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## Processual Form in Sufi Dhikr Ritual

### ABSTRACT

For four hundred years, the *zikir* ritual has been performed weekly in *Kadirîhâne* in Istanbul. Sufi rituals are believed to have been compiled by the founder (*pîr*) of the order. The ritual conductor (*şeyh, postnişin*) symbolizes the founder. The ritual form consists of chanting (*dhikr*) several divine names (*esmâ*). While participants perform the divine names with drone-like melodic repetitions or guttural rhythmic ostinatos, musicians perform songs, recitations, and improvisations. Through rhythmic enunciation, body sway, and breath control, these chants are embodied as ostinatos while music varies the mood. The ostinato polyphony between the *derviş* and *zakir*, as well as the succession of the divine names symbolizes unity (*tevhid*) in different ways. The manners and the formality of the ritual (ethics) and their musical expressions (aesthetics) implies harmony that leads to communal and/or individual unity. This article examines the form and content of the ritual, and shows their relation to Sufi concepts.

### KEYWORDS

Sufism  
Qadiriyya  
Ritual  
Ayin  
Dhikr  
Chant  
Ostinato

## Introduction

The *Rûmî* branch of the *Kadirî* order (Qadiriyya) was founded in Istanbul in the early seventeenth century. When masters modify rituals, ceremonies, teaching methods, or other features of a certain order, they are called *pîr-i sâni* (second founder) and the new branches are attributed to their name. The founder İsmâil Rûmî (d. 1631) is regarded as the *pîr-i sâni* of the *Kadirî* order. The *tekke* that he built in Istanbul/Tophane in 1630 is known as *Kadirîhâne Tekkesi*. Being the âsitâne (central *tekke*) of the *Kadirî* order, it is also called *İsmâil Rûmî Âsitânesi* and *Kadirîhâne Âsitânesi*. Today, his descendants live at the adjacent house and keep the tradition alive. The weekly ritual (*âyin*) is still performed in *Kadirîhâne*.

This ritual has been performed every Tuesday for four centuries. It is not performed during the month of Ramadan except the one on *Kadir gecesi* (Qadr night). According to Islamic belief, the revelation of the Quran began on this particular night in the month of Ramadan while the Prophet Muhammed was in seclusion at Mount *Hira*. Although it is not known what day of the month this night was, it is thought to be in the last ten days and is officially celebrated on the 27<sup>th</sup> (Özerverli, 2001). Pîr İsmâil Rumî reserved this month for reading and meditating on the Quran and did not perform the *zikir* ritual except *Kadir gecesi* (Eren Erkmenkul, personal communication, December 26, 2020).

*Zikir* (dhikr) means remembrance and generally denotes the repetitive invocation of the divine names (*esmâ*). This repetition can be silent, vocal, individual, or collective (Öngören, 2013). The dhikr ritual (*zikir âyini*) involves the vocal (*cehrî*) and collective version of this practice. In its different aspects, it is a devotion, a meditation, a ritual and a musical performance. In this weekly public ritual, participants chant six divine names and phrases (*esmâ*) while musicians perform songs, recitations and improvisations.

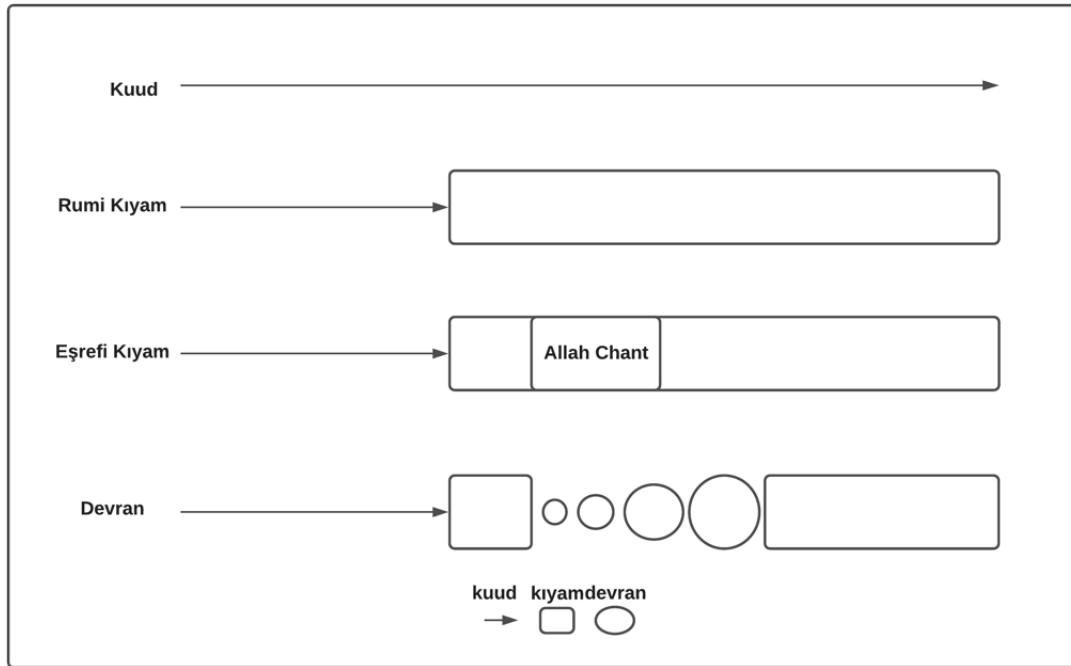
I did fieldwork in *Kadirîhâne* between 2018-2022 as part of my doctoral research and participated in the weekly *âyin*. This study is based on my doctoral field research and here I will try to illustrate how ritual form is constructed by and through music, using both analytical and phenomenological approaches. It aims to introduce the *zikir âyini*, about which there is very limited information in the literature. This article presents a formal model for the *âyin* and discusses the significance of the form, content, and the subjective experience in terms of Sufism.

## Form

Ritual form is the most distinctive feature of a particular Sufi order. The form is believed to have been composed by the *pîr* (father), the founder of the order. The *şeyh* in service (*postnişin*) symbolizes the *pîr*, and is responsible for maintaining the order as it is. In ritual, the *şeyh* conducts the process while the *zâkirbaşı* (head musician) undertakes the musical aspects such as repertory, vocal or instrumental improvisations, songs and recitations. Being a *zâkirbaşı* requires exceptional performance skills and vast knowledge of repertory and texts, as well as having a good command of various rituals.

There are three main ritual forms categorized by their position and motion: *kuud* (sitting), *kıyam* (standing), and *devran* (circling). These three forms are interrelated. In a weekly ritual, people make a circle (*halka*) after the night prayer and sit down for *zikir*. *Kuud* constitutes the first part of the ritual. It includes *evrâd-ı şerif* (litany), *kelime-i tevhid* chant, and *durak*. The rest of the *esmâ* can also be performed on *kuud*. But it is performed in its full form rarely or in situations in which standing up is not possible. While *Kadirîhâne* was under restoration in 2014, I observed the *kuud* rite on several occasions at the *konak* (*şeyh's* house) adjacent to *tevhidhâne*. Later I learned that this was because of the small capacity of the room.

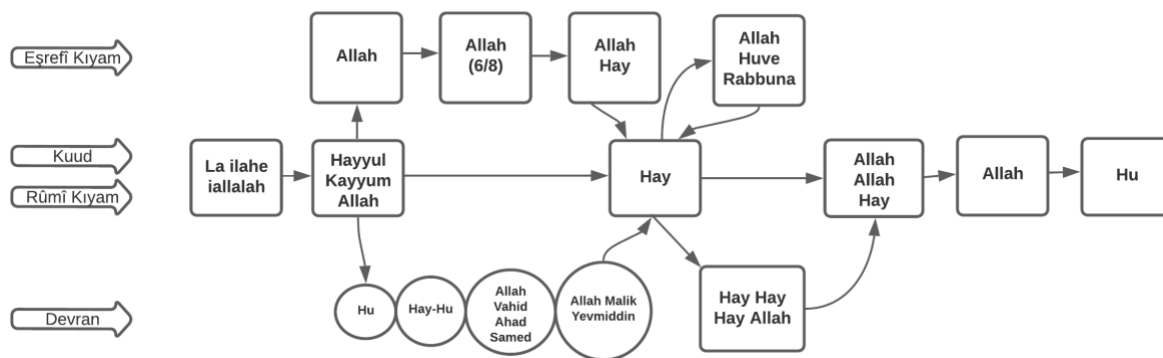
*Kıyam* starts with *kuud* and continues with standing up after the *durak* and proceeds thereafter. It has two different forms. They are associated with two *pir-i sani* of the *Kadirî* order in Anatolia and named accordingly; *Rumî kıyam* and *Eşrefî kıyam*. The only difference in the latter is that two different melodic *Allah* chants are performed between the second and the third *esmâ*. *Eşrefî kıyam* is performed during special days such as *kandil* or *bayram*. *Devran* is performed less often and requires experienced participants. In *devran*, *zikir* starts with *kuud* and proceeds to *kıyam*. During the second *esmâ* (*Hayyul Kayyum Allah*) the *şeyh* guides people to create a circle. Participants chant specific *esmâ* for *devran* while the circle rotates counterclockwise. The circle keeps expanding and dissolves at the *Hay* chant. This dissolution leads back to the *kıyam* naturally, and the chanting continues. To eliminate confusion, figure 1 shows the comparison of four ritual forms. *Devran* includes *kuud*, *kıyam*, and *devran*; *kıyam* includes *kuud* and *kıyam*; *kuud* is both a standalone form and the first part of every form.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of ritual forms

The *şeyh* decides on a particular form. Consecutive chants are performed in the order of a chosen form. Since the intention of all ritual forms is *zikir*, chanting the *esmâ* is the main organizational motive. The diagram in figure 2 shows the orders of *esmâ*, comparing different forms. *Kuud* and *kiyam* have the same order. After standing up for *kiyam*, *Hayyul Kayyum Allah* is the strategic point that assigns the rest of the ritual to one of the forms; *Rumî*, *Eşrefî*, or *Devranî*. The intertwining of forms seems to allow for shifting to other forms as seen in figure 2. Considering the various forms, ranging from simple to complex, *kiyam* apparently holds a middle level. This position emphasizes the generative syntax that drives the ritual procedure. The words *âyin* (pr.) and *usûl* (ar.) are used interchangeably denoting ritual or procedure. *Usûl* already implies a procedure: several actions undertaken successively towards a specific goal. Such forward-moving syntax defines the sense and structure of ritual.





**Figure 2.** Model for ritual process

*Rûmî kıyam* represents the default form. It was composed by and is associated with the founder İsmâîl Rûmî. The order of *esmâ* in *Rûmî kıyam* is *La ilahe illallah, Hayyul Kayyum Allah, Hay, Allah Allah Hay, Allah, and Hu*. Their succession is coherent in terms of meaning, direction, rhythm, breath and movement. And the coherence is parallel among these temporal categories. For example, ostinatos proceed from complex to simple and the succession of divine names reaches 'Allah' and eventually 'Hu' (third-person non-gender pronoun). In this last *esmâ*, ostinato contracts into one beat and one breath. The heart and the breath balance until a long *Hu* finishes the chanting.

### Chants

As a meditation, participants chant the divine names while directing the names to their hearts. Syllabic structures produce different rhythmic/melodic motifs for every *esmâ*. Thus, each chant is a combination of verbal, melodic, rhythmic ostinatos that coincide with the specific gesture and breath rhythm. Meditating on the *esmâ*, controlled breathing, pounding of the heart, and moving the body bidirectionally are experienced as one *embodied ostinato*. Sonic, somatic and visual elements meld into a holistic experience and converge performance and perception. Regulating the heartbeat and breath may also lead to exaltation.

