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KOMITAS'S CONCEPT ON MUSIC EDUCATION

Besides his activities as a composer, musicologist, music collector, singer and choir-master, Komitas Vardapet was also engaged in the practice of music education. He taught music at Gevorgian Seminary in Etchmiadzin from 1890s to 1910.¹ Afterwards, while living in Constantinople (now Istanbul), he projected establishing a music conservatory there. For that purpose he was preparing students to work with. Meanwhile, he gave private lessons, as well as worked with various choirs in different cities and countries, which were in general followed by concerts.

Having been educated first as a clergyman at Gevorgian Seminary, then as a musician at Richard Schmidt private conservatory in Berlin and as a musicologist at the Faculty of Philosophy of Humboldt University (Royal University by that time period), Komitas was well aware about both medieval Armenian and Western system of music education. As a result, he successfully engaged both systems in his own concept of music education.

Komitas was an outstanding expert in medieval Armenian music, which is known at least from the V century. Komitas mastered the most important areas in Armenian music, among them being the medieval Armenian *khaz* (*xaz*) music notation,² as well as the Armenian eight–

¹ More about Komitas's life can be founded in: **G. Geodakian**, *Komitas*, Yerevan, "Graber" Publishing, 2014.

² See more in: **R. Atayan**, *The Armenian Neum System of Notation*, translated by V. Nersessian, Richmond, Surrey, England, Curzon, 1999.

mode system,³ which considered huge information on modes, melodic and rhythmic formulae, etc.

As a music collector, Komitas appears to be a pioneer in the field, foreshadowing the activities of famous experts such as Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály and many others. In Komitas's collection of folk music, not mere hundreds, but thousands of songs are included, which have been collected and transcribed from various Armenian inhabited regions.⁴

While collecting folk songs, Komitas mostly used Armenian music notation of Limonjian, which was created in early XIX century and developed during the XIX century.⁵ The Limonjian system was practically more comfortable to use for Komitas, since it did not imply any five-line staff to write music down, and therefore it was easier for Komitas to quickly write music down even when he heard a folk song in an unexpected situations.

Not only Armenian folk music, but also that of neighboring nations were target for Komitas's interest. He collected Kurdish, Turkish, Arabic, Iranian and other folk songs in order to compare them with each other and to derive consistent patterns in each of them.

While studying at Humboldt University, Komitas mastered also in Western art music and medieval music. His studies with Oscar Fleischer, Heinrich Bellermand and Max Friedländer provided good basis for him both as a researcher and a teacher. Of special importance were his

³ See more in: **Н. Тагмизян**, *Теория музыки в древней Армении*, Ереван, изд. АН Арм. ССР, 1977 (**N. Tahmizyan**, *Music Theory in Ancient Armenia*, Yerevan, Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR, 1977).

⁴ The folk songs collected by Komitas are published by the Institute of Arts of National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia: **Կոմիտաս, Երկերի ժողովածու**, հատ. 9–14, խմբ.՝ Ռ. Աթայան և Գ. Գյոդակյան, Երևան, 1999–2006 (**Komitas**, *Works*, Volumes 9–14, edited by R. Atayan and G. Geodakian, Yerevan, 1999–2006).

⁵ See **Ա. Բաղդասարյան**, *Հայկական նոտագրության ձեռնարկ*, Երևան, «Ամրոց գրուպ», 2010 (**A. Baghdasaryan**, *Handbook for Armenian Notation*, Yerevan, “Amrots Group”, 2010).

studies with Richard Schmidt, who taught him theoretical and practical disciplines.⁶

When programing his concept of music education, Komitas aimed at conjoining both Armenian and Western models of music education. From one hand, he prepared his handbooks as based on Armenian notation, from the other hand, Western music-theoretical disciplines were his main orientation.

Komitas prepared several handbooks, however, none of them seems to be completely finished. The survived ones he worked on were *The History of Music*, *The Elementary Music* and *Harmony*. Besides, a tutorial regarding voice training is also available for discussion.

1. The History of Music

Komitas started this book with simple but basically important questions. What is music? What are its aims? The answers for those philosophical questions are also felicitous.

“Music is nothing else but the same language, but more melodic.”⁷

“The aim of music is to link the soul and the heart to one another, to express the mental action and ability conjointly with the emotion of the heart, so that our heart purifies to the extent it resembles silver, meaning it becomes very pure.”⁸

Komitas refers to the differences in “devices for writing”, which are found between Armenian and Western music. He referred to the scales, which lay in the basis of those two music cultures.

