

MCM 3004

Georgia

The Resounding Polyphony of the Caucasus

MUSIC OF THE EARTH





Georgia

THE RESOUNDING POLYPHONY OF THE CAUCASUS

Track Listing

Artana Village

1. MRAVALJAMIERI 2:03
2. SHEMODZAKHILI 3:43
3. KALOSPIRULI 2:39
4. *Nana* (Kakhetia) 3:00
5. ALILO 2:55
6. SHEMODZAKHILI 3:21
7. SHEN BICHO ANAGURELO 3:18
8. GAPRINDI SHAVO
MERTSKHALO 2:51

Tbilisi Conservatory

9. MRAVALJAMIERI
(Kakhetia)* 4:08
10. HASSANBEGURA 3:08
11. MAY PEACE BE WITH US 2:38
12. SHAVI SHASHVI 2:07
13. SHAVI SHASHVI
(IMERETIA) 3:13
14. SONG OF FRIENDSHIP* 2:04
15. VAKHTANGURA* 3:32

Chokhatauri

16. BATONEBO 3:28
17. *Nanina* 1:50

Telavi

18. TSMINDAO GMERTO 2:48
19. ALILUYA 3:17
20. *Nana* 4:20
21. TSINTSKARO 3:28
22. SHEN KHAR VENAKHI 2:42
23. SULIKO 3:34
24. MRAVALJAMIERI 1:51

Total time: 73:31

Non-English musical types and styles are indicated by italics. Titles are in capital letters.

**mono*

Because these are field recordings, there may be some extraneous noise despite the high fidelity utilized.

Field Notes

by Minoru Morita

Historical Background

In Russian, Georgia is referred to as "Zakavkas"—"the land on the other side of the Caucasus Mountains." Zakavkas is a narrow isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas where three peoples of completely differing origins have established their respective republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. The toweringly steep Caucasus range that separates Georgia from Russia encompasses such renowned peaks as El'brus (5642 meters) and Kazbek (5033 meters). The Georgian Republic lies on the southern side of this wall between Europe and Asia; along the southern side of Georgia runs the Lesser Caucasus, which defines the border with Turkey and Armenia. Georgia is thus located in the narrow ravine extending east-west between these two mountain ranges. The Rioni River flows westward into the Black Sea, the Kura eastward

through neighboring Azerbaijan and into the Caspian, and the relatively level river valleys make up Georgia's western and eastern regions. Still, Georgia is a mountainous country; 54% of its territory is above 1000 meters.

Georgia is a country rich in tradition that takes pride in its ancient history. While the history of humans in this area dates back to the early Stone Age, evidence of music in Georgia dates from the 8th century B.C.E., when the Assyrian king, Sargon, noted that he was impressed by singing workers in the region. In the 4th century B.C.E., the Greek historian, Xenophon, recorded that a Georgian tribe sang and danced before battling enemies, and in the first century B.C.E., Greek geographer Strabon reported that choruses were sung at area festivities.

West Georgia, on the Black Sea,

was known as Colchis to the ancient Greeks, who established a colony at the mouth of the Rioni River, near present day Poti. Situated between the great Greek, Roman, and Byzantium nations on the one hand and the various Persian empires of Asia Minor (along the south coast of the Black Sea) on the other, Georgia was always caught in other powers' lengthy struggles and was subject to foreign control. Christianity spread throughout the region during the 3rd-4th century and became the official religion in 337 C.E. However, at the same time, Persian influence on eastern Georgia intensified, followed by Arab invasions in the 7th century, Mongols in the 13th, and the destructive 14th century raids by Timur. Byzantine influence completely disappeared by the 16th century, leaving Georgia in the middle of conflict between Turkey and Iran. In this history of constant foreign rule, Georgia gained power as a unified nation only once. During the 11th-12th century, under King Georgi III (reign 1156-84) and Queen Tamara (reign 1184-1213), Georgia extended

power across Azerbaijan, Turkey, Armenia, and the north side of the Caucasus. This era was also the Golden Age of Georgian culture.

