to distance itself from the directives of artistic resolutions and the decrees of Marxist-Leninist ideology, Georgian composers, by bringing forth the deep layers of folklore, clearly expressed their national consciousness and overcame the influence of the Russian world. The use of rhythmic, melodic, and modal system characteristics of national folklore was, for Georgian composers, a means of expressing their national identity, which had been suppressed by Soviet ideology. Since the 1960s, as individualism gained prominence, Georgian composers have each adopted unique approaches to integrating folklore into their work, reflecting personal interpretations of national traditions. I find it difficult to disagree with Nasidze’s perspective: “Folk music is a bearer of universal qualities, it appears to us from a different side at each new stage, and in this respect its potential possibilities are inexhaustible. Therefore, the creative attitude towards musical folklore is as diverse as there is individuality, and its standardization is completely impossible” (Nasidze 2023a, 70). Thus, famous representatives of Georgian “Sixties”, including Nasidze, believed that by bringing forward its ethnic layers, Georgian composers could make Georgian music one of the most interesting tributaries of European music.

## 2. The importance of ethnic music in Nasidze’s symphonic music

From the representatives of the sixties, Nasidze’s compositional approaches reveal the significant potential of Georgian folk music within the contemporary musical ecosystem. Georgian folk music served as a source of his innovative creative ideas. Integration of folk rituals in Nasidze’s symphonies demonstrates that when a composer deeply expresses the national roots of ethnic music through the language of contemporary music, the narrative of archaic rituals aligns harmoniously with the structure of classical genres and modern techniques. Moreover, this approach allows the composer to transcend ethnicity and create a global musical dialogue. To be more specific, I will say that a symphony turned out to be a suitable genre for conveying themes of general human relevance, through which he tries to continue certain traditions of European and Russian symphonic music. He was greatly inspired in particular by the symphonies of Gustav Mahler and Dmitri Shostakovich. Gogua perceives a connection between Nasidze’s symphony and the works of Mahler and Shostakovich due to their shared focus on tragic and philosophical themes (Gogua 2016, 131). Orjonikidze believes that the tragic concept of symphonies is primarily rooted in Shostakovich’s music, which deepened Nasidze’s interest in psychological and philosophical issues. “Shostakovich introduced into Nasidze’s creation

the idea of the struggle and opposition of good and evil dramaturgical layers, [he] introduced the theme of the face of musical symbols, specific types” (Orjonikidze 2023, 137).<sup>8</sup> Stravinsky’s influence should also be taken into account, which is not surprising, considering the interest of the Georgian “Sixtiers” in Stravinsky’s music. As Orjonikidze notes: “Nasidze was not indifferent to some of Stravinsky’s principles (for example, the principle of ostinato). In his *Passion*, one can sense Stravinsky’s intonational types, which remind us of *The Rite of Spring*. However, in this case as well, everything remains within the framework of Nasidze’s style and is organic to his worldview” (Orjonikidze 2023, 137).

And what are the main markers of Georgian ethnic traditions used by Nasidze? Unlike Georgian Soviet music of the 1920s–50s, which relied heavily on direct quotes from folklore, the Georgian music of the 1960s, including Nasidze’s works, employs rhythmic-intonational complexes, modes, and melodies, drawing from a new modal perspective rather than using explicit folkloric quotations. In terms of musical language, in the first symphony of the triad, the composer mainly relies on the melosphere of Tbilisi, as well as on elements of mountain folk songs, while in the other two symphonies, he draws entirely on the intonations of Georgian folklore from the mountain regions of Eastern Georgia. As a composer, Nasidze was especially captivated by mountain folklore, driven by his deep appreciation for the poetry of mountain regions. But what, ultimately, did this folklore represent? According to Gogua, “mountain folklore is characterized by an archaic-mythical tragic intonational concentrate, in which the psychological characteristics of the Georgian national soul are encoded, and this is reflected precisely in the mountain mode, which is a stylistic category, an intonational structure, and not simply a sound sequence” (Gogua 2016, 128). The melodies are characterized by the following features: the descending, metrically flexible melodic phrases, the minor key, an improvisational and declarative type of recitative, the excess of movements in seconds, the repetition of ending notes at the end of phrases. The theme based on downward movements is particularly interesting, symbolizing the descent of villagers from the mountain to the valley. The fact is that due to the harsh climatic conditions of the mountains, the villagers temporarily moved to the valley in winter, as the living conditions were easier there.