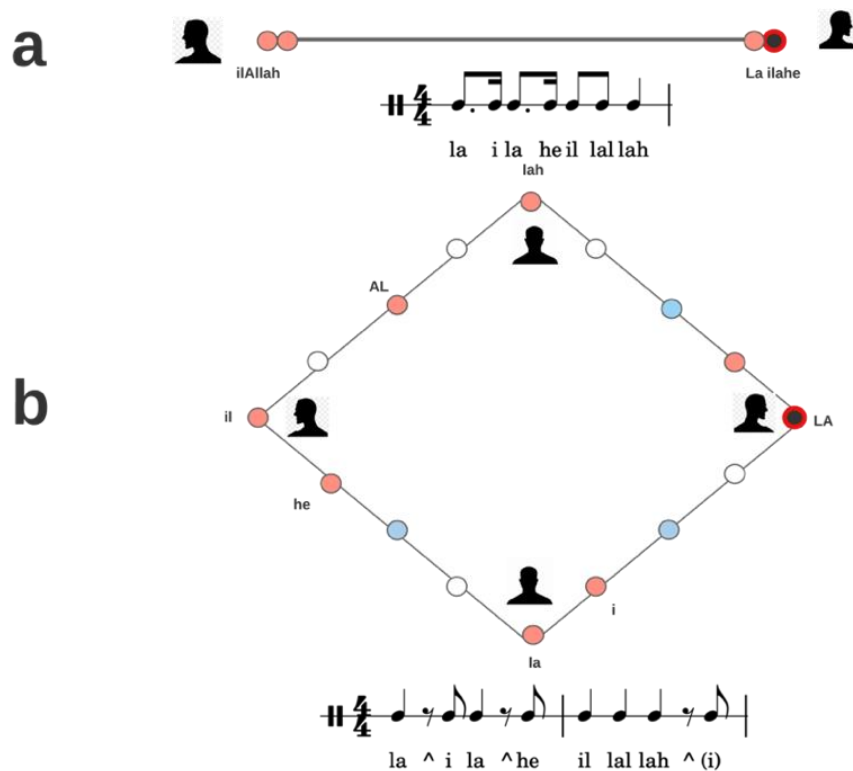
The unique characteristic of this collective chant is an unpitched and percussive timbre. This voice comes from the larynx and coalesces with the pounding of the heart in the subject's experience as if coughing. Usually, the last half of the duple metre contains inhalation that produces a contrasting sound. Thus, every *esmâ* ends up with a different ostinato. Also, in some of the *esmâ*, especially during the *kaside*, the *şeyh* shouts "*kalbî!*"

(from the heart) that signals the pronunciation of the *esmâ* by closing the mouth and fixing the tongue to the palate as if humming. This technique conceals the enunciation and the rhythmic pulses of the syllables in the chest create the sensation that the *esmâ* is being uttered from the heart. The muffled sound of *kalbî* chanting also reduces the volume and intensity and suppresses the exaltation. Naturally, solo recitation (*kaside*) becomes more apparent in the sonic spectrum.

A combination of body sway, breath rhythm and syllabic structure creates unique *ostinatos* for each *esmâ*. Through their common metre, these *esmâ ostinatos* are capable of connecting consecutively. The only exception to this rule is *kelime-i tevhid (la ilahe illallah)*. Since the following part is an intermission (*durak*), this *esmâ* stands alone with its beginning and ending. The beats, breaths and gestures of this chant are shown below in figure 3. The red-black dot shows the starting point: the first beat. Orange dots correspond to syllables. Blue dots indicate inhalation points. Starting from the red-black dot while facing the right, the lower corner shows the third beat with the body in normal position. The left hand corner shows the first beat of the next bar and starts facing left. The top corner shows the third beat of the second measure that completes the *ostinato*. In quadruple metre, the first two beats correspond to facing right while the last two beats correspond to left. The meaning of the phrase (*la ilahe illallah*) is also embodied with these gestures. Facing right is an abnegative gesture emphasizing the first half of the phrase: *la ilahe* (there is no god). The next half responds to this by pointing the heart (left) with the head and directing the word *illallah* (only *Allah*) with a strong guttural accent.

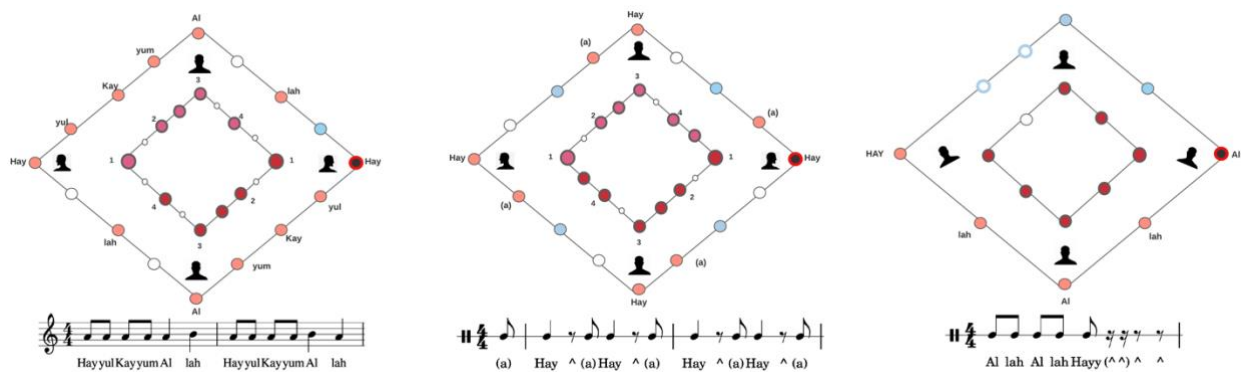
This *esmâ* has two phases. In the first (a), shown as a straight line, enunciation starts slowly on a specific pitch (C3). It is slow (60 bpm) and exhaled along with the bar. Throughout this (a) phase, the *şeyh* raises the pitch three times while *ney* player improvises over the drone of the chant. This pitch rise is called *perde kaldırma* (tr.) and presents an ambiguous concept. The word *Perde* is a homonym that means both pitch and veil. So, *perde kaldırma* both means “pitch raising” and “unveiling”. It symbolizes the *şeyh*'s subjective-spiritual experience (Murat Şahin, personal communication, 5 March 2021). After chanting the *esmâ* for about five minutes the *şeyh* goes up a whole step (D3) on the last syllable ‘-lah’ and continues thereafter. Participants recognize the pitch rise and attend to this new pitch. After a few minutes, *perde kaldırma* happens again (E3) and continues for a few minutes. These pitch rises increase the volume and change the timbre

as well. A few minutes after this last pitch rise, the *şeyh* hits the floor and moves to phase (b) with a sudden and dramatic emphasis on the first syllable *La*. Unlike the previous rises, where the *şeyh* indicated the changes on the last beats, punctuation by hitting the floor does not only inform but affects as well. The *şeyh* hits the floor and the following ostinato produces a half-time feel following with acceleration. This abrupt hitting on the first beat dramatically changes the vocal quality. The first phase's drone-like, slow chanting displays an apparent contrast with the loud and rhythmical accents in the second phase. This accentuation brings down the pitch almost an octave. Lower pitch (C2) and strained voice produce a timbre with a strong attack. Additional inhalation accents on upbeats (^) create a percussive and almost unpitched timbre. The square in figure 3 (b) shows the ostinato at this second phase. As the notation indicates, the ostinato spreads to two bars. Half-time feel gives the impression of slowing down, but actually, it is slightly faster. As soon as phase (b) starts musicians start to sing over this ostinato. After the song is performed, a solo recitation (*kaside*) takes place while *dervişler* (dervishes) are still chanting the ostinato. This first *esmâ*, *la ilahe illalah*, follows with an intermission (*durak*). Here, while everyone is resting before standing up, one *zakir* performs a *durak ilahisi*.



**Figure 3.** Description of the first chant

As the solo singing ends, the *şeyh* performs a prostration by hitting his hands to the ground and stands up (*kıyam*) while participants start to sing (*cumhur ilahisi*). This song is also followed with another *ilahi* (*kıyam durak*). Chanting the *esmâ* continues on *kıyam* with the second *esmâ*: *Hayyul Kayyum Allah*. The *şeyh* chants the *esmâ* two times and everybody joins in. After the *ney* improvisation, the *zâkirler* (musicians, singular: *zâkir*) start to sing again. The *zâkirbaşı* takes the *bendir* (frame drum) from the *şeyh* and hands it to the player ceremonially. In the rest of the ritual, every ostinato connects to the next one until the end. Figure 4 shows consecutive ostinatos from *kıyam*; *Hayyul Kayyum Allah*, *Hayy*, and *Allah Allah Hay*. This time inner squares are added to show the drum rhythm. Comparing the first ostinato to the second, we can say that adding an eight-note to the last beat on the drum increases the intensity and makes the ostinato even more symmetrical. The first ostinato as having two movements divided between upper and lower parts of the square changes to four parts in the second ostinato. Slight rhythmic changes and added breath points drive the tempo and intensity. When the *Hay* (chant) reaches its fastest tempo, orange dots merge with the heartbeat in the subject's experience. After this paramount experience, the fourth *esmâ* works as a cooling-down phase with the contribution of its *düyek* [12122] feel. But this *düyek* rhythm is provided by the songs, not the chant itself.



**Figure 4.** Second, third and fourth chants

While the intensity increases, ostinato structures simplify. The last two ostinatos are shown below in figure 5. The first one, *Allah (ism-i celâl)* has two gestures and syllables in two beats. It starts by hitting the first syllable to the left (heart) on the first beat and turning to the right (or middle) on the last beat while inhaling on the last quaver. This ostinato can be as fast as 160 bpm. It ends abruptly and follows with three long *Hu*

accompanied with bowing. After these three initial *Hu* tempo anchors at 60 bpm. This ostinato (*Hu*) divides syllable and breath equally as shown in figure 5. After it reaches the fastest point (160 bpm) as the previous one, a long *Hu* finishes the chanting. Silence. Everyone sits down and a *zâkir* recites the Verse of Light (24/35) from the Quran.<sup>1</sup>

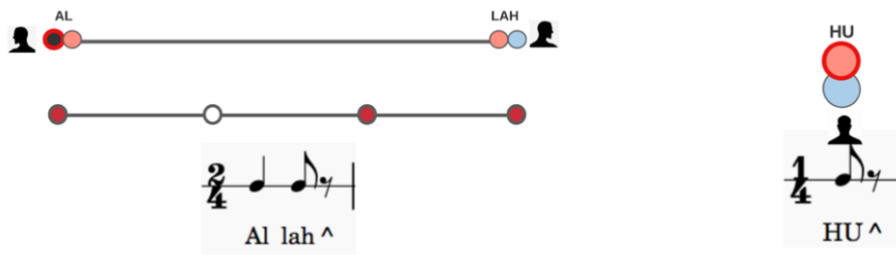


Figure 5. Fifth and sixth chants

## Music and Musicians

The *zikir* precedes music and provides ground for its performance. While consecutive *esmâ* are being chanted, musicians provide musical performances. Although their numbers vary, there are usually five to ten musicians. The musicians' role in the ritual encompasses several different tasks. During the chanting, the *zâkirler* perform songs and improvised melodic recitations. They also perform instruments. These instruments, *ney* (reed flute), *bendir* (frame drum), and *halile* (cymbals) are not used during the month of Muharram to respect the martyrs of Karbala.

The *Zâkirbaşı* is responsible for choosing the right piece for particular situations. *Makam* (melodic mode), *usul* (rhythmic mode), textual content and the author or the composer of the piece are factors that he should consider. The *şeyh* may also make suggestions for each new song (*ilahi*). The virtuosity of the *zâkirbaşı* depends on his knowledge of repertory and various ritual forms as well as musical skills (Murat Şahin, personal communication, 5 March 2021). When considered from this point of view, improvisation precedes performance. So much so that choosing songs within the process can be seen as a higher-order improvisation. The *zâkirbaşı* (and the *şeyh*) observes the processual

<sup>1</sup> The audio recording and visual diagram of the ritual can be accessed at: <https://youtu.be/RLRtVUmNBck>.

energy of ritual and provides content for it. This, in turn, contributes to the formative ritual energy.

The *şeyh* conducts the ostinatos in terms of tempo and intensity. Firstly, the *ney* improvisation (*taksim*) starts on the drone of the ostinato. This stabilizes the tonic and serves as a preparation for singing. However, since the listening activity is always from the point of the ostinato, which generates a buzzing sensation, the *ney* improvisation enriches this meditative effect. After the improvisation introduces the *makam* and lands on its tonic, the *zâkîrler* start to sing an *ilahi*. During the singing, the *ney* player may accompany the *ilahi* or provide a drone.

Song types in Sufi rituals and ceremonies vary. *İlahi* and *kaside* are two main forms of singing. Besides being musical forms, they are also poetic forms (Uzun, 2000). In the *Kadirî* ritual most *İlahis* are composed of several quatrains. Each one repeats the same rhyme throughout the poem. These Turkish poems are measured in syllabic metre. Musically they are composed in A-B form. The first half of the quatrain corresponds to the tonic melody and the second corresponds to the dominant (figure 6). Usually, vocatives such as *illallah* or *Hu* are added at the end of the melodies to fill them up, as seen in the example.