Musical History

Christianity in Georgia, which had guarded its traditions since the 4th century, assumed a central place in the consciousness of the people. Church music also flourished in the Golden Age, and a unique mode of "neumatic" musical notation developed. Numerous collections of sacred music in this notation exist, but they have yet to be successfully deciphered. Contemporary written accounts, however, indicate that such songs had three voices, and thus it is believed that Georgian Christian music of this era was already in three-part form. Literature, architecture, visual arts, and secular music also prospered during the 12th century. Celebrated poets, including Rustaveli, Shavteli, and Chakhrukhadze, wrote poems and anthems that were sung. Although actual music from this time has not survived, there have been many attempts to demonstrate that

12th century music is reflected in folk song styles that have been passed on to the present day.

Raids by Mongols in the 13th century and by Timur in the latter half of the 14th dealt devastating blows to Georgian culture. Turkish and Persian invasions during the 16th-17th centuries further reduced and divided Georgia into several principalities under foreign domination. Continuing Georgian insurrections were mercilessly suppressed. The 18th century finally brought the beginnings of reunification, and city life revived in Tiflis (Tbilisi). The professional Armenian musician, Sayat Nova (1712-95), for instance, was active at the court in Tiflis. But when Georgia and Russia established diplomatic relations in 1795, the Iranian army overran Tbilisi and Nova was brutally murdered. Russia intervened in this crisis by annexing eastern Georgia as a territory in 1801, and, following war against Iran and Turkey, all of Georgia. Georgian rebellions against Russian colonization, which had dethroned all Georgian royalty, arose repeatedly. Still, Russian control did serve to

modernize Georgia. By the mid-19th century, Georgia had a capitalist economy, Western culture was sprouting in the cities, and an intelligentsia had emerged. A cosmopolitan folk song style had also developed, utilizing the traditional Georgian 3-part harmony. "Suliko" (track 23) is an example of this late 19th-century urbanized folk form with the upper two voices singing in parallel thirds over a harmonic bass progression.

That Georgians fostered such complex polyphonic music is a wondrous mystery, however, since none of the peoples with whom Georgia had contact for over 2000 years practiced polyphony. Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and other surrounding peoples have monophonic music. This lends credibility to the theory that 3-part polyphony already existed in Georgia by the 12th century. While some believe that Georgian polyphony developed from Russian influence, the fact that Russian folk polyphony is apparently a post-17th century phenomenon cannot support this hypothesis.

Regional Styles of Georgian Folk Song

Georgian is an ancient language that has had its own alphabet since the 5th century. Old Georgian (pre-11th century) and New Georgian (post-12th century) differ in vocabulary but not significantly in basic structure and grammar. There are relatively few regional variations and a limited range of dialects. Nonetheless, as a mountainous country not conducive to easy travel, Georgia offers an abundance of regional cultures. Regions share some fundamental musical aspects, such as modes and harmonic progressions, but they also manifest distinct, local elements.

Musical characteristics divide broadly into east and west Georgian styles. Among the peoples who live on the south slope of the great Caucasus range, a rudimentary two-part style of singing—in which a choral drone joins the end of monophonic song phrases—occurs in both the east and west. But even then the harmony moves to a VII-I progression, the most standard Georgian cadential pattern. In general, however, three-part singing is the

usual form throughout Georgia, and four-parts occur especially in Guria.

East Georgian Folk Song

Folk songs abound in the relatively level Kartali-Kakhetin region, the cultural center of east Georgia. Three-voice forms are common, and there are four types based on the way the parts function: 1) the middle voice begins with a solo, joined by the outer voices in octaves; 2) the top voice carries the melody; 3) the upper two voices carry melodies of equal importance, parts are rhythmically independent, and there may be modulation; 4) the upper two voices lead alternately and develop richly ornamented, wide-ranged melodic lines. In all cases, the low voice provides a varied drone or ostinato. Types 1 and 2 are homophonic styles in which the voices move together with the same rhythm.

The Old Styles Preserved in West Georgia

An archaic three-voice form survives in Svanetia, the mountain region in northwest Georgia. Snowlocked for over half the year, this



Ensemble harmonizing at Chokhatauri

sections involving this voice do not need the bass part. *Krimanchuli* is vocalized without any specific text or words.

Georgian folk songs, which often develop musically through sections of vocalized vowel sounds (not limited to the *krimanchuli* part), can take

on a very abstract musical form. In Guria, for example, voices often launch independently into technical displays of complex linear polyphony. Three-voice singing in Imeretia and Megrelia, on the other hand, tends to be more harmonic and falls into two general categories: 1) lyric songs—about daily life, love, and similar matters—that adhere to the poetic meter; 2) work songs and processionals or marches of a strong, theatrical nature, where the text is not so important and extended singing on exclamatory syllables such as “o,” “okho,” and “orira” occurs.

The Selections

I traveled twice to Georgia—in June-July 1983 and November-December 1987. I have selected the Chokhatauri and Telavi recordings from the 1983 trip, and the Artana village and Tbilisi Music Academy recordings from 1987. Chokhatauri is in the middle of Guria in southwestern Georgia. There I heard performances distinctive to the region, but the tape recorder was not working well and so captured only the two examples presented here.

Artana Village

Artana is an agrarian village on the outskirts of Telavi in central Kakhetia, where grapes are cultivated. Vineyards extend from the narrow, level fields around the Alazani, a branch of the Kura River, and toward the mountain slopes. Known as the former Soviet Union's premier wine country, this area is also known for its connection with the great Russian poet and dramatist Griboedov (1795-1829). The author



The Director of Artana, an elementary school teacher (center, wearing eyeglasses)

of *Woe from Wit* (*Gore ot uma*), considered to be the first real Russian comic play, fell in love with, and married, the daughter of a prominent family from Tsinandali near Telavi. Old Christian churches and monasteries and fortresses once occupied by powerful clans survive in this eastern region and recall the long and bitter history of the Georgian people.

The Artana ensemble consisted mostly of people in their 60s, with Andro Shimashvili (age 64) as their leader, Pirza Mamukashvili (age 72) as the eldest member, and Mirman Mamukashvili (age 44) as the youngest. Nine of the full 15-member ensemble gathered on this day. Mr. Shimashvili, an elementary school teacher in the village, showed us to the second floor of his newly-built house. We were welcomed with a roast suckling pig, slaughtered especially for the occasion, and homemade wine in earthenware cups. The ensemble sang for an hour or so for the recording before the banquet, then continued to sing, feast lavishly, and offer limitless speeches and toasts. The Shimashvili family

ensemble, formed in 1937 by the late brother Mikhail, is long-lived and famous in this village. No other groups with special names existed, but it was said that all men in the village sing.

All songs sung by Artana are in the east Georgian, Kakhetin, style. These pieces correspond to types 3 and 4 of the east Georgian regional styles discussed earlier.

1. MRAVALJAMIERI (LONG LIVE!): There are many regional forms of this celebratory song, which is always sung at the beginning and end of banquets. This example is particular to Artana village and differs from track 9, the typical Kakhetin version familiar to Georgians.
2. SHEMODZAKHILI (SHOUT): A commonly-known drinking song, like MRAVALJAMIERI.
3. KALOSPIRULI: A threshing song. Work songs are an important genre of Georgian folk song.

4. *Nana*: A Kakhetin lullaby variant. Lullabies are called *Nana* or *Nanina*, and there are individual regional versions.

5. ALILO (ALLELUIA): A Christmas folk song, possibly descended from surviving Christian sacred music scores in indecipherable neumatic notation.

6. SHEMODZAKHILI: Another drinking song (see track 2)

7. SHEN BICHO ANAGURELO (YOUTH OF ANAGURA): A song of honoring; also a drinking song.

8. GAPRINDI SHAVO MERTSKHALO (FLY, BLACK SWALLOW): A lyric song about fear and worry for those who have gone off to war. It could also be considered a drinking song, as the classification of Georgian folk songs is not necessarily strict, and many pieces fall into two or more genres.

Tracks 1-8 recorded 11/28/87

Tbilisi Conservatory

The Tbilisi Conservatory offers a major in folk music, and I was able to speak with instructors and students in this department. Here, the recently-organized student folk song ensemble, a still nameless group that had been rehearsing occasionally since April and had yet to make its debut, performed. The 7-member ensemble was led by a fourth-year folk music major and consisted of a second-year folk music major, first, second, and fourth-year composers, a fourth-year piano major, and a Tbilisi University math major. This performance took place at the Conservatory in a rehearsal room with a capacity of about 30 people. Twenty or so women students also attended, and the room was packed. Although most of the students are women, the women students only listened and lent lively support to the men, whose songs included styles from various regions.

Similarly, at every banquet I attended, men took the leading role. Women prepared and served the food but did not participate in the feast itself or in the singing.

9. MRAVALJAMIERI : The only Kakhetin song in their repertoire and the version ordinarily known throughout Georgia. For other regional variants see tracks 1 and 24.

Pieces 10-24 are West Georgian.

10. HASSANBEGURA: A well-known historical song, representative of the Guria region and characteristically featuring *krimanchuli*, the unique falsetto ornamental singing practiced in Guria and Adjara. Hassanbeg was a Georgian rebel who joined the Turks against the Russians during the 19th-century Russo-Turkish War. The piano major sings the *krimanchuli*.
11. MAY PEACE BE WITH US : A drinking song for toasting and wishing peace; also from Guria and featuring *krimanchuli*.
12. SHAVI SHASHVI (RAVEN'S NEST): Gurii variant with *krimanchuli* sections and complex polyphony. The song humorously depicts a hunting scene. Although

Georgians engage in agriculture on level lands, they are also a people of a mountainous region for whom hunting is a vital livelihood.

13. SHAVI SHASHVI (RAVEN'S NEST): Variant from Imeretia, showing this region's distinctive three-voice homophonic style.
14. SONG OF FRIENDSHIP: A Gurii wedding song. There is some *krimanchuli*, but the characteristic homophonic sound represents the general west Georgian style.
15. VAKHTANGURA: A historical song about Georgian King Vakhtang sung in the west Georgian Imeretin style.
- Tracks 9-15 recorded 11/26/87.*

Chokhatauri

Chokhatauri is one of the main towns in the Guria region. While grape cultivation is the mainstay, people living between the mountains focus on hunting, and hunters' houses become visible after about a one hour bus ride into the mountains from

Samtredia. Nine members of the Guria Ensemble gathered on this occasion. The group leader, Bondo Bendeliani, is chair of the town Executive Committee's Culture Department. The highly esteemed *krimanchuli*, Auto Atsanslidze, a hunter living deep in the mountains, is the eldest ensemble member. As the *krimanchuli* acts as the musical focus of a group, he receives special respect. Guria has a truly rich repertoire, and the Ensemble performed more than



*Soloist
(Alaverdi
Church)*

fifty pieces in two days. As mentioned earlier, however, an unfortunate equipment malfunction resulted in recording only two songs for this collection.

16. BATONEBO: A healing song sung at the bedsides of children with infectious illnesses and an especially famous Georgian folk song.
17. *Nanina*: A lullaby that is essentially a lyric song type. The text essentially says, "O rose, who created you so beautifully, why do you have thorns?"

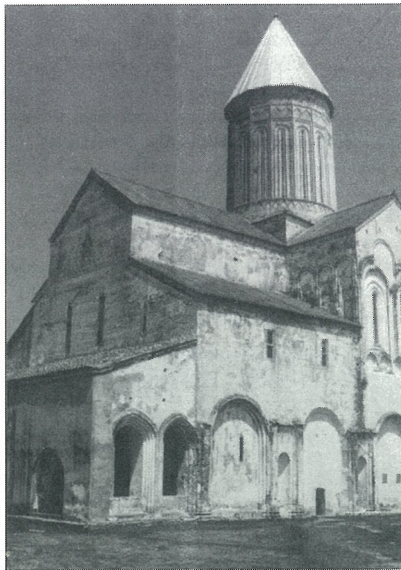
Tracks 16-17 recorded 6/27/85

Telavi

Telavi, with a population of approximately 30,000, is the main city of Kakhetia and prides itself on its ancient history. It has a college of education and is the cultural center of the region. There are no music colleges, but there is a post-middle-school, four-year music specialty academy. This recording features a performance by 30 or so senior women students (ages 19-20) from this music academy. The conductor is