Nasidze was captivated by the inherent symphonic potential of mountain songs, and it is no surprise that he actively integrated this quality into his symphonies. He noted: “The seemingly simple melodic texture of Khevsurian Tushian, and Pshavian<sup>9</sup> traditions possess remarkable internal potential, offering extraordinary opportunities for its symphonic development. In these songs, the melodic line is independent and self-contained, providing an excellent opportunity for imagination to unfold within the harmonic sphere” (Nasidze 2023a, 70).

Interestingly, this metrically flexible melodic structure of mountainous folklore in Nasidze’s music has a broader context. These melodies, with descending movements, a gloomy mood, slow tempo, minor key, and declamatory, improvisational style, connect Nasidze’s music with themes of fate and destiny in Georgian, Russian, and European music.

The composer’s attention was captivated not only by the elements of folk music but, first and foremost, by the philosophical dimensions of the burial and mourning rituals of the mountainous regions of Eastern Georgia. These rituals best reveal the nation’s consciousness and cosmological ideas, while simultaneously echoing universal human themes such as vanity and eternity, life, and the mysticism of death. Thanks to these universal themes, these compositions transcend narrow national borders and acquire a global context. Due to

<sup>8</sup> The attempt of the Georgian Sixtiers to integrate more closely with the achievements of European music may appear to contradict the fact that they were also influenced by the music of Shostakovich. The following brief explanation may clarify this point. Liberation from the dominance of Russian music was a gradual process and, it must be admitted, did not occur overnight. The orientation toward 20th-century European music and its leading composers became possible once Georgian composers gained access to recordings of European works, and for a very limited circle of them, through participation in the festival Warsaw Autumn. Due to several circumstances, Shostakovich’s music—unlike that of composers who openly expressed Party ideology, such as Isaak Dunaevsky, Georgy Sviridov, Tikhon Khrennikov, and others—was perceived as representing, in one way or another, opposition to the regime. In the minds of Georgian composers, he was associated with rebellion against indoctrinated Soviet art. The most significant factor was that his opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* became the target of Soviet censorship, placing his career in jeopardy. It is well known that this opera was the subject of the article “Muddle Instead of Music: On the Opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*,” published in *Pravda* on January 28, 1936, where it was condemned as “formalist,” “coarse,” “bourgeois,” and “vulgar.” This episode marked a turning point in Shostakovich’s career and remains a key example of Soviet censorship in the arts. It is also well known that in 1948 his works were again denounced under the Zhdanov Doctrine, leading to professional setbacks that lasted for several years. Even after his rehabilitation in 1956, performances of his music were still occasionally subject to state intervention, as in the case of his Thirteenth Symphony (1962).

<sup>9</sup> Khevsureti, Tusheti, and Pshavi are historical and geographical regions of Georgia, located in the mountainous area of Eastern Georgia, along the Caucasus Range.

the subtitles of the symphonies, they are examples of programmatic symphonism, distinguished by the tendency to visualize the music and serve as an example of the application of film montage principles in music. As Zhghenti notes: “The titles of his symphonies carry specific content and emotional landmarks” (Zhghenti 2004, 117). Due to the inherent tendency toward visualization in these symphonies, Zhghenti interprets them as musical scenarios, constructed from a sequence of film-like frames arranged according to a specific plot, where two types of narration alternate: action-like and psychological (Zhghenti 2004, 118).

In these symphonies, we not only listen to the human drama, but we also watch it, like film frames arranged according to the cause-and-effect principle. The main idea of the symphonies is related to the drama of human existence and is dedicated to themes such as decadence, burial, and mourning on the occasion of human burial. As Orjonikidze noted, Nasidze’s hero is the archetype of a thoughtful individual, who is imbued from beginning to end with contemplation of the eternal theme of life and death (Orjonikidze 2023, 124).

### 2.1. Symphony No. 5, *Pirosmani* (1977)

This symphony in six episodes, which contains elements of rhapsody, sonata, and rondo, was defined by the composer as a symphonic poem. It is dedicated to a solitary artist, isolated from society, whose inner spiritual experiences unfold against the backdrop of Tbilisi’s multi-ethnic musical environment. “Pirosmani’ is a story full of sadness about the fate of a genius, a lonely artist,” as Orjonikidze has argued (2023, 141).