⁶ See more about Komitas's studies in Berlin in: **Ռ. Շեսկուս**, Կոմիտասը Բեռլինում, *Կոմիտասական* 2, խմբ.՝ Մ. Մուրադյան, Երևան, Հայկ. ՍՍՀ ԳԱԱ հրատ. , 1981, էջ 25–38 (**R. Sheskus**, Komitas in Berlin, in: *Komitasakan* 2, edited by M. Muradyan, Yerevan, Publication of NAS Arm. SSR, 1981, p. 25–38).

⁷ **Կոմիտաս Վարդապետ**, Պատմություն երաժշտության, *Ուսումնասիրություններ եւ յօդուածներ*, Գիրք Ա, Երևան, «Սարգիս Խաչենց» 2005, էջ 137 (**Komitas Vardapet**, History of Music, in: *Studies and Articles*, book I, Yerevan, “Sargis Khachents”, 2005, p. 137 (here and after my translation)).

⁸ Ibid, p. 138.

He discusses music among wild people and expounds how simple and clear their singing manner and techniques are. He mentions that a number of factors affected the music development of various nations, among them being the climate, the placement of the country, political circumstances, religious and national conditions etc.⁹

Komitas concludes: *“People living in the mountains continuously deal with the disasters of nature, and thus, their character also puts up with the latter. Contrarily, those who live in the fields and in the plains have a more prosperous life and are very calm in their character. The melodies of the two are different as corresponding to the location of their countries.”*¹⁰

Furthermore, Komitas refers to the music of various nations in his textbook, in particular dwelling on Chinese, Indian, Farsi (Iranian), Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic music.

Komitas suggested a table with comparison of the names of the notes as common in Armenian, Latin and in Greek music (see table 1).

In another table, Komitas put in neighborhood the Armenian modes and Arabic modes, proposing parallels between them (see table 2).

Thus, Komitas considered teaching the history of music embracing various parts of the world and focusing on typical features of each of them.

⁹ Ibid, p. 144–145.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 145.

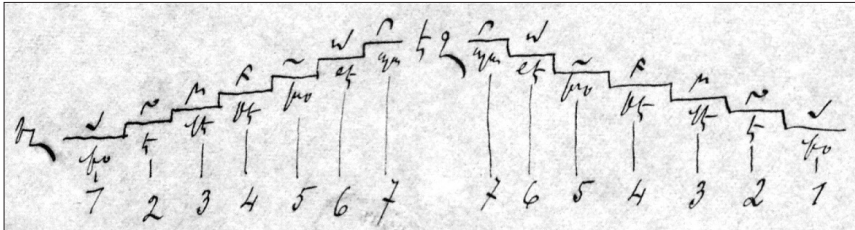
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¹² Komitas Archives, No. 655, p. 09313.

2. The Elementary Music

Komitas's handbook on music theory is not only based on Armenian notation, but also considers the features of Armenian music.

Table 3: The Armenian notes are situated above the scale-line, under which their abbreviated names are included. Below, the scale steps are found.¹³



Not only in the handbook for music theory, but also in various occasions, Komitas mentioned the structural differences between Armenian and Western music. In the basis of his theory, the concept of Ancient Greek music theory laid, according to which *tetrachords* lay in the basis of the scales. The *tetrachords* may be related to each other in two different ways: conjunct and disjunct. According to Komitas's theory, while in the Western music disjunct *tetrachords* lay in the basis of the scales, in Armenian music they are oppositely in conjunct correlation. To compare with Western major, the latter consists of two neighboring disjunct Ionian *tetrachords* with inner structure of 1+1+1/2 tones. To consider the note "C" as a tonic, the result is: C–D–E–F and G–A–B–C. "C" appears to be a tonic also above. Meanwhile, in the Armenian music, the *tetrachords* are in conjunct correlation, that is to say, the last note of the *tetrachord* appears to be a starting point for the sequential *tetrachord*. For example, if the first *tetrachord* is C–D–E–F, the next one is F–G–E–B flat. Therefore, the second *tetrachord*

¹³ Komitas Archives, No. 693.

does not lead to the presumed tonic above, but rather it leads to the seventh degree, which makes a minor seventh interval with the tonic. No half step against tonic exists here. Consequently, the functional roles of the scale steps fundamentally vary.¹⁴

Table 3 presents what Komitas considered to be the basis of the Armenian music. Here, the scale degrees ascend according to Armenian music modes: D–E–F sharp–G–A–B C, which can otherwise be interpreted as C–D–E–F–G–A–B flat. No perfect position is to be considered but rather the correlations of the notes. The mentioned scale is the basis for Komitas to expound any details in music theory.

3. Harmony

The handbook for harmony is based on Western model of the subject. Unlike the *Elementary Music*, it is written with Western music notation. At the same time, the author used mere Armenian terms. Komitas not only considered the chords and their relations, but also dwelled on values of the notes and discussed them in the context of harmony.