Cemi . . . e . . . . n bi ya la . . r da n ca .nim bi ya la . r dan Hay Hay

7 Mu ham med cüm le nin şâ hı il lal lah Hu ya Hu il lal lah Hu ya Hu

Cemi enbiyâlardan Muhammed cümleinin şâhı  
Yüzü nûrundan almışlar felekler şems ile mâhı

Bu Eşrefoğlu Rûmî'nin günâhı çok dürür gâyet  
Şefâ'at kıl yâ Muhammed yüzün şems ü kamer mâhı

**Figure 6.** *Hüseyinî ilahi; Cemî' enbiyalardan...* (Author's transcription)

These songs are performed over *zikir* ostinatos. Melodically, they are consonant with the drone that is provided by the chanting. Consisting of crotchets and quavers, the melodies usually emphasize the beats. This demands clear enunciation and makes it easy to sing

collectively. With minimal ornamentation, this singing is loud and exciting for singers and listeners.

The rhythmical structures of songs and chants interlock. Notation in figure 7 shows the first line of the *ilahi*. This line, by spanning over four bars, is completed in two ostinato cycles. The structure produces a sensation that is exciting for both dervishes and musicians.

Zakirler

ce mi i e n bi ya la r da n ca nım

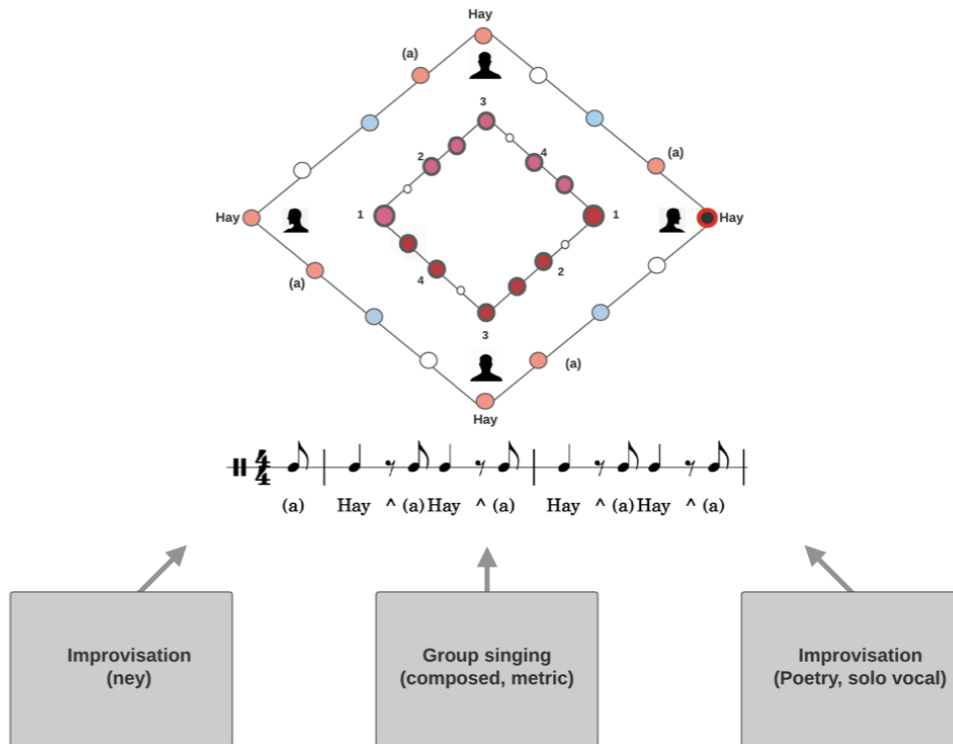
Dervişler

la ^ i la ^ he il lal lah ^ (i) la ^ i la ^ he il lal lah ^ (i)

**Figure 7.** Song-ostinato relation on the first chant

The *Kaside* is another poetic form and its improvised musical recitation (Özkan, 2001). It is performed right after *ilahi*, following its melodic mode. *Kaside* performance is very similar to *taksim* in the Turkish *makam* music tradition. Therefore, the *ney* player may provide drones and improvisations in between the lines of *kaside*. While *ilahi* is performed in a low male vocal range, *kaside* is performed often in the high register. The *kasidehan* improvises the text and incrementally reaches the highest note possible. Textual contents usually emphasize longing for the Prophet Muhammed and praise his virtues. This odic feature affects the very performance of the poem and may lead to mild exaltations among participants. For this reason, *kasidehan* pays attention to textual content and tries to convey its emotional aspects. Also proceeding to the next *esmâ* occurs during the *kaside*.

Having opposing qualities such as solo/group performance, low/high register and composed/improvised melodies, *ilahi* and *kaside* contrast very well, and therefore drive the overall ritual performance. As shown in figure 8, this succession of *taksim*, *ilahi* and *kaside* over the *esmâ* ostinato establishes the overall musical strategy. This structure contrasts *derviş* and *zâkir* and their concurrence generates an *ostinato polyphony*.



**Figure 8.** Model for the musical procedure

### **Conclusion: The Sense of Ritual**

Apart from many of their common features, music and ritual have the power to affect participants through temporal processes. The sense of ritual is revealed through the ritual's formality and affectivity. As I tried to illustrate throughout the article, ritual form and its contents are organized by and through music. Even the ritual subject is constructed with the musicality of the chants. The polyphonic relationship between *zikir* and music, in other words the chanting of the ostinato and the succession of *taksim*, *ilahi* and *kaside*, should be seen as concentric rather than parallel. Recognition of this concentric development characterizes the ritual process from the subjective point of view of the participant. The structures of these chants and their transformation symbolize the physical and emotional transformations of the subject.

Two parallel lines, chanting and singing, complement each other musically. While the participants follow the trajectory of the *esmâ* through successive, interconnected chant-ostinatos, the *ilahi* and *kaside* both emotionally affect them and provide additional themes and concepts to contemplate. On the other hand, the chant-ostinatos provide



rhythmic and tonic ground for the performances of the *zâkirs*. The harmony among the chanters, and also between the chanters and singers symbolizes the *tevhid* (unity).

According to Rappaport, participation and performance (1974: 8, 1999: 37) together with formality (1999: 33) and invariance (1999: 36) are indispensable for any ritual. Considering ritual as a general human activity, he stated that rituals primarily communicate through their formal features, rather than their symbolic and expressive features (Rappaport, 1979: 174-78 as cited in Bell, 2009: 72). The processual form of the *âyin*, even as a mere form, limits and shapes the individual. At the same time it creates spaces of freedom and allows one to focus one's own work since it is also a meditation. In ritual, both the form itself and the gestures that initiate or close sections highlight the concept of propriety (*edep*). This emphasis on decency also manifests itself as politeness and courtesy. Both in ritual and in everyday life this manifestation of decency gives way to self-awareness. In this way, various aspects of beauty (gestures, arts, etc.) are both produced and perceived. Thus, decency and beauty, namely ethics and aesthetics, are embodied in the ritual.

In Sufi dhikr ritual, participation is not a passive activity. The ritual subject is constructed through chants and music; from inside and outside. These two components always complete each other and provide the necessary transformative force. The transformative quality of the processual form with its goal-oriented progress is coherent with the explicit purpose of the *tasavvuf* as a 'way to God'. This 'way' materializes itself beginning from rules and manners (*âdab*) to multi-sensory congruence generated with chants and communal unity (*vahdet*). Each component in ritual is aestheticized (*lütuf, güzellik*) through gestures, words, sounds and shapes. In other words, the "way" that is paved with beauty, starts with decency and moderation, and ends with unity.

This public ritual summarizes the *tasavvuf* practices by presenting it as an ethic and aesthetic way of life. This presentation highlights music as a component of it and uses it as a perfect way to show affection for God (*muhabbetullah*), acknowledging that the human is the reflection of God. The reciprocity of *zikir* (*Fezkuruni ezkurkum*— So remember me, and I shall remember you [Bakara 2/152]) and the processual form situate the *âyin* as the *axis mundi*, a point where two entities meet; God and Human, divine and mundane.

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## Sulaymān Bākirghānī in the Culture of the Volga Tatars: The Phenomenon of the “*Bākirghān kitābī*”

### ABSTRACT

The name of the Central Asian mystic Sulaymān Bākirghānī/Ḥakīm Ata and the literary legacy attributed to him were well-known among the Tatar Muslims of the Volga region in Russia until the middle of the 20th century. A representative of the Yasawiyya tariqat that in the past was widespread among the Tatars, he was venerated as a saint and as an author of many popular poems. The recitation of these texts became a part of ‘the book chanting’ /*kitap köyläp uqu*/ tradition. A special place in this repertoire was taken by the Sufi anthology *Bākirghān kitābī*, which was repeatedly published in Kazan from 1846. Thanks to these editions before the revolution of 1917, this collection could be found in almost every Tatar house. Until almost the middle of the 20th century texts of this book were recited with tunes called *Bākirghān köe*. At present time, this tradition has almost disappeared in the Tatar environment, as is knowledge both about Bākirghānī himself and the collection under his name.

The aim of this article is to show the specificity of the perception of the texts ascribed to Bākirghānī in Tatar culture and to follow the changes of their interpretation in the Tatar milieu towards the beginning of the 21st century. The study is based on the analysis of little studied textual sources and materials collected in the territory of the Tatarstan Republic on field trips in the 1990-2000s.

### KEYWORDS

Bākirghānī

Yasawiyya

Volga Tatars

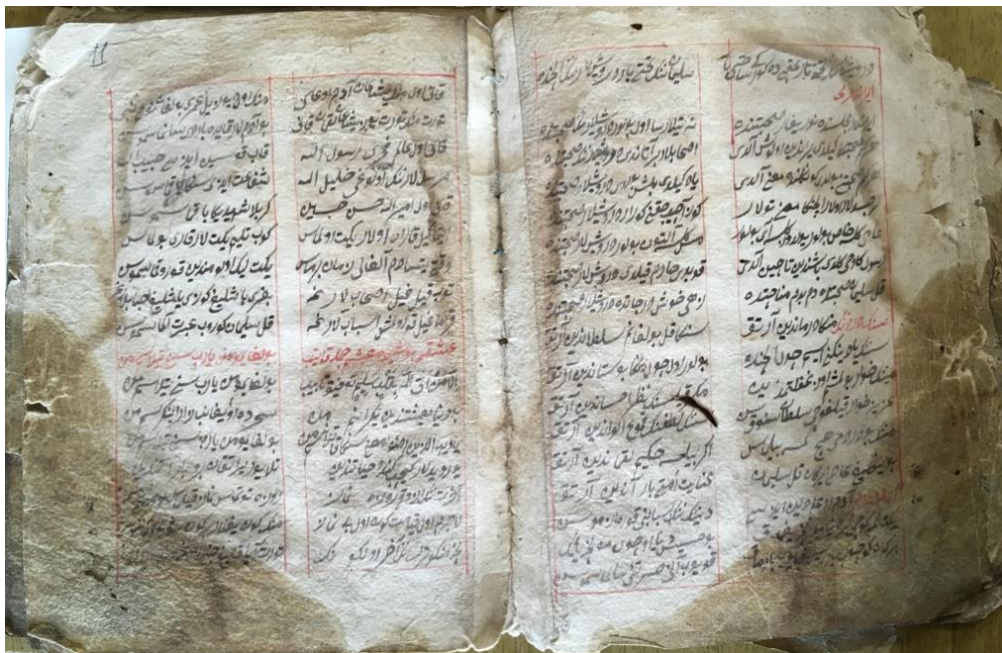
*Bākirghān kitābī*

Recitation of Sufi poems

The Central Asian Sufi Sulaymān Bāqirghānī is a legendary representative of the Yasawiyya tarikat, a contemporary and the closest follower of Aḥmad Yasawī. He was known under different names (Ḥakīm Ata, Ҷул Sulaymān, Ḥakīm Sulaymān, Khwāja Sulaymān and others). According to Devin DeWeese, who questioned the previously established date of his death (1186), he lived at the beginning of the 13th century (DeWeese, 2003). Various works were written on the life and the activity of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī, primarily in the context of legends connected with his life, in the context of the Yasawiyya silsilas, of ‘the holy places’, that used to be places of pilgrimage, as well as in connection with the texts that are diffused under his name.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of this figure for the Turkic Muslim world is proved by the fact that still today works under the name of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī are being published and commented on in the region (in particular in Uzbekistan, Turkey, and Kazakhstan)<sup>2</sup>.

In the culture of Tatar Muslims (‘the Northern Turks,’ according to definition of Fuad Köprülü), the figure of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī as a saint and as the author of popular religious texts has had a special place until the middle of the 20th century. For a long time, his poems circulated among Tatars in handwritten form.



**Figure 1.** Fragment of the handwritten *Bāqirghān kitābī*. End of the 18th century.

<sup>1</sup> In particular: Zaleman (1898); Bartold, (1964: 241); Köprülü (2006/1918); DeWeese (2009).