The prototype of the symphony’s personified character is Pirosmani, a Georgian painter from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, who died in complete loneliness and poverty. To the shame of the nation, not even his grave remains. He is celebrated for his distinctive, folk-inspired style often described as naïve or primitivist art. Pirosmani’s work is marked by a direct, unschooled quality that captures the simplicity and vitality of Georgian rural and urban life. His paintings commonly depict scenes of village life, animals, feasts, historical figures, and landscapes. Dimitri Shevardnadze, the founder of the National Art Gallery and the Union of Artists of Georgia, noted regarding his connection with folk roots, that he was the only artist who portrayed the entirety of 19th-century Georgian life through an authentic folk narrative (Tinikashvili 2015, 1).

Through the figure of Pirosmani, Nasidze broadly addressed the issue of the conflict between a genius artist and society, also alluding to the fate of artists during Soviet repressions. Pirosmani, originally from a village, created his masterpieces after moving to Tbilisi. It is no coincidence that the drama of his life unfolds both through the intonations of mountain folklore (Episode II, mm. 66–68, see figure 1) and against the vibrant backdrop of old Tbilisi—a multicultural city where music was played by all social classes. Asian music, Karachokheli music, urban songs with guitar accompaniment, Neapolitan songs, and even arias from Italian operas were heard in Tbilisi after the opening of the first opera theatre in Transcaucasia.

The image shows a musical score excerpt for five instruments: Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Clarinet in Bass (Cl.b.), Trumpet (Tr-be), and Violin (V-le). The score is written in 3/4 time and consists of three measures. The Flute part has a melodic line with a five-measure rest in the second measure. The Clarinet and Clarinet in Bass parts have sustained notes. The Trumpet part has a melodic line starting in the second measure with a piano (pp) dynamic marking. The Violin part has a sustained note. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamics like 'pp'.

Figure 1. Sulkhan Nasidze’s *Pirosmani*. An excerpt from the opening of Episode II, mm. 66–68

Pirosmani’s life was deeply intertwined with a single city—Tbilisi. His paintings vividly depict only its landscapes, and the guitar—being the most common and popular instrument in Tbilisi for performing lyrical and romantic songs—can be regarded in this symphony as the embodiment of the gentle and luminous timbre associated with the image of Pirosmani’s loneliness. Thus, Pirosmani’s leitmotif, as the “main character,” in my interpretation, is expressed through the guitar—this beloved instrument of Tbilisi—which also serves as a subtle reference to the artist’s final place of residence and to his life marked by solitude. To the extent that the symphony vividly contrasts the artist’s delicate spiritual world with the cruel and harsh environment

that failed to recognize Pirosmani's genius and ultimately condemned him to death by starvation, I suggest that this is precisely what Nasidze seeks to emphasize in his music; the artist's toxic environment in my interpretation is symbolized by dissonances, militaristic marching rhythms, and two collages that are presented in Episode III, which brings the grotesque into the music. The first collage incorporates the "March of the Pechora Regiment" (mm. 133–135, see figure 2), whose forceful entry adds a grotesque element to the music, along with the waltz from Gaetano Donizetti's "La Favorite" (mm. 174–179, see figure 3), thereby symbolizing the superficiality of the society surrounding the artist.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system, labeled with a box containing the number 13, covers measures 133 to 135. It includes staves for Piccolo (Picc.), Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet (Cl.), Bass Clarinet (Cl.b.), Cor, Trumpet (Tr-be), Trombone and Tuba (Tr-ni e Tuba), Tympani (Timp.), Snare (Tno), Cymbals (P-tti), Cassa, and Arpa. The woodwinds and brass play a rhythmic, marching pattern with various articulations and dynamics. The percussion section provides a steady, rhythmic accompaniment. The harp is silent. The second system, also labeled with a box containing the number 13, covers measures 136 to 138. It features the string section (Archi) with markings for 'tutti' and 'tutti unis.' The strings play a sustained, rhythmic accompaniment with various articulations and dynamics.