4. Voice training

Although no textbook on voice training we know as written by Komitas, but his activities witness how important for him voice training was. For example, he translated the article on vocal training by Fritz Arlberg.¹⁵ Although no evidence we have on the aims of the article in Armenian educational field, however, we can conclude that Komitas himself found it necessary for Armenian musicians.

¹⁴ See more in: **Կոմիտաս, Հոդվածներ յեւ ռուսումնասիրություններ**, խմբ.՝ Ռ. Թերլեմեզյան, Երևան, Պետհրատ, էջ 139–141, 153–156 (**Komitas, Articles and Studies**, edited by R. Terlemezyan, Yerevan, State edition, 1941, p. 139–141, 153–156). **Komitas Keworkian**, Die Armenische Kirchenmusik, in: *Sammelbände der internationalen Musik-Gesellschaft*, Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, Oktober–Dezember, 1899, S. 54–64.

¹⁵ **Komitas, Studies and Articles**, p. 427–458.

We find his recommendations on singing in a letter, which he addressed to his student Margarit Babayan.

Thus, Komitas's concept on music education is based on the Western model, but at the same time, the following principles are to be noted:

- ✓ Komitas employed the features of Armenian music and considered educating the students according to national mentality.
- ✓ Komitas had wider perception on music education: world music was under consideration, while the Armenian music was the main target.

Therefore, the priorities he had adopted were not mere conditioned by one line. The usage of both Armenian and Western notations, as well as the contents which reflect wider mentality were to lead the students to a high level of music education.

Abstract

Music pedagogy occupies an important place in Komitas's multi-dimensional activity. He was a music teacher at Gevorgian Seminary in Etchmiadzin. Founding a conservatory in Constantinople was among his fundamental projects, and for that purpose he was preparing students to work with. In the basis of Komitas's concept on music education laid the idea of juxtaposing from the one hand, the elements of Western classical pedagogy and, from the other hand, the national traditional principles of didactics.

Komitas's textbooks on music theory, harmony and music history allow understanding the system of Komitas's approach in music education. Komitas used to teach music theory based on Armenian notation, rather than the Western one, although he himself perfectly possessed both of them. Why did Komitas use Armenian notation? It was Komitas to invent that conjunct rather than disjunct tetrachords laid in the basis of Armenian traditional music. Are there any relations between priority of Armenian notation by Komitas and Armenian music modes? In the article, I focus on those questions and discuss the content and structure of Komitas's textbooks.

Keywords: music pedagogy, Komitas's textbooks, music theory, harmony, music history.

Տաթևիկ Շախկուլյան (Հայաստան)

արվեստագիտության թեկնածու
Կոմիտասի թանգարան–ինստիտուտ
ՀՀ ԳԱԱ Արվեստի ինստիտուտ

ԵՐԱԺՇՏԱԿԱՆ ԿՐԹՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԿՈՄԻՏԱՍԻ ՀԱՅԵՑԱԿԱՐԳԸ

Ամփոփում

Կոմիտասի բազմակողմանի գործունեության մեջ առանձին տեղ է զբաղեցնում մանկավարժական աշխատանքը: Նա երաժշտություն էր դասավանդում էջմիածնի Գևորգյան ճեմարանում: Ծրագրել էր Կոստանդնուպոլսում հիմնել կոնսերվատորիա, և այդ նպատակով աշակերտներ էր պատրաստում: Նրա հայեցակարգը հիմնված էր դասավանդման դասական (արևմտաեվրոպական և ռուսական) և ազգային ավանդական (ժողովրդական և հոգևոր երաժշտության վրա հիմնվող) սկզբունքների համակցման վրա:

Կոմիտասի երաժշտության տեսության, հարմոնիայի և պատմության դասագրքերը հնարավորություն են տալիս հասկանալու նրա մոտեցումները: Կոմիտասը երաժշտության տեսություն էր դասավանդում հայկական նոտագրության հիման վրա, ոչ թե եվրոպականի, թեև հրաշալի տիրապետում էր թե՛ մեկին, թե՛ մյուսին: Ինչո՞ւ էր Կոմիտասը հիմնվում հայկական նոտագրության վրա: Ինչպե՞ս է այն առնչվում հայ երաժշտության հնչյունաշարերի կոմիտայան տեսությանը, որի հիմքում ոչ թե հարևան, այլ կցվող տետրախորդների սկզբունքն է: Հոդվածում անդրադառնում ենք այս հարցերին և քննարկում կոմիտասյան դասագրքերի բովանդակային և կառուցվածքային որոշ առանձնահատկություններ:

Հիմնաբառեր՝ երաժշտական մանկավարժություն, Կոմիտասի դասագրքեր, երաժշտության տեսություն, հարմոնիա, երաժշտության պատմություն: