



Ekaterine Diasamidze, John Graham and Davit Shugliashvili performing Georgian chants and folk songs at the concert on the opening day of the Conference. (Photo: DL)

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WITHOUT PARALLEL:

VOICE-CROSSING AND TEXTUAL RHYTHM IN
WEST GEORGIAN CHANT

Several studies in recent decades have shown that the structure of Georgian Orthodox liturgical chant is organized around model melodies sung in the highest voice part.¹ Not only are the 200-300 phrase-length melodies preserved through oral tradition important referents for the three-part polyphonic realization of each chant, but the entire Georgian *oktoechos* is based on their tonal and genre assignment. In short, these melodies have clearly played a critical role in centuries of transmission of the liturgical chants for the services of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Thus it comes as a surprise that in many manuscript transcriptions,² the first voice does not sing the referent melody,

1 See Davit Shugliashvili dissertation, V. Sarajishvili State Conservatoire, Tbilisi Georgia, 2009, pp. 18-19 (Georgian); John A. Graham, "The Role of Memory in the Transmission of Georgian Chant," *Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium on Traditional Polyphony*, published by the V. Sarajishvili State Conservatoire, Tbilisi, Georgia, 2008 (English and Georgian).

2 Many thousands of pages of transcriptions survived the Soviet era suppression of Orthodox chant. These are mostly to be found in the National Centre of Manuscripts, but also in the Folklore Centre, the Patriarchate of the Georgian Orthodox Church, and private

but something entirely different. In certain cases, entire chant phrases appear in these transcriptions without any trace of it. This anomaly raises a number of questions about performance practice in the oral tradition. For example, how was it possible, in the absence of notation, to realize the musical phrase without hearing (or singing) the referent melody? In such cases, were there other musical parameters that enabled singers to maintain the form, and if so what were they?

The deliberate avoidance of the referent melody is relatively unusual, occurring only in particular circumstances involving advanced ornamentation. For example, when the upper two voices temporarily switch ranges in a voice-crossing motion known as *gadajvaredineba* [lit. "the crossing of the cross"],³ the second voice does not replace the melody, thus leaving the referent as an unsounded, imagined line. The practice of "crossing" two voice parts over one another is not unique to Georgian liturgical music, but can be found among many indigenous folk traditions of the world.⁴ It was also a technique used by 11th-13th century medieval Western composers from Perotin to Machaut, whose pieces often feature voice-crossings and voice exchanges.⁵

In the Georgian case, voice-crossing is a natural development of a polyphonic vocal culture that prized ornamentation and improvisation. Even so, it occurs only in particular instances, and was governed by "rules" of variation that prevented the plain mode structure from being corrupted over time. The

collections in Tbilisi, Georgia. Many of the chants are duplicate copy, or variations of the same chant, as the semi-improvised performance of chant was notated over several decades. The main historical figures in the preservation of this invaluable material include saints Ekvtime Kereselidze, Pilimon Koridze, and Vasil Karbelashvili. Other important figures include Razhden Khundadze, Anton Dumbadze, Vasil Kutateladze, Dimitri Chalaganidze, Ivliane Tsereteli, Nestor Kontridze, Melkesidek Nakashidze, Ivliane Nikoladze, saint Polievktos Karbelashvili, Grigol Karbelashvili, Grigol Mgebrishvili, Alexander Molodinashvili, Maksime Sharadze, saint Ilia Chavchavadze, and their teachers before them.

3 The etymology of this word is as follows: *gada-* is a preverb meaning 'to go across'; *jvari* is the noun root which means 'the cross'; *-dineba* is a suffix meaning 'going with the flow' (*moedineba* - flows towards, *chaedineba* - flows down), which gives the cumulative literal meaning of 'to go across the cross going with the flow.' Another related term in Georgian is *jvaredini khaze*, which means 'to cross the line.' This term may be a translation of the Russian *perekreshchivanie*.

4 Voice crossings can be found, for example, in the vocal polyphony of the Ba'aka people in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Albanian drone polyphony, and Lithuanian *sutartines* among many others.

5 There is extensive literature on the use of voice-crossing and voice-exchanges in 11th-14th century Western polyphony. See for example, Anna Zayaruznaia, "'She has a Wheel that Turns...': Crossed and Contradictory Voices in Machaut's Motets," *Early Music History* 28 (2009): 185-240. Unlike medieval voice exchange, however, the second voice in Georgian chant never replaces or duplicates the melody of the first voice. Rather, each voice part remains independent even when ranges overlap. Another important feature in the Georgian case concerns the fact that instances of voice-crossing are initiated by the primary melodic and harmonic referent (the first voice). Thus this referent is unsounded in the process of voice-crossing.