Figure 2. The beginning of the military march from Sulhan Nasidze's *Pirosmani*, Episode III, mm. 133–135

28 15 <sup>a2</sup>

Fl.  
Ob.  
Cl.  
Fag.  
Cor.  
Tr-be  
Timp.  
Archi

Figure 3. The beginning of the waltz from Sulkhan Nasidze's *Pirosmani*, Episode III, mm. 174–179

In my opinion, the finale of the symphony contains very interesting references. It is well known that during the height of Soviet repression, individuals deemed undesirable by the regime were interrogated in their homes and arrested, or pursued through the streets to be taken into custody, after which they were gathered and transported by train to various locations, where they were either executed or sent to labour camps and colonies. Given what we know of the composer's attitude toward the Soviet regime, I assume that in the fourth episode of the symphony, there is a direct reference to the Soviet repressive machine, which actively hunted down artists, capturing them in the streets and buildings, and sending them by train to their place of execution. In the fifth episode, the imitation of the train serves as yet another poignant reference to this matter. In the finale, the composer incorporates a guitar solo and drums to evoke the ethnic atmosphere of Tbilisi, alluding to the world-famous Georgian primitivist artist who died in loneliness in this multicultural city.

Opera became a source of spiritual nourishment and a cultural hub for Tbilisi's eclectic population in the second half of the 19th century. The excerpt from the Italian opera directly references the musical affinity Georgians showed towards Italian opera following the opening of the Opera Theater in Tbilisi in 1854. Dolidze examines a passage from review of an unknown author published in the *Kavkaz* newspaper on November 22, 1852, which suggests that Tbilisi would soon become an Italian city, as everyone, including the workers, sang in Italian (Dolidze 2004, 337).

According to Kavtaradze, “at the beginning of the 20th century there were, at least, four cultures in Tbilisi: ‘Imperial’ Russian, European (in the form of both ‘western’ in general and European subcultures), ‘old Tiflis’ and Georgian culture” (Kavtaradze 2017, 34). Pirosmani was an iconic artist of Tbilisi, vividly capturing the essence of the city's vibrant, multi-ethnic life through his unique and expressive works. Pirosmani's paintings are primarily depictions of the musical life of the inherently multi-layered and multicultural old Tbilisi. Indeed, in Pirosmani's works, one finds the everyday environment of Tbilisi streets, the life of the Karachokheli<sup>10</sup> and *kinto*,<sup>11</sup> a city of musicians, and musical instruments.

Kavtaradze provides a very interesting explanation of the function of collage in the symphony:

The category of space and time is revealed in the symphony in the opposition of two musical layers: one layer is the musical material through which the composer creates a real artistic world, and the other layer is the artistic-illusory space, which he creates through the principle of collage. Through collage, not only two spaces are created in the symphony, but also two times—past and present, which are represented by three stylistic models: the march of the Pechory Regiment, the waltz from Donizetti's opera “La Favorita” and the imitation of the sound of the Zurna.<sup>12</sup> (Kavtaradze 2014, 216)

These two collages capture the musical atmosphere surrounding Pirosmani: the bold march of a military regiment noisily parading through the streets and a passage from the popular Italian opera, which was all the rage in Tbilisi at the time. This is how Nasidze creatively applied the European musical collage technique to portray the multiethnic atmosphere of Tbilisi.

## 2.2. Symphony No. 6, *Passione* (1978)

This work combines the characteristics of the oratorio, symphony, and Passion genres. The composer seeks to draw emotional and even visual parallels between the mourning and burial rituals of the mountainous regions of Georgia and the European Passion genre. As Zhghenti noted, *Passione* is a folk-inspired composition, an interesting example of stylistic synthesis, one that organically combines Baroque and Romantic traditions (Zhghenti 2004, 119).

Since this archaic Georgian ritual was traditionally performed by a men's chorus, the composer revives it by incorporating a male chorus into the first and third parts of the symphony. According to Gogua, the bass tessitura is relevant to the gloomy and meditative nature of the symphony (Gogua 2016, 133). The literary basis for the bass part is drawn from the poems of Vazha-Pshavela and explores themes of vanity and the natural cycle of one life replacing another. The chorus text in parts I and III serves both a commentator's and a sonorous function. To enhance the emotional atmosphere of mourning, Nasidze employs traditional elements of ethnic music from Eastern Georgian mountains, such as the recitative style, the predominance of descending melodic movements, and the characteristics of the so-called mountain modes.

In this way, Nasidze conveyed the mourning ritual of the mountainous region, embodying the intensity of the most painful human experience, through elements of ethnic music.

The idea of composition—depiction of an ancient folk mourning ritual with the monotonous psalmody in the chorus part presented in the form of a Georgian variant of *Lamento*, the ostinato in the orchestra and

<sup>10</sup> A Karachokheli was a traditional Georgian street performer in Tbilisi, entertaining passers-by with folk music and enriching the city's multicultural social and cultural life.

<sup>11</sup> A *kinto* is a term used in Georgia to describe a type of street musician or entertainer, similar to the Karachokheli. *Kintos* often dance in public spaces, entertaining people. They were an important part of the urban setting of Tbilisi.

<sup>12</sup> The zurna is a traditional wind instrument, widely used in the music of the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and parts of the Balkans and Sri Lanka. It is usually accompanied by drum in Armenian, Tbilisian (Georgia), Anatolian, and Assyrian folk music. The zurna typically has a conical wooden body and a double reed, which produces its distinctive sound. The zurna has a limited range of notes but can produce a strong, vibrant sound, making it ideal for outdoor performances or processions. Different regions may have slight variations in the instrument, such as the Turkish zurna, the Georgian zurna, and others, each with slightly different shapes or sizes.

chorus parts, the funeral march and catharsis in the finale—provokes allusions to the Passion genre of the Baroque era.

My interpretation is that the author uses sonorous effects through a funeral march in the third part to establish a connection between the archaic era and modernity, as the main theme of the work remains ever relevant. The timbral dramaturgy, in my opinion, adds more intensity to the presentation of this archaic ritual through symphonic dramaturgy. The trombone part introduces a tragic tone to the march rhythm, the bells suggest the gathering of people for mourning, while a transformed main theme in the oboe part features a catharsis in the finale.

### 2.3. Symphony No. 7, *Dalai* (1979)

The source of inspiration for this symphony in four episodes also relates back to Georgian ethnic traditions, although the direct impetus came from his attendance at a mountain poetry evening, as argued by Nato Zhghenti (2004, 121). This ethnic tradition was called *Dalaoba*, the ethnic ritual for mourning and commemorating the deceased. It was spread in Tusheti, a mountainous region of Eastern Georgia, and its neighboring Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia.<sup>13</sup>

This ritual was performed on the anniversary of a deceased person in a responsorial style of singing, in which a soloist, the main mourner *Modalave*, sang a line or phrase, and the congregation or chorus (mourners) responded with a repeated phrase or melody. *Modalave*, riding on a horse called the “horse of the soul,” mourned in a recitative style. He was surrounded by five riders, known as *Amkolebi* (“followers” in Georgian), who alternated with him in unison. The text of the chorus refrain can be translated as follows: “Sing Dala, you riders, Dalaoba is very hard.”

This folk tradition of responsorial singing between the mourner and a unison chorus is symbolically reimagined by Nasidze in symphonic dramaturgy as the alternation of different orchestral groups. In my interpretation, the composer uses the timbre of the trombone and elements of the aleatoric technique to convey a gloomy image of death (Episode II, mm. 71–72; the Episode III, mm. 186–190, see figures 4 and 5). I suggest that, in contrast, the composer employs the timbre of the celesta to symbolize the childish and innocent soul of the deceased.

Figure 4. Sulkhan Nasidze's *Dalai*. An excerpt from Episode II, mm. 71–72

<sup>13</sup> Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia are republics in southern Russia, each with its own distinct culture, language, and history.

The image displays a musical score for Sulkhan Nasidze's *Dalai*. The score is arranged in a vertical stack of staves. From top to bottom, the instruments are: 2 Flutes (Fl.), 2 Oboes (Ob.), 2 Clarinets in B (Cl in B), 2 Bassoons (Fag.), Cello (Cel.), Arpa (Arpa), Piano (Piano), and Archi (Archi). The woodwind and string parts (Fl., Ob., Cl in B, Fag., Cel., Arpa, Piano, Archi) feature a continuous, wavy, tremolo-like texture. The woodwinds (Fl., Ob., Cl in B, Fag.) and strings (Cel., Arpa, Piano) play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Piano part includes a prominent triplet of eighth notes. The Archi part consists of a simple, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). A double bar line with a repeat sign is present in the middle of the score, indicating a section that repeats.

Figure 5. Sulkhan Nasidze's *Dalai*. An excerpt from Episode III, mm. 186–190

As Nasidze's penchant for vivid musical illustration is a well known feature of his compositional style, in my interpretation, in the fourth episode, he conveys the depletion of vital energy and the gradual cessation of the human pulse. And in the coda, the chromatic movements and the final E major chord reference the passage of the soul into the corridor and the light at its end. The threshold between death and life has been crossed. Through revival of this ritual, Nasidze presents a different interpretation of death—the physical death of the body is seen as an opportunity to enter a realm of mysticism. Consequently, the human, driven by curiosity, even seeks it out.

In my interpretation, Nasidze used this ethnic ritual, the purpose of which was precisely to show people what life and death are, to convey the significance of universal existential themes, such as death and eternal life, to the inhabitants of the Georgian mountain region, and to highlight how deeply the mountain people value the fate of an exceptional individual who endures a difficult and painful life. I cannot disagree with Zhghenti that reviving the ritual was not the composer's goal in itself, but rather the inner essence it embodies (Zhghenti 2004, 121). By depicting the arduous journey a person must endure—through death, mourning, and eternal remembrance—this passage suggests that the composer seeks to connect Georgian music with the European Passion genre in a meaningful way.

Judging by the example of this composition, I suggest that integrating the characteristics of Georgian national mountainous folk music with the musical traditions of Baroque Passions and European or Russian symphonism demonstrates how national traditions can operate within the broader framework of European musical heritage.

The significance of this and Nasidze's earlier symphonies in Georgian music lies in the composer's effort to revive national ritual traditions within the symphonic genre. In my view, through the intensive resuscitation of these rituals, Nasidze sought to renew the concept of the Georgian national symphony and to create original genre models. In this respect, his work had a profound influence on the contemporary multimedia project Symphony-Exhibition "Khma" (2018–2022) by Eka Chabashvili, a representative of the Georgian post-avant-garde. According to the composer, she drew inspiration from several sources, including Nasidze's ideas, when developing this project.

### Conclusion

What new perspectives did the composer bring to Georgian music and particularly the symphony genre through his Symphonic Triad? His interest in national rituals went beyond their ethnic culture features; he explored the philosophical dimensions of rituals, which encode universal human dilemmas—the antinomy of life and death, and the problem of human existence and nonexistence.

Through the course of the research it was determined that:

—The development of Georgian art music reflects a synthesis of national traditions and European compositional techniques, creating a unique musical identity. Rooted in the rich *a cappella* tradition and influenced by Georgian folk songs and Orthodox chants, this music played a key role in awakening national consciousness during the 19th-century nationalist revival. Despite the constraints of Soviet ideology in the mid-20th century, Georgian composers used folklore as a medium to assert their national identity. From the 1960s, increased artistic freedom allowed them to creatively reinterpret folklore, showcasing individuality and enriching both Georgian and European music traditions.

—Nasidze's symphonies masterfully integrate Georgian mountain folklore and contemporary composing techniques, reflecting themes of life, death, and universal human experience. His music transforms traditional rituals and melodies into profound, globally resonant narratives, combining philosophical depth with a cinematic, programmatic approach. He expanded the cultural boundaries of Georgian ethnic traditions by framing them within the context of universal issues. The first symphony of the triad honors the Georgian painter's tragic life, using collage techniques to depict Tbilisi's multicultural essence and the tension between artistic genius and societal repression. The next symphony blends Georgian mountain mourning rituals and Baroque-era Passion elements. The male chorus, ethnic modes, and orchestral timbres evoke themes of grief and catharsis, connecting archaic traditions with modernity. Symphony No. 7 draws on the Georgian ritual *Dalaoba*, integrating its responsorial singing and symbolic elements with European Passion genres and symphonic traditions. Through carefully considered choices of orchestral timbres and dramaturgy, which are innovative for Nasidze's compositional style, the composer explores profound existential themes—death, mourning, and eternal memory—reinterpreting national traditions within a broader European musical context.

—In terms of the use of Georgian ethnic rituals, Nasidze had a great influence on the multimedia project, the symphony-exhibition *Khma* by Eka Chabashvili. This hereditary connection is evident in how Nasidze seeks to highlight the national consciousness rooted in ancient rituals, while Chabashvili similarly aims to revive a Georgian pagan healing ritual. In both cases, the symphonic genre undergoes transformation to serve as the medium for their creative experiments.

Thus, Nasidze created an immense stimulus for the subsequent development of national music. By juxtaposing Georgian national musical traditions with Western music techniques, he contributed to positioning Georgian music within a broader, particularly European, context. More so, he expanded the cultural boundaries of Georgian regional ethnic traditions by framing them within the context of universal issues. He heightened the importance of the ethnic within the context of his time, incorporating it into a modern compositional framework. Nasidze once remarked wittily: "While mastering the technical apparatus created by various styles of 20th-century music and adopting new compositional techniques is achievable by many composers, discovering a new world of emotions is the fate only of individuals" (Nasidze 2023a, 64).