<sup>2</sup> In particular: *Bāqirghon kitobi* (1991); Ahmad Yasawi. Sulaymon Bāqirghānī (2011); Hakim Süleyman Ata. (2006); Güzel (2008); Sulaymān Bāqirghānī (2008).

The first editions of books connected with his name appeared in Kazan, the main centre of the Tatar Muslim culture, and from the middle of the 19th century until 1917 they were repeatedly published there. It is worth noting that all works dedicated to Sulaymān Bāqirghānī are based on these publications. For a long time, however, this ‘Kazan context,’ and the wider ‘Tatar context’ of their existence remained without scholarly attention<sup>3</sup>. The usage of ‘the Bāqirghāni texts’ in the Tatar milieu was not studied neither as a reflection of the culture of popular Sufism among Tatars, nor in connection with the forms of their presentation, especially the peculiarities of recitation. A certain role in this was played by the Kazan ethnomusicologists, who in the 1980s put to discussion the specificity of musical forms with which ‘the *Bāqirghāni* texts’ circulated in Tatar milieu, but were deprived of the possibility of studying their content.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of this article is to show the specificity of perception of ‘the Sulaymān Bāqirghānī legacy’ among the Volga Tatars<sup>5</sup>, who populate areas that are significantly distant from the land of the Central Asian civilization, and who found themselves in conditions not conducive to the development of old Sufi traditions towards the end of the 20th century. What are the peculiarities of the existence of “the texts of Bāqirghānī” here? What accounted for the rise of popularity of traditions connected with his name in the Tatar milieu at the beginning of the 20th century and their fall into almost total oblivion towards the end of the same century? What was the *Bāqirghān kitābī* in the past for Tatars and what does it mean for them now?

The study I carried out in order to answer these questions was based on materials collected in the territory of the Tatarstan Republic on field trips which started in the 1990s and that are still ongoing today.

Speaking about “the legacy” of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī, we should keep the conditional character of this term in mind. Just as the data concerning the biography, the places of

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<sup>3</sup> A noticeable step in this direction was made by researchers of “Siberian Islam” who showed the significance of the figure of Ḥakīm Ata for the Tatars of this region. See: Seleznyov et al. (2009); Bustanov (2011).

<sup>4</sup> The first publications where the melodies of “*Bāqirghān kitābī*” were published as examples of “book melodies:” Sharifullina (1981); Nigmatzyanov (1984). On the recitation of religious texts in connection with Sufi rituals in Tatar Muslim milieu: Sayfullina (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Here we speak about the Tatars who live on the territory of contemporary Tatarstan. Presumably, in future it will be possible to present a more complete picture of the spread of traditions connected with the name of Bāqirghānī in the culture of different groups of Tatars: the Astrakhan Tatars, the Mishars (central Russia), in Siberia, in Crimea. In recent years, we have seen growing interest amongst researchers in this direction. See: *Tariqat Yasaviyya i Krym* (2015); Bustanov (2011); Seleznyov et al. (2009).

residence and the burial<sup>6</sup> of Ḥakīm Ata are ambiguous, so the question of the authorship of texts connected with his name still remains open. Many scholars today share the opinion that most of these texts are merely ascribed to Sulaymān Bāqirghānī.<sup>7</sup> Based on various textual traditions in the Tatar culture of the 20th century (recital of religious books, the folk munajats, the ritual dedications “*baghishlau*”), we prefer to call them the “traces” of influence of the literary traditions and of the legends connected with this person.<sup>8</sup>

As a whole, the popularity of “the legacy of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī” among Tatar Muslims can be regarded as a sign of the amazing vitality of the traditions of the Yasawiyya tariqat, which were widespread in the area between the Volga river and Ural mountains for centuries. Down to this day the elements of these traditions can be discovered in various forms of folk culture.<sup>9</sup>

First of all, Tatars venerated Sulaymān Bāqirghānī as the closest follower of Aḥmad Yasawī, called by the people “the head of 99 thousand shaykhs”,<sup>10</sup> and about whom they recited the following lines: “*Mādinādä Möhämmät, jir jözendä Hujjahmät*”/In Medina is Muḥammad, on the /whole/ earth is Khwāja Aḥmad/.<sup>11</sup>

Sulaymān Bāqirghānī / Ḥakīm Ata was the central link in the chain of holy names that had a special place in the Yasawiyya tradition, beginning with the mythical Hozur/Hizr (or Hozur-Ilias, as he was more often called by Tatars), up to the members of the family of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī, who were believed to be important protectors of Muslims: Hubbi khwāja (the son of Ḥakīm Ata), ‘Ambar-ana (his wife), Zangī-baba (the husband of ‘Ambar-

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<sup>6</sup> While the shrine in Bāqirghān near the town of Qonghirat in Uzbekistan is considered the burial place of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī, there is a similar place in Siberia. In its significance, the pilgrimage to this place is comparable to the pilgrimage to Mecca, according to local Tatars. (Seleznyov et al. 2009: 54).

<sup>7</sup> See the translation and comments to the book by Mehmed Fuad Köprülü (2006); DeWeese (2003).

<sup>8</sup> In the context of the Yasawiyya traditions in Central Asia, Devin DeWeese uses the definition “the broader realm”, which seems appropriate in this case: “...by this designation I mean not only the specifically Sufi communities linked to the name of Khoja Ahmad Yasavi, as well as the elements of teaching and practice ascribed to him and to the later ‘Yasavi’ Sufi communities, but also the broader social, religious, and literary legacies of these communities as adopted in much wider circles of Central Asian society... This broader definition of ‘the Yasavi tradition’ is in part suggested by the forms in which the legacy of Ahmad Yasavi has survived even today...” DeWeese (1996: 206).

<sup>9</sup> This subject was discussed in my article “The Yasawiyya Legacy in the Culture of Tatar Muslims” (2013).

<sup>10</sup> The line from: *Kişşai Hubbi khwāja* (1899), 2. Translated by Guzel Sayfullina.

<sup>11</sup> A paraphrase of the line, widespread among followers of Yasawi: “*Mādinādä Möhämmät, Turkestanda Khujahmät*” /In Medina is Muhammad, in Turkestan is *khwāja* Aḥmad /. Recorded in the village Smail in 1991 as part of a munajat from Fahira Zakirova, b.1921 (Baltach district, Tatarstan, Russia).

ana after the death of Ḥakīm Ata). As my field observations show, faith in their patronage still remained in the 1990s (which can be seen most clearly from the texts of the ritual dedications /*baghishlau*/ performed after the recitation of the Koran<sup>12</sup>).

A special impetus that contributed to the spread of knowledge on Ḥakīm Ata and of the texts connected with his name from the second half of the 19th century onward was given by changes in the social life of Tatar Muslims, namely, the development of their own book-publishing and the widening of the network of Muslim schools and medrese. The texts that earlier were passed on orally and that circulated in manuscripts among relatively small groups of competent people, were now published in hundreds, and later, to 1917, in thousands of copies. In 1846, the *Bāḳirghān kitābī* was printed in Kazan for the first time. In 1847 it was followed by the *Ḥakīm Ata kitābī*, a well-known anonymous hagiography that Muslims used as the main source for the biography of Sulaymān Bāḳirghānī, and by *Akhīrzaman kitābī*.<sup>13</sup> Later these books, as well as other texts from the ‘circle of Bāḳirghānī,’ were repeatedly republished.

An important role in the distribution of literature of such kind was played by the ‘union’ of publishers with schools and medrese, where these texts were used for educational purposes, as manuals on the history of Islam and for reading in Turki.<sup>14</sup> This approach had a special impact on the perception of the people, for whom the ‘Sufi context’ of these texts now became fairly shadowy. Their recitation became an instrument of education and, to some degree, of entertainment.<sup>15</sup> The melodic reading /*köylap uqu*/ of the printed religious books became one of the favourite traditions in Tatar culture at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and during the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>12</sup> Several examples of dedications recorded in the 1900s show veneration of some Sufi shaykhs by Tatars. In the dedication, recorded in 1994 from the 85-years old Gölbustan Safina (Baltach village of the Baltach district of Tatarstan), among other Sufi shaykhs are mentioned: “...*Qasīym-baba, Bāhlül divana- khwāja, Hakim Ata, Hubbi- khwāja, Zangī Baba*” Sayfullina (2005: 51). Investigation of *baghishlau* in the 2000s shows the disappearance of this kind of information from the folk texts.

<sup>13</sup> “Only from 1855 to 1864, 9600 copies of this book were produced in Kazan”, writes Efimiy Malov (Malov, 1897: 39).

<sup>14</sup> “For a century, the *Bāḳirghān kitābī* by Ḥakīm Ata served as a manual in elementary schools. In my childhood, I had to learn it by heart,” writes the historian Zaki Validi Togan (1890-1970). (Togan, 1998: 24).

<sup>15</sup> This peculiarity of the existence of Sufi texts among Tatars was noticed by Russian missionaries already in the 19th century. Thus, concerning the *Māryam ana kitābī*, Stefan Matveev wrote: “For the *Mahomedans* of the Kazan land, the story of Sulaymān serves as religious-didactic reading for children, whereas in Central Asia, these verses are recited together with the poems of Khwāja Aḥmad Yasawī by the whirling dervishes in their praying sessions.” (Matveev, 1895: 4).

As we can see from the book catalogues of the pre-revolutionary period<sup>16</sup> and from the private libraries preserved in Muslim houses in the following decades<sup>17</sup>, there were several narrative poems connected with the name of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī at that time, which circulated among Tatar Muslims: “*Māryam ana kitabī*” /The Book of Mother Mary, first published in 1878/, “*Akhīrzaman kitabī yaki Taqiy ghajab*” /The Book of the End of the World, or the Miracles of Piety/<sup>18</sup>, “*Mi’rādīname*” /on the legendary night journey of the prophet Muḥammad/, “*Isma’īl kīşşasī*” /A Story of Isma’īl, on the sacrifice of Abraham/, “*Yarīm alma*” / A Half of an Apple, about Imam Aghzam<sup>19</sup>/.(The last three together with a large number of *hikmats* and other short poems were published in the “*Bāqirghān*” collection).

The popularity of these books was exceptional in this area and, according to Fuad Köprülü, exceeded that in Central Asia itself.<sup>20</sup> In 1922, a major Tatar writer, Galimjan Ibrahimov (1887-1938) mentioned that the book *Bāqirghān* is in the history of Tatar literature an example of the phenomenon that a text, born on foreign soil, becomes a national treasure (Gali, 1956: 43) Concerning *Akhīrzaman kitabī*, the authors of the History of Tatar literature (1923) noted that the people’s belief in it was comparable to their belief in the Qur'an (Gali Rahim & Gaziz, 1923: 110).

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<sup>16</sup> In earlier catalogues, the titles of the texts of our study could be found in the sections on Sufism (as in *Āsame köteb*, 1901); later on, mostly in the sections on reading in Turki (*Āsame köteb* 1913, 1912, 1914).

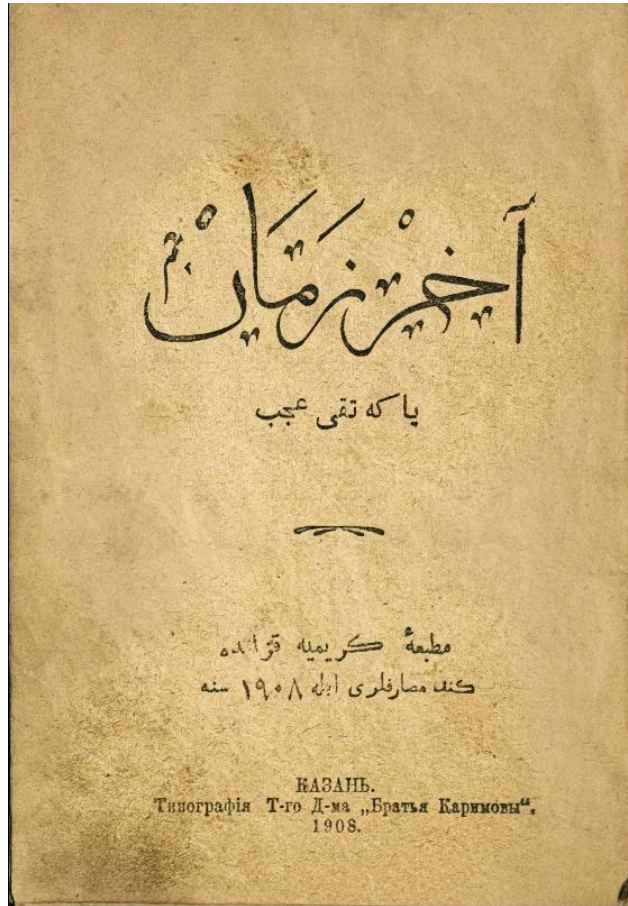
<sup>17</sup> Even if we keep in mind that those were the remains of rich collections of Muslim books which were destroyed in the Soviet period.

<sup>18</sup> The text was also published under the title *Taqiy ghajab/ Taqiy ghajab kitabī*.

<sup>19</sup> Imam Aghzam – “The Great Imam”, as Muslims called Abū Ḥanīfah (699 – 767), the founder of the Sunni Hanafi school.

<sup>20</sup> “The major works that have been attributed to Ḥakīm Sulaymān Ata... are popular works that are still read with great rapture and excitement in Central Asia, especially in the region of the Volga.” Köprülü, 2006: 175.





**Figure 2.** *Akhīrzaman kitabī yaki Taqiy ghajab*, Kazan, 1908

There are several explanations of such love for “the texts of *Bākirghānī*.” First of all, there is the ease of understanding their language for Russian Muslims. Formed in Central Asia, the literary Chagatai/Turki language for centuries was the basis for texts spread among Tatars, beginning with the *hikmats* of Aḥmad Yasawī (Köprülü, 2006; Hofman, 1969: 230). Both poems, which consisted of a few *beits* and long narratives, recited from printed or handwritten texts in Arabic script, were always highly popular with the audience, be it during festivals or simply at times of leisure.



**Figure 3.** At the time of *kitap köyläp uqu* (book chanting). Iske Yerek village, Tatarstan.  
Photograph by Guzel Sayfullina, 1991.

But the factor which in course of time became most influential was the use of melodies, with which the poems were recited and which made the performances more attractive for the listeners. (It is noteworthy that the Russian missionary Yefimiy Malov, who was the first to study the *Akhîrzaman kitabî*, explained its popularity among Tatars as follows: “*Mahommedans* read this book with a singing voice, especially women and girls who charm the ears of the members of their families. For a long time, this book has been known and loved for its melody” (Malov, 1897 : 39).

Books of such a kind (called “*köyle kitap*” by the people) had their own melodies (whose titles were taken from the name of the book<sup>21</sup>), or there were tunes which through the compliance of their structure to the metrical structure of a poem (syllabic or *aruz*) could be easily used with different texts.

Despite the diversity of these tunes, they are united by a common feature, namely, their narrative nature, which also reveals itself in the manner of performance. As a rule, it is a recital in a low voice, without the use of bright dynamics and other effects that could overshadow the meaning of the verbal information; the ornamentation, typical of other

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<sup>21</sup> Such as *Yusufkitābî köe*, the tune of *Kişşai Yusuf* by Kûl ‘Ali (13<sup>th</sup> century), *Muḥammadiya köe* of *Muḥammadiya* by Muḥammad Yazıjoğlu Celebi (15<sup>th</sup> century). See: Sayfullina, 2008: 137.

genres of folklore, is kept to a minimum.<sup>22</sup> In the repertoire connected with the name of Bāqirghāni, different variants of the tunes of *Taqiy ghajab* and, especially, of *Bāqirghān* (*Bāqirghān köe*), turned out to be the most resilient.

♩ = 132

Bän - dä - lä - rem jir yö - ze - nä qay - chan ti - gän,  
an - din ar - tiq tä - kiy gha - jab tang - na - ry var

Figure 4. *Akhīrzaman kitābī yaki Taqiy ghajab* (Husnullin, 2001: 695)

♩ = 158

Kil sā mi - nga ä - jal ji - tep(e) yom - shaq tü - shäk - lār - din tö - shep  
Qa ra jir as - tı - na ke - reb(e) yal - ghız lä - het - tä nit - käy - men?

Figure 5. *Bāqirghān kitābī* (Sayfullina, 1991). Text by Shamseddin

As the materials of the expeditions and the existing literature show, *Bāqirghān kitābī* is the best-known book connected with the name of Sulaymān Bāqirghānī today. At the same time, there are still many uncertain points about it, beginning with the title itself: many commentators call it *The Book by Bāqirghānī*, although it is more appropriate to translate it as *The Book from Bāqirghān*. It is the place from which the mystic received his *nisba* and which is mentioned in the opening line of the collection: *Bāqirghāndan sāfār qılsam...* [I start my journey from *Bāqirghān*] (*Bāqirghān kitābī*, 1858: 2).

<sup>22</sup> These and other structural features of “the book tunes” have allowed Tatar ethnomusicologists to assign them to the category of musical epic. See: Nigmatzyanov, 1984 : 8.

A collection of poems by Turkic Sufi authors of different centuries - this is the only information on which all scholars agree.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, there is no clear answer to the question of the number of its authors<sup>24</sup>, as well as of the time that they represent: in the Kazan publication by Farid Yahin of 2000 they are poets of the 12th-18th centuries; according to Abdurrahman Güzel, they are poets of the 12th – 16th centuries (Güzel, 2008: 104); in his Survey, Henry Hofman writes: “On the whole we are obliged to conclude ...that this book most likely represents an old anthology, successively enlarged in the 16th-19th century” (Hofman, 1969: 230).

One cannot but agree with the opinion that the book was still being formed in the 19th century. Comparison of the first publication of 1846 with the following ones<sup>25</sup> shows significant differences in the language and especially in the structure of the collection: in the edition of 1846, three large poems by Bākirghānī, ‘Abidi and Saḳıyn, which come at the end of all other editions, are absent, as well as more than twenty short poems of various authors; in addition, there are many reshuffles or replacements of individual words and beits. All this suggests that the editions studied were based on different manuscript “*Bākirghān kitābī*.”

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<sup>23</sup> Analysis of the content of the collection is not the aim of this article. We will only mention that its “Sufi character” is recognized in both the subjects and the forms of the poems. A significant number of texts is dedicated to dhikr or even written in the form of dhikr (especially those by Yasawī, Bākirghānī, Shamseddin).

<sup>24</sup> In the Encyclopaedia of Islam 14 authors are mentioned (Alpay, 1986: 76); the editor of the new Kazan edition lists 18 poets (*Bākirghān kitābī*, 2000); Abdurrahman Güzel mentions 22 authors (Güzel, 2008: 97).

<sup>25</sup> Obviously, there was a gap of several years between the first editions of *Bākirghān kitābī*.” In the Kazan libraries the earliest are the publications of 1846 and 1858, which probably have served as a model for future reprints. In his Memoirs, Z.V. Togan mentions the edition of 1857. See: Togan, 1998: 24.



Figure 6. Kazan editions of *Bākırghān kitābī*: 1846, 1907

There is a detail in the book of 1846 which also points to differences in publications, but at the same time sheds light on the purposes of the publisher: not the spreading of Sufi ideas, but in the first place the education of ignorant Muslims.<sup>26</sup>

There are questions concerning the authors of the book as well. Apart from *Bākırghānī* himself, whose texts form a rather small part of the collection, there are: Aḥmad Yasawī, Rajji, Mashrab, Shamseddin Ghasıy, Җul Sharif, Hodaidad, Iqanıy, Ghabidi (Ghobäydi), Shohudi, Gidai, Ghazzali, Nasimi, Fakiri, Tafi, Җasim shaykh, Gharibi, Karim Hobbi, Hatai Saḳıyn and Baba Machin.

When investigating these names from the perspective of the Sufi *silsilas* and of the Central Asian literary tradition<sup>27</sup>, one can see that, with all their variety, they represent the oeuvre of the Central Asian shaykhs who have direct or indirect connections with each other. Tatar scholars who study *Bākırghān kitābī* in the context of Tatar history have another vision. According to their position, the characters of Җul Sharif and Җasim represent well-known persons in 16th-century Tatar history: the leader of Muslims Җul Sharif, who died in the capture of Kazan, and the shaykh Җasim. (The poem *Hubbi khwāja*, belonging to the

<sup>26</sup> A postscript to the text: “This *Bākırghān kitābī* was published in 1846 by the Kazan merchant Rahimjan Saḡid ugli in his own typography, with the hope that illiterate Muslims would read it.” *Bākırghān kitābī*, 1846: 84.

<sup>27</sup> Köprülü, 2006: 386, 175; DeWeese, the above mentioned works; DeWeese, 1999.

same range of reading for Tatars as “the *Bākirghāni* texts,” is also ascribed to the Kazan *Ḳul Sharif*).<sup>28</sup>

It should be mentioned, however, that over time the authorship of the texts of “*Bākirghān kitābī*” has become of less and less interest to the people. When reciting the texts by both *Ḳul Sulaymān*, *Shamseddin*, *Hudaidad* or others, Muslims simply called them “from the ‘*Bākirghān kitābī*’ (as both my field observations and recordings of the Kazan ethnomusicologists confirm).

The widespread knowledge of the *Bākirghān kitābī* at the beginning of the 20th century in all layers of the Tatar Muslim population made this book a cultural phenomenon, the significance of which went far beyond the frame of only a Sufi anthology (the original function of the collection) or a popular religious manual.<sup>29</sup>

However, together with the social changes in the life of Tatars at that time (in particular, innovations in the system of education),<sup>30</sup> a new attitude towards *Bākirghān kitābī* and other texts of this range was formed. These texts began to be perceived ironically, as a symbol of the old system of religious education and more broadly, as a symbol of an old – that is, obsolete – culture. In print, works in the form of certain verses from *Bākirghān kitābī* or *Taqiy ghajab* with new content appear, often having a socially accusing nature. Examples are the works of the most ‘audible voice’ of that time, the poet *Ghabdulla Tukay* (1886-1913), which are written in the style of *Bākirghān*.<sup>31</sup>

Use of the known poetical and musical forms with other content, mostly in a satirical vein, was practiced in the Soviet period (after 1917) as an instrument of an atheistic campaign and contributed to a new perception of once-favoured texts. An example of this is the poem by *Sulaymān Bākirghānī* written in the form of a dialogue between Paradise and Hell. If *Tukay* in 1906 made only an allusion to this poem in his dialogue of the Donkey and *Ishan*, in 1918 the renowned writer *Ghaliaskar Kamal* (1879-1933) repeated the

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<sup>28</sup>See in particular: *Kol Shārif hām anīng zamanī*, 2005. In the article by *Önal Kaya Ḳul Sharif* is shown as “a famous writer in Transoxiana” of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. See: *Önal*, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Among other *köyle kitap* of similar significance, the anonymous *Badawam* and *Muḥammadia* by *Muḥammad Yazıjoglu Celebi* should be mentioned. See: *Sayfullina*, 2008: 136.

<sup>30</sup> This subject is discussed in a huge amount of sources, in particular, in the context of *Jadidism* among Tatars. See in particular: *Iskhakov*, 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Sometimes the poet directly points to *Bākirghān* in the titles of verses: *Hatirāi ‘Bākirghān* [Remembering *Bākirghān*], *Maktanīshu (Bākirghānnan)* [Boasting. From *Bākirghān*]. *Tukay*, 2011: 407, 511.

original form of the verses in the dialogue of the Worker and the Bourgeois (Gali, 1956 : 43).

Similarly, as a musical 'sign' of the negatively depicted clergy, the melodies of popular religious books were interpreted in the first Tatar musical theatre performances, in particular, *Kazan sölgeşe* [The Kazan towel, 1923] and *Zängär shäl* [The Blue scarf, 1926].

During the seven decades of the Soviet period, the perception of *Bākirghān kitābī* in the Tatar milieu underwent fundamental changes. Together with the closing of Muslim schools, with the changes of alphabet (1929 in Latin, 1939 in Cyrillic), which cut off new generations of Tatars from the old literary legacy, knowledge of these books and their authors disappeared. Oral transmission of texts performed with popular melodies became the main mechanism of preserving the *köyläp uqu* tradition. Both musical and textual information connected with the tradition of the recitation of religious books moved to the repertoire of folk munajats and were evaluated as part of the song folklore of secular content.<sup>32</sup> When analysing munajats recorded in the last decades of the 20th century, one discovers that many of them are to a greater or lesser extent the transformed fragments of earlier popular religious books and that their melodies have the same origin.<sup>33</sup>

The new forms of existence of *Bākirghān kitābī* and other texts of the same kind at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries are their reprints in Cyrillic, accompanied by their translation into modern Tatar, and sometimes, their appearance in musical programmes, as a tribute to the poetical-musical traditions of the past. As a rule, these are performances by rare enthusiast-"restorers" of endangered traditions (singers Gulzada, b. 1946; Idris Gaziev, b. 1960; the scholar and musician Gennadiy Makarov, b. 1952).

## **Conclusion**

The study of the perception of the traditions connected with the name of Sulaymān Bākirghānī by the Volga Tatars actually brings us to the question of what happens when

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<sup>32</sup> On the interpretation of the form of the munajat in Tatar culture see: Sayfullina, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Examples of different kinds can be found in: Husnullin, 2001 (such as the munajat, recorded in 1983, which represents the poem by Shamseddin from the *Bākirghān kitābī*: 144-145).

cultural traditions rooted in a particular cultural and historical context appear in a different environment.

‘The legacy of Sulaymān Bākirghānī,’ which entered deeply into the life of the Tatars together with the spread of the Yasawiyya traditions and which obviously existed as a form of popular Sufism for a long time, underwent a fundamental reinterpretation in the 20th century.

While maintaining some of the formal elements of the Sufi tradition (such as mentioning some dhikr formulas, like *Hu-hu*, *Alla-hu*,<sup>34</sup> some ‘holy names’ in dedications), people lost real knowledge of it. The recitation of texts such as *Bākirghān kitābī*, which at the beginning of the 1900s was mostly interpreted as an element of popular religious education, towards the end of the century was perceived as the stylistically special, musical poetical tradition *köyläp uqu*, which in its turn, received a new life in folk munajats and in a repertoire that was designed for professional performance on the concert stage.<sup>35</sup> A special role was played in this by the Kazan editions of *Bākirghān kitābī*. On the one hand, they contributed to the preservation of this special layer of Central Asian Sufi poetry extending over several centuries; on the other hand, they brought the collection into a new cultural and historical context and predetermined the new ways of understanding it.

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<sup>34</sup> See: Sayfullina (2019).

<sup>35</sup> An example is the repertoire of such popular singers as Gulzada and Idris Gaziev.



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## Tuning Systems of Traditional Georgian Singing Determined from a New Corpus of Field Recordings

**ABSTRACT**

In this study we examine the tonal organization of the 2016 GVM dataset, a newly-created corpus of high-quality multimedia field recordings of traditional Georgian singing with a focus on Svaneti. For this purpose, we developed a new processing pipeline for the computational analysis of non-western polyphonic music which was subsequently applied to the complete 2016 GVM dataset. To evaluate under what conditions a single tuning system is representative of current Svan performance practice, we examined the stability of the obtained tuning systems from an ensemble-, a song-, and a corpus-related perspective. Furthermore, we compared the resulting Svan tuning systems with the tuning systems obtained for the Erkomaishvili dataset (Rosenzweig et al., 2020) in the study by Scherbaum et al. (2020). In comparison to a 12-TET (12-tone-equal-temperament) system, the Erkomaishvili and the Svan tuning systems are surprisingly similar. Both systems show a strong presence of pure fourths (500 cents) and fifths (700 cents), and 'neutral' thirds (peaking around 350 cents) as well as 'neutral' sixths. In addition, the sizes of the melodic and the harmonic seconds in both tuning systems differ systematically from each other, with the size of the harmonic second being systematically larger than the melodic one.

**KEYWORDS**

Traditional  
Georgian Music  
Tuning  
Computational  
ethnomusicology

## Introduction

The rich musical heritage of the country of Georgia has attracted the attention of musicians, music lovers and music scholars for a long time. Over the years, starting with phonograph recordings already more than a century ago, many efforts have been made to record and document traditional Georgian music. However, many of these recordings have been lost in the course of time and the available historic audio tracks are often of insufficient quality for the application of modern, quantitative analysis techniques. One well-known exception is the collection of the Tbilisi State Conservatory recordings of master chanter Artem Erkomaishvili from the year 1966, the computational analysis of which is covered in a series of papers (Müller et al., 2017; Scherbaum et al., 2017; 2020; Rosenzweig et al., 2019; 2020; 2021). In preparation for the research project “Computational Analysis of Traditional Georgian Vocal Music” (GVM)<sup>1</sup>, two of the authors (N.M. and F.S.) travelled through Georgia during summer of 2016 to record a new research corpus of traditional Georgian singing, praying, and lamenting. All of the recordings were done as multichannel recordings in which a high resolution (4K) video stream was combined with a stream of 3-channel headset microphone recordings (one for each voice group), a stream of 3-channel larynx microphone recordings (also one for each voice group), and a conventional stereo recording. The use of larynx microphones, which had never before been systematically employed in ethnomusicological field work, allows the use of methods from audio signal processing and music information retrieval (MIR) to analyse the recordings of the separate voices while the singers are singing together in their natural singing environment.

The regional focus of the field expedition was on Upper Svaneti which is one of the rare regions at the crossroads of Europe and Asia where very old (presumably pre-Christian) traditions are still cultivated as part of daily life. Svan songs as parts of these rituals therefore occupy a special place within Georgian music and are still maintained in a comparatively original form on account of the remote geographical situation. The reason for choosing Svaneti as our main target was that presumably the first stages of Georgian vocal music development (and possibly of Europe) have been preserved there (Jordania,

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<sup>1</sup> Computational Analysis of Traditional Georgian Vocal Music (GVM) [DFG MU 2686/13-1, SCHE 280/20-1] (2018 - 2022)

2006).

The complete dataset, the technical details of which are described in Scherbaum et al. (2018) and Scherbaum et al. (2019), has been made publicly available on two websites<sup>2</sup>. In addition to the systematic collection of recordings from Upper Svaneti, it contains recordings of two ensembles from Guria, a small collection of recordings of singers from Racha, and a set of recordings of a Tbilisi-based ensemble.

In recent years, we have witnessed a revolution in the way computer technology has affected the way we do research, not only in the natural sciences. Not surprisingly, these changes have also impacted ethnomusicology and led to the emergence of a new field of research called "computational ethnomusicology" (see Tzanetakis et al., 2007; Gómez et al., 2013; Tzanetakis, 2014). The intellectual core of computational ethnomusicology is what the influential mathematician Stephen Wolfram has called "computational thinking, which he describes as the principle of "formulating questions with enough clarity, and in a systematic enough way, that one can tell a computer how to do them" (Wolfram, 2016). Of course, not all relevant research questions in the field of ethnomusicology can be solved computationally, but the analysis of audio signals and the extraction of quantitative information from them are prime examples of where computational approaches are extremely useful.

The starting points for the present study are computationally estimated pitch trajectories for the individual voices of all recordings of the GVM 2016 dataset belonging to three-voice songs of sufficiently high fidelity for computational analysis. The technical goal of our analysis was the derivation of quantitative models for the melodic pitch distributions and harmonic interval distributions for the complete dataset, but also separately for the Svanetian, Gurian, Racha, and the Tbilisi subsets. Thereby we aimed to investigate what these recordings can contribute to the ongoing scientific dispute about traditional Georgian tuning systems, a comprehensive review of which can be found in Section 2 of Scherbaum et al. (2020).

The rest of the current paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, we discuss the processing workflow to obtain the melodic pitch and harmonic interval distributions.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.audiolabs-erlangen.de/resources/MIR/2017-GeorgianMusic-Scherbaum> and <https://lazardb.gbv.de/search>

In order to cope with the peculiarities of the singing styles in Svaneti and Guria (continuous pitch shifting and rapidly changing note durations, respectively), we had to develop and test new computational tools for music and audio processing and implement them into a completely new processing workflow. Then, in the results section, we present the pitch and interval distributions as so-called Gaussian mixture distributions, a very efficient numerical representation already used in Scherbaum et al. (2020), which also facilitates the comparison of the tuning systems of the different regional subsets. The final section of the paper contains a discussion and concluding remarks.

### **Processing Workflow**

The first step of our processing workflow to derive pitch distributions and harmonic interval distributions, respectively, consists of processing each recorded audio track of interest (in our case preferably the output signals of the larynx microphones) with a so-called ‘pitch<sup>3</sup>’ tracking algorithm. For the present study we used the autocorrelation-based PYIN algorithm (Mauch and Dixon, 2014), which is also implemented in the widely used Tony software (Mauch et al., 2015). The resulting pitch trajectories, which are commonly also referred to as ‘fundamental frequency’ or ‘F0’ trajectories, were subsequently checked for octave jumps and artefacts. Octave jumps were corrected and obvious artefacts (e.g., non-singing related utterances such as clearing the throat, coughing, and so on) removed. For the analysis of pitch distributions and harmonic interval distributions, we are only interested in stable segments of the F0 trajectories (where one can perceive stable pitches) and not in utterances corresponding to very short transient signals such as sliding phases (‘portamento’), which are a common feature, especially in Svan singing. A computationally efficient way to remove the latter is by morphological filtering, as described by Rosenzweig et al. (2019). Here we use an extension of the original algorithm of Rosenzweig et al. (2019), motivated by the fact that, especially for the Gurian songs in the 2016 GVM dataset, we were confronted with notes

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<sup>3</sup> In the field of psychoacoustics, the term ‘pitch’ is defined as a quantity that can not be measured directly, but which is perceptually more closely related to an autocorrelation process than to the measurement of a physical frequency component (Heller, 2012). In contrast, in the field of acoustic sound analysis the term ‘pitch’ is usually understood as a numerical quantity which can be determined by means of so-called pitch tracking algorithms and which is also called ‘F0’ or ‘fundamental frequency’. The latter term has to be taken with a grain of salt, since it is commonly also used for algorithms in which F0 is determined purely in the time domain, e.g. by using an autocorrelation-based approach which is the current state-of-the-art of pitch determination (Heller, 2012). Those algorithms will return proxies for ‘pitch’ values even for signals without spectral energy at F0, or for periodic non-harmonic signals, for which fundamental frequencies in the strict sense are not defined.



with rapidly varying durations that the original algorithm cannot handle optimally.

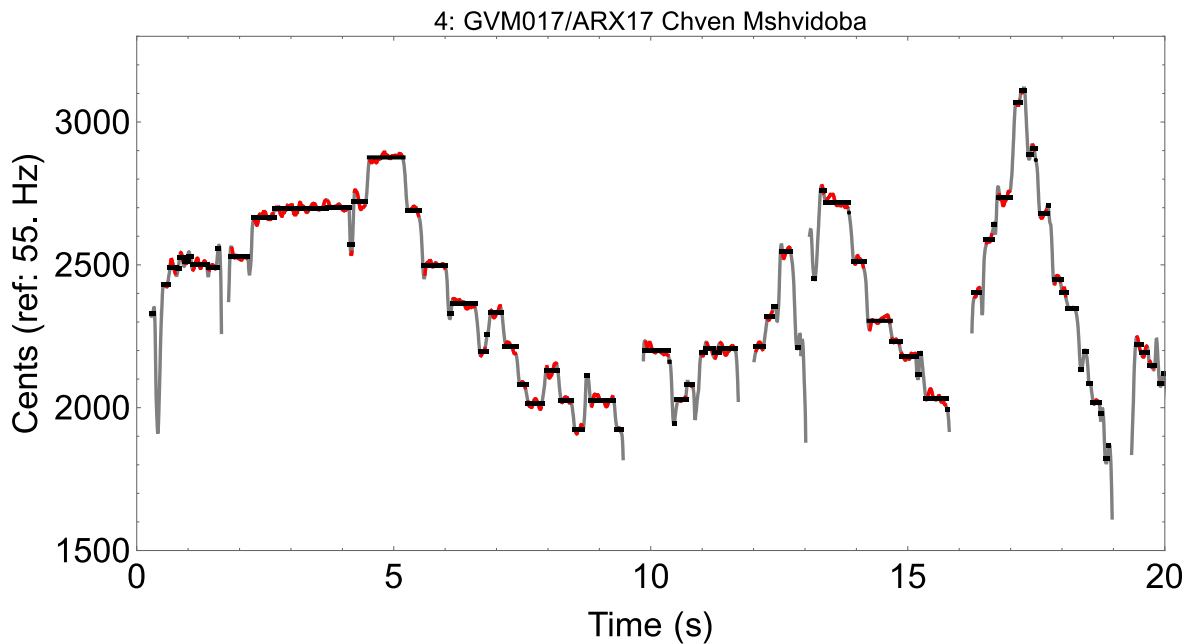
The extended approach first processes the raw pitch trajectories with the original algorithm, but uses extremely short filter lengths (e.g. three to five samples). This results in a large number of very short stable segments which we call 'note fragments'. These note fragments are subsequently recombined to new 'note objects' according to two criteria (motivated by simple perceptual principles).

The post-processing starts by taking the first note fragment as the start of a new (longer) note object. The following note fragment is joined with the previous one if a) the pitch and time differences between the two fall below chosen thresholds and b) if the pitch of the candidate note fragment to be joined stays within a chosen distance from the cumulative mean pitch value of all the previous fragments already joined in the long note object. This prevents the creation of note objects with excessively curved pitch curves. As an additional optional feature, we have also implemented the possibility of trimming the beginnings and ends of the newly generated note objects so that the pitch trajectory within it stays within a chosen maximum distance from its mean pitch value<sup>4</sup>. The performance of this processing scheme is illustrated in Fig. 1, which shows the first 20 seconds of the pitch trajectory of the top voice of the Gurian song "Chven Mshvidoba."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This was to facilitate the visual comparison with Tony-generated note objects displayed in Tony by blue rectangles.

<sup>5</sup> The corresponding audio signal can be accessed at <https://www.audiolabs-erlangen.de/resources/MIR/2017-GeorgianMusic-Scherbaum> at GVMID 017.

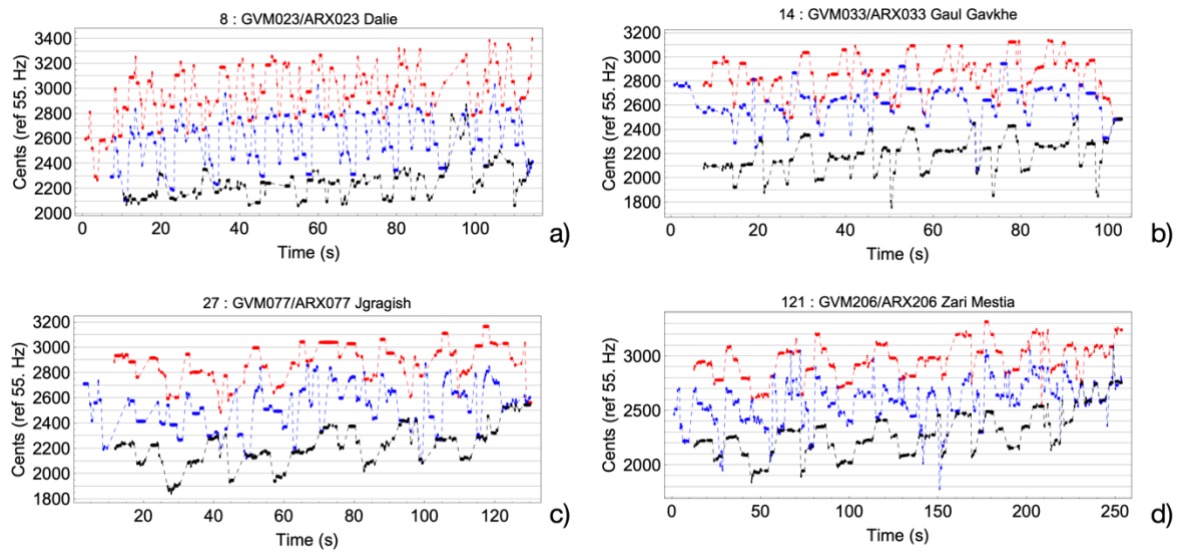


**Figure 1.** Determination of stable segments (note objects) of the pitch trajectory of the beginning of the top voice of the song ‘Chven Mshvidoba’. The wiggly grey line corresponds to the raw pitch trajectory, the horizontal black lines to the detected note objects, and the wiggly red lines to the pitch trajectories within those note objects.

The black horizontal solid lines in Fig. 1 show the resulting stable segments for the beginning of the song "Chven Mshvidoba," sung by the trio Shalva Chemo (GVMID 017). The wiggly red lines show the corresponding parts of the pitch trajectory (after restriction to the stable segments). In principle, a similar result could also have been achieved with the software tool "Tony" (Mauch et al. 2015), which has the additional advantage of visually and acoustically controlling precisely which parts of an audio signal are used for the determination of note events. However, for the processing of the complete GVM dataset with several hundred tracks, this would have been far too time-consuming.

The greatest technical challenge which we were confronted with in the course of the data processing of the GVM dataset was caused by the fact that a large portion of the performances by Svan singers was accompanied by a gradual and coordinated rise of the singers' pitches of up to several hundred cents over the course of the whole song. Fig. 2. shows several examples to illustrate this phenomenon. Gradual pitch rises have been described by Georgian scholars (e.g. Paliashvili, Arakishvili, Garakanidze) for a long time, both for individual and for antiphonal performances. They are also well known from other unaccompanied vocal performance traditions worldwide. Specific examples of this

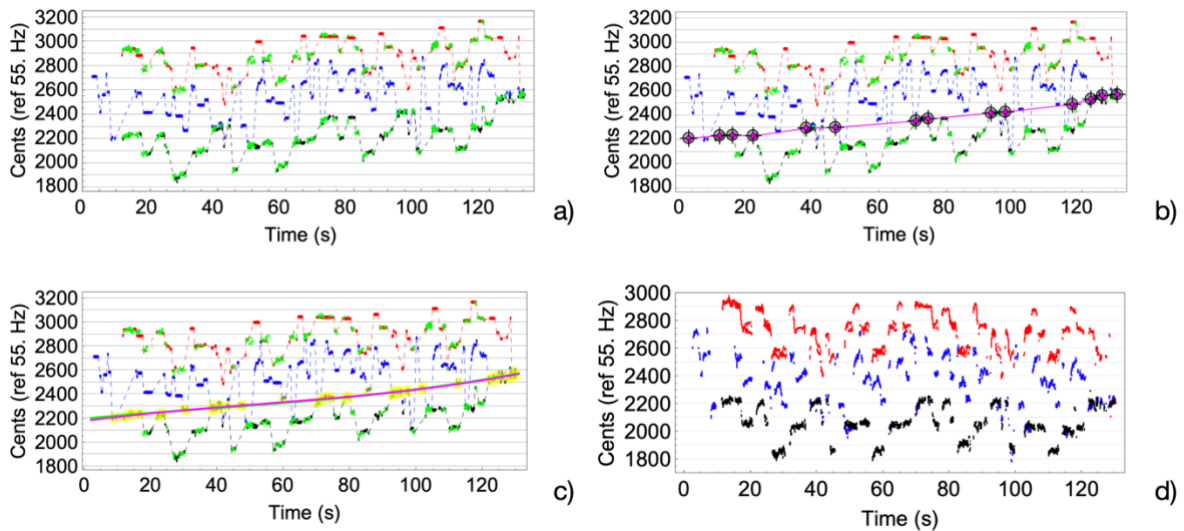
phenomenon are discussed, for example, in Chapter 7 in Ambrazevičius et al., (2015).



**Figure 2.** Display of the stable segments (note objects) of the pitch trajectories for a selected set of Svan song showing a steady pitch rise.

In the context of discussing the properties of eleven *Zār* recordings from the 2016 GVM dataset in a series of previous papers (Mzhavanadze and Scherbaum, 2020; Scherbaum and Mzhavanadze, 2020), a very labour-intensive annotation process was used to remove the gradual pitch rises for subsequent processing. This would not have been applicable to the entire 2016 GVM dataset on account of the time required. A recent study by Rosenzweig et al. (2022) demonstrated that the use of ‘interval filtering’ could significantly simplify and hence also speed up the removal of pitch drifts from larger datasets. The basic idea behind this approach is recognizing that Georgian singers employ what they sometimes refer to as ‘vertical thinking’: they mutually adjust the intonation of their voices to generate particular harmonic (vertical) intervals which are as ‘pure’ as possible. In other words, they may sacrifice the precision of a melodic line in exchange for an increase of precision of a harmonic interval. This in turn means that interval-filtered trajectories, leaving only those note pairs where the corresponding harmonic intervals meet chosen precision levels, will correspond to those locations in the time-pitch space where the singers obviously want to be and, consequently, will ‘mark’ the pitch rise. For Svan singing, the two prime interval candidates to be used for interval

filtering are the unison and the fifth (702 cents).<sup>6</sup> These considerations led to a new efficient processing strategy for pitch rise removal (when combined with an interactive interface). Fig. 3 illustrates the related processing scheme for the song "Jragish" (GVMID 077), for which the raw note trajectory is displayed in Fig. 2c.



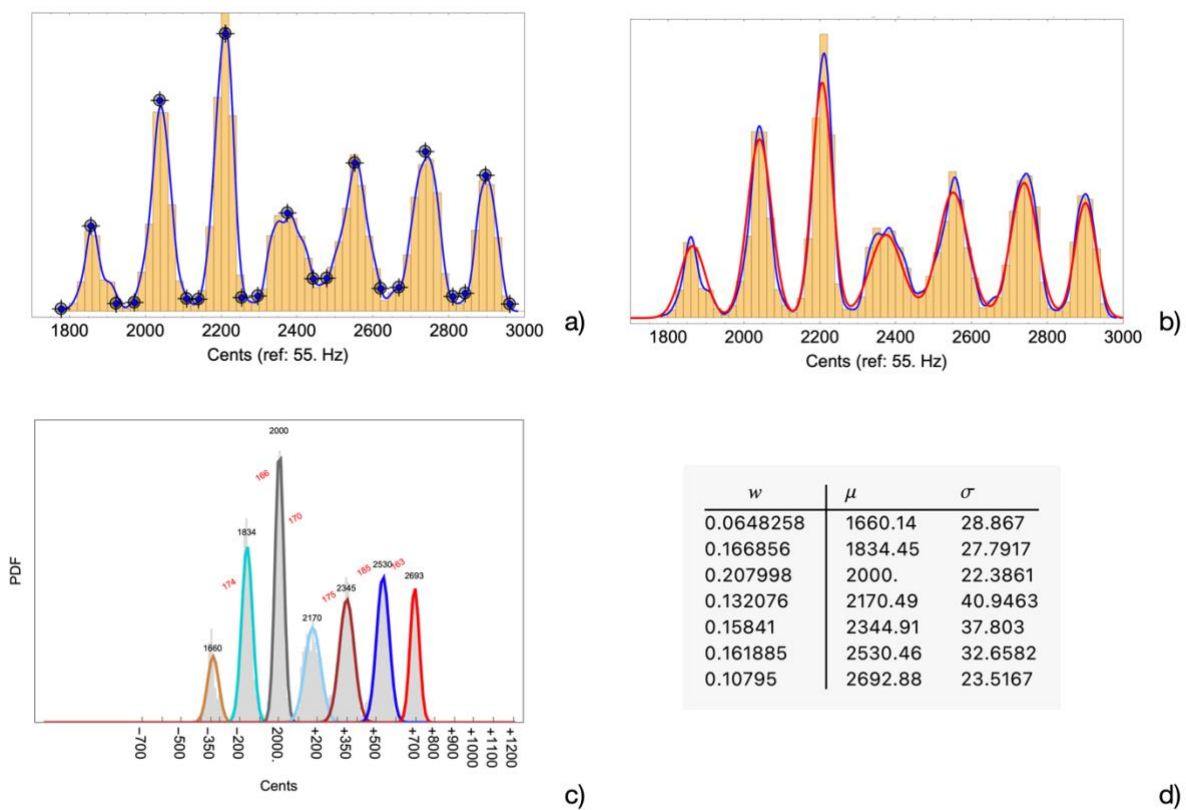
**Figure 3.** Illustration of the processing steps to identify and remove the steady pitch rise from the pitch trajectories of song "Jragish," shown in Fig. 2c. We refer to the text for further explanations.

The green note objects in Fig. 3a show interval-filtered note trajectories for  $0 \pm 40$  cents (unisons) and for  $700 \pm 40$  cents (fifths). Fig. 3b illustrates the placement of locator objects (circles with crosses) to a selected scale degree of one of the voices, which is assumed to represent the gradual pitch rise. These placements were done manually using an interactive user interface. In this context, the display of the interval-filtered traces turned out to be very helpful. After placement, the position of the locator objects can still be moved until the analyst is satisfied. Once the locator placement has been accepted, two regression curves, displayed in green and magenta respectively in Fig. 3c, are calculated. The green curve corresponds to a third degree polynomial regression through the locator positions. The magenta curve corresponds to a third degree polynomial regression through all note objects found within a pitch differences  $\pm 40$  cents from the green regression curve. This puts more weight on the actual note objects and reduces the subjective influence of the analyst. Finally, after visual control, the magenta regression

<sup>6</sup> The octave, because of the close perceptual proximity of the two defining intervals, does not appear frequently enough in Svan songs to be useful.

curve is chosen to correct the pitches in the original note and pitch trajectories, the result of which is then displayed in Fig. 3d). This procedure turned out to be sufficiently efficient to be applicable to the whole 2016 GVM dataset.

The goal of the subsequent processing step is to find a compact representation for the pitch histograms of the drift-corrected pitch samples (from within the stable segments) of the pitch trajectories for all three voices of a song. These histograms typically show a strongly clustered structure with separated pitch clusters (at least if the pitch drift could be properly compensated for). Each of the pitch clusters can be seen to represent an individual melodic sound scale degree. The sand-coloured histogram in Fig. 4a shows the pitch histogram calculated from the complete set of pitches displayed in Fig. 3d.