Pavle Demurishvili, a graduate of the Tbilisi Conservatory and choirmaster at this school. The singers performed in the Alaverdi Church, located in the middle of a field outside Telavi. Dating back to the 11th century, this active church presently functions as a cloister. The building is a stone structure at least 70 meters high with a spacious, earthen-floored interior. Windows at the top of the tower face all sides, and small birds come and go freely through the glassless openings. The sounds of those birds can be heard in the recording. The students stood spread out across the space and, reveling in the resonance of the sanctuary, presented an effective and deeply impressive vocal ensemble performance. Their broad repertoire ranged from Georgian folk songs to works by Georgian composers and Baroque and Renaissance choral music. Only the folk songs were selected for this collection.

18. TSMINDAO GMERTO (HOLY GOD) and 19. ALILUYA: Christian hymns that have been passed on as folk songs.



Alaverdi Church

20. *Nana*: A lullaby featuring soloist Tina Nateladze.
 21. TSINTSKARO (ON THE EDGE OF A SPRING): A famous lyric folk song.

22. SHEN KHAR VENAKHI (THOU HOLY GRAPEVINE): Christian hymn that has been passed on as a folk song.
 23. SULIKO and
 24. MRAVALJAMIERI: These selections represent the Westernized musical trend of the late

19th-century. In this style, the upper two voices move in parallel thirds over a bass part that supports the harmony. "Mravaljamieri" is a traditional drinking song, but this is musically a more Westernized variant (see tracks 1, 9).

Tracks 18-24 recorded 7/2/83.



Credits:

Original Japanese Version

Producers: Yuji Ichihashi & Aki Sato
Director: Masaya Murakami
Recording and Notes: Minoru Morita
Audio Mixer: Yoshinobu Asao
Planning: Katsumori Ichikawa

English Language Series

Producer: Stephen McArthur
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Mark Greenberg teaches Humanities and Cultural Studies at Goddard College and is President of Upstreet Productions, specializing in radio, video, and audio projects involving traditional folk music and oral history. He was the text editor and a writer for *The JVC-Smithsonian/Folkways Video Anthologies of Music and Dance of The Americas, Europe, and Africa* (available from Multicultural Media).

Editor & Translator's Note

These notes have been translated, for the first time, from the original Japanese and edited as judiciously as possible for an English-speaking audience. In translating and editing these notes, we have attempted to preserve the authors' original tone, as well as the essential information. Some references aimed at a Japanese audience have been eliminated but little else. The fieldworkers who recorded these selections represent a variety of disciplines and approaches, and this is reflected in the notes. Some, for example, are more musicologically detailed, while others present the point-of-view of an enthusiastic traveler learning about new cultures and peoples.

Translating always presents challenges, and these are amplified when the material being translated itself contains many terms from yet another language. Often, the Japanese fieldworker attempted to preserve original terms, such as the names of people and musical instruments, through direct transliteration into Japanese. Since transliteration involves capturing one language's

sounds in another's alphabet, it is subject to unavoidable inaccuracies. These are compounded when a second transliteration—as here, from Japanese to English—occurs. Some terms can be checked by using recognized authorities and references, and we have done this wherever possible by following spellings used in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980 edition) and the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1986 edition). We also appreciate the assistance of Mr. Yuji Ichihashi, at the Victor Company of Japan, and the original writers in reviewing our work and making suggestions.

Some spellings, however, have remained problematic, especially the names of people and some places. In those cases we have followed standard Japanese-English transliteration practice and have attempted to be as consistent as possible. We have also followed Western practice, rather than Japanese, by placing surnames second.

Non-English terms are in italics.

— MG and TN