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**Kartvelų etninių ritualų ir europinės muzikos tradicijų sintezė  
Sulkhano Nasidze'ės simfoninė triadoje:  
tautinės tapatybės ir universalių temų tyrinėjimas**

Santrauka

Sulkhanas Nasidze'ė yra vienas ryškiausių kartvelų kompozitorių, kurio muzika persmelkta etniškumo estetika ir filosofija, išlaikant santykį su europinėmis muzikos tradicijomis. Jo simfonijos grindžiamos kartvelų archajiškų liaudies ritualų sinteze su europinio vėlyvojo romantizmo elementais (simfoninės poemos bruožais) bei XX a. muzikos tradicijomis. Šie etniniai ritualai kompozitoriui buvo svarbūs todėl, kad juose užkoduotos universalios žmogiškosios dilemos, pavyzdžiui, gyvenimo ir mirties antinomiija, išliekanti aktuali visais laikais.

Tyrimo objektas – Nasidze'ės simfoninė triada *Pirosmani*, *Passione* ir *Dalai*. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip Nasidze'ė sintetina etninės muzikos elementus ir europinės muzikos principus, kokie kartvelų ritualų filosofiniai aspektai pastebimi kompozitoriaus kūryboje. Tyrimo tikslams įgyvendinti keliami šie uždaviniai: 1) nustatyti, kurie etninės kultūros sluoksniai yra aktualūs XX a. kompozitoriui, ir 2) išanalizuoti, kaip etninės muzikos ir liaudies tradicijų elementai gali būti integruojami, transformuojami ir perinterpretuojami šiuolaikinėje kompozicijoje. Straipsnyje pateikiama naujų įžvalgų, nes Nasidze'ės simfoninė triada iki šiol nebuvo analizuota šiuo aspektu. Taikant istorinio ir lyginamojo tyrimo metodus daroma išvada, kad etniniai elementai yra esminė Nasidze'ės stilistikos dalis, suteikianti jo muzikai ryšio su nacionaline tradicija pojūtį.

Išvados pabrėžiama, kad *Pirosmani* dedikuotas vienišam, nuo visuomenės izoliuotam menininkui, kurio vidiniai dvasiniai išgyvenimai atsiskleidžia daugiatautės Tbilisio muzikinės aplinkos fone. *Passione* kompozitorius siekia sukurti emocines ir vaizdines paraleles tarp Sakartvelo kalnų regionų gedulo ir laidojimo ritualų bei europinio pasijos žanro. Kadangi šie ritualai tradiciškai atliekami vyrų choro, kompozitorius juos aktualizuoja į simfonijos faktūrą įtraukdamas vyrų chorą. Siekdamas sustiprinti gedulo atmosferą, Nasidze'ė pasitelkia Rytų Sakartvelo kalnų regionams būdingus etninės raiškos elementus – rečitatyvinį giedojimo stilių ir vietinių dainų dermes. Kūrinyje *Dalai* kompozitorius siekia perteikti Tušetijos (Sakartvelo kalnų regiono)

laidotuvių ritualą, tradiciškai atliekamą mirusiojo mirties metinių proga. Liaudies tradicijai būdingas responsorinis giedojimas tarp gedinčiojo ir unisonu giedančio choro Nasidze'ės simfoninėje dramaturgijoje simboliškai perinterpretuojamas kaip skirtingų orkestro grupių kaita. Derindamas nacionalinės kalnų liaudies muzikos bruožus su baroko ir romantizmo muzikos tradicijomis, Nasidze'ė siekia nacionalinę tradiciją interpretuoti platesniame europinės muzikinės kultūros kontekste.

Nacionaliniai ritualai kompozitorių domino ne vien kaip etninė medžiaga, bet ir kaip priemonė reflektuoti juose slypinčias universalias žmogiškąsias gyvenimo ir mirties temas. Integruodamas etninę kultūrą į savo epochos meninį kontekstą jis suteikė lokaliems reiškiniams platesnę, universalesnę reikšmę. Nasidze'ė ypač siekė atgaivinti kartvelų liaudies muzikos ir archajiškų ritualų bruožus šiuolaikinės kompozicijos kontekste, taip išplėsdamas Sakartvelo akademinės muzikos kultūrinės ribas. Sintendamas etninės ir europinės muzikos elementus, kompozitorius suformavo savitą kompozicinį stilių ir originalią simfoninės kūrybos koncepciją.