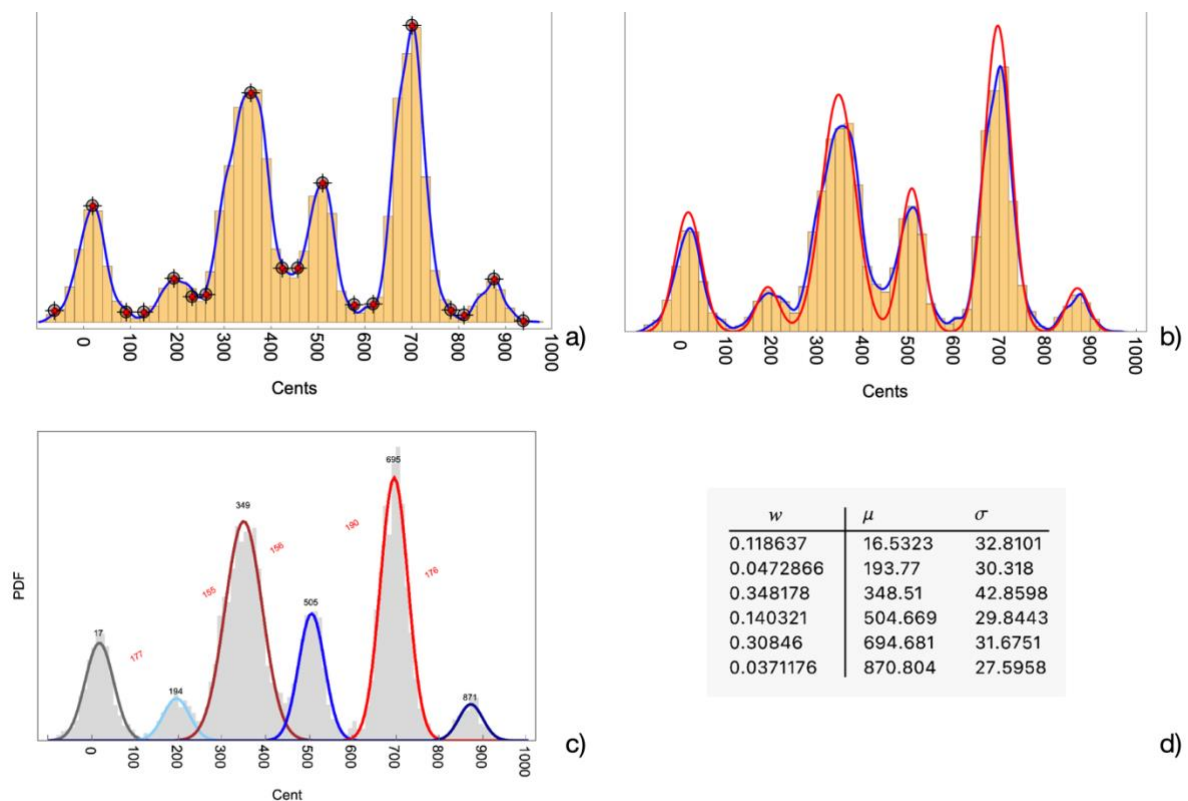
**Figure 4.** Illustration of the determination of the Gaussian mixture model of the pitch distribution of the song "Jragish" (GVMID 077). The black numbers on top of the pitch clusters show the  $\mu_k$ -values of the corresponding mixture elements, while the tilted red numbers between two pitch groups correspond to the corresponding intervals in cents.

If one thinks of modelling each pitch cluster by a Gaussian distribution  $\mathcal{N}(\mu, \sigma^2)$  with a mean value  $\mu$  and a standard deviation  $\sigma$ , the complete pitch histogram can be represented as a so-called Gaussian Mixture Model (GMM). This is simply a weighted sum

of individual Gaussian distributions  $\mathcal{N}(\mu, \sigma^2)$ . In the case of  $K$  pitch groups, this results in a representation as  $\sum_{k=1}^K w_k \mathcal{N}(\mu_k, \sigma_k^2)$ . The mean values of the individual Gaussians (the  $\mu_k$ ), which correspond to the centre values of the individual pitch clusters in the pitch histogram, can now be seen to express the pitches of the associated melodic sound scale degrees, while the standard deviations of the Gaussians (the  $\sigma_k$ ) define the pitch variability within the associated scale degree. The  $w_k$  represent the individual weighting factors, in other words, how much a particular sound scale degree is present in a set of pitch trajectories.

Technically, the determination of a Gaussian mixture model is an iterative process, which requires starting values for the  $\mu_k$ , the  $\sigma_k$ , and the  $w_k$ . Motivated by the efficiency of the interactive pitch drift correction, we implemented the determination of these starting values as another interactive procedure, which is illustrated in Fig. 4. In addition to the sand-coloured pitch histogram, Fig. 4a shows a blue solid line, resulting from smoothing the pitch histogram data (mathematically speaking representing it as a smooth kernel density distribution). The superimposed locators should be interpreted as triplets representing the pitch cluster's left boundary, peak, and right boundary, respectively. The locators marking the peaks are calculated from the smooth pitch histogram using a peak-finding algorithm, while the locators marking the left and right margins of a pitch cluster have to be placed manually by the analyst using the mouse cursor. After placement, the position of the locator objects can still be moved until the analyst is satisfied. Once the analyst accepts the locator placement, the position of the locator triplets is used to calculate the mean value and standard deviations for all the pitch values falling within the two locator margins. The peak value locator is used to calculate the starting value for the weighting factor. The resulting model, displayed in red in Fig. 4b, is used as initialization for estimating the Gaussian mixture distribution. Now it takes only very few iterations for the expectation maximization algorithm to converge to a final model which is shown in Fig. 4c. Furthermore, Fig. 4d shows the corresponding values for the  $w_k$ , the  $\mu_k$ , and the  $\sigma_k$  for each Gaussian component in a row-wise fashion. In addition, prior to the generation of Fig. 4c, the pitch value for the final bass note was calculated and the complete distribution was adjusted in pitch so that the mean value of the pitch cluster containing the final bass note becomes 2000 cents so that the pitch distributions from different songs can easily be compared visually.

It seems worth mentioning for a non-technically inclined audience that this representation of the pitch distribution is not an end in itself but serves an essential purpose for subsequent analysis. This way, the complete set of pitches, the size of which for all three voices of a song of five-minute duration can easily exceed 100,000 pitch samples (in practice often one for every 5.8 milliseconds), the complete information for the subsequent task to analyse melodic sound scales, can be expressed by roughly 24 values per octave (for a sound scale with 8 scale degrees or pitch clusters per octave). Only with this kind of data reduction/compression does it become feasible at all to try to quantitatively compare hundreds of sound scale models derived from audio tracks and still be able to interpret the results.



**Figure 5.** Illustration of the determination of the Gaussian mixture model for the harmonic interval distribution of the song "Jgragish" (GVMID 077). The black numbers on top of the pitch clusters show the  $\mu_k$ -values of the corresponding mixture components while the tilted red numbers between two interval groups correspond to the differences between them. In order better to distinguish the individual Gaussians visually, they were displayed in different colours.

The last processing step consists of the calculation of the harmonic interval distribution. Technically, this is more or less identical to the processing of the pitch distributions

except that it is performed on the samples of harmonic intervals, which are calculated from all the concomitant samples of the three voices. The resulting Gaussian mixture model for the harmonic interval distribution of the song "Jgragish" (GVMID 077) is shown in Fig. 5.

## Results

The processing workflow described in the last section was applied to all those recordings in the GVM dataset that contained three simultaneously recorded voices and (based on visual inspection of the pitch trajectories) seemed of sufficient quality for processing. This left 125 potential performances, six of which had to be discarded for various technical reasons discovered later (e.g., the lack of sufficient numbers of concomitant samples, problems with time synchronization of channels, and so on). The remaining 119 recordings which were finally used in the present study correspond to 82 different songs from 19 different ensembles (14 from Svaneti, two from Racha, two from Guria, and one from Tbilisi). Since the choice of the performed songs was left to the ensembles, there is only partial overlap between the songs performed by the different groups. The maximum number of useable multiple recordings for a single song is five (for the song "Jgragish"). In the following subsections, we are going to address the following specific questions:

- How variable are the tuning systems used by ensembles?
- How similar are the specific tuning systems used by different ensembles for the same song?
- How similar are the average tuning systems used by different ensembles?

### Ensemble Related Tuning Systems

To determine the variability of ensemble-related tuning systems, we have used 18 recordings from the group Lakhushdi-B<sup>7</sup>, a group of three male village singers from the village of Lakhushdi in Upper Svaneti. Since this is the largest number of recordings from a single ensemble, we consider this set the best one to address this question with some confidence. The next largest number of recordings from a single ensemble from Svaneti

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<sup>7</sup> On purpose, we refer to all ensembles by a fictitious name, referring only to the location of origin of the singers.

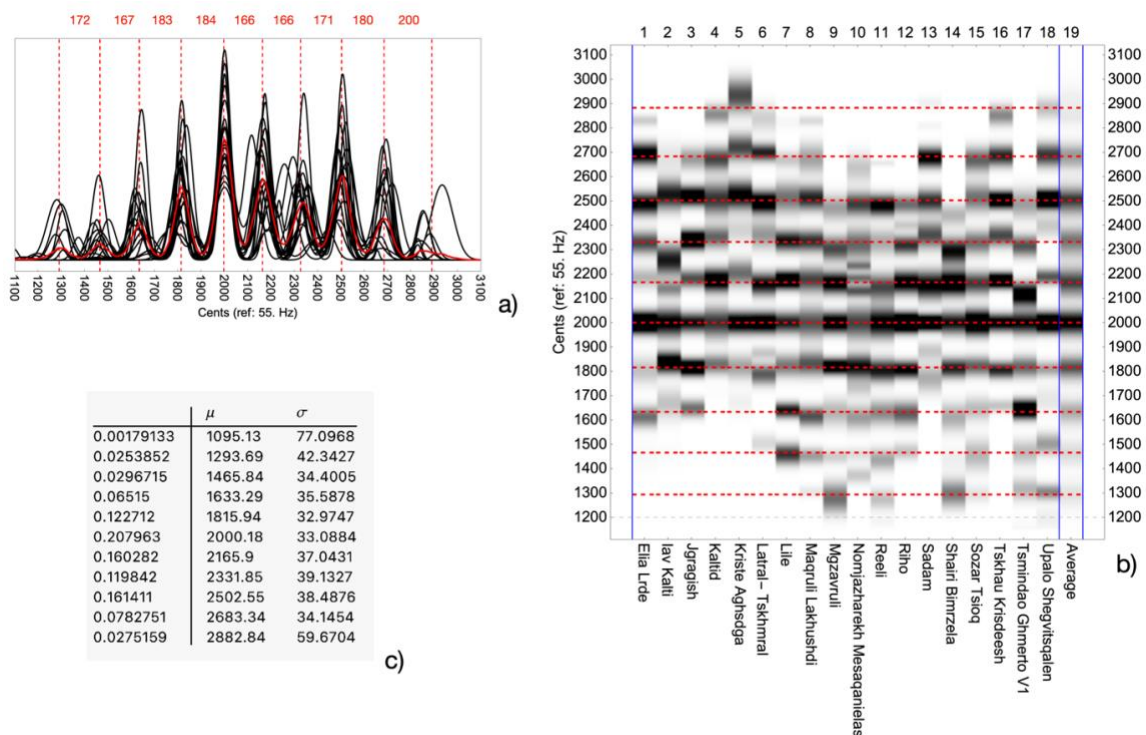


is already down to nine, for which less stable variability estimates are to be expected (simply because of the smaller sample size).

The black solid curves in Fig 6a show the individual pitch distributions (as Gaussian mixture models) for all 18 songs. All of them were processed in the way described in the previous section. The solid red line shows the corresponding ‘average pitch distribution’. The latter was calculated by first resampling the individual Gaussian mixture distributions for each song with the same number of samples (1,000). This was done to avoid a bias towards individual songs (which are of different durations and therefore contain different numbers of samples). Subsequently, a new Gaussian mixture model was calculated from the combination of samples. The resulting weights, mean values, and standard deviations are listed in Fig. 6c. The corresponding pitch distribution is shown in Fig 6a by the solid red curve. As expected, it maps the characteristic structure of the set of individual pitch distributions in an average sense. The red numbers on top of the panel in Fig. 6a denote the intervals between the centre values of the individual pitch groups (of the average distribution) in cents. Note that the pitch trajectories of all songs were adjusted so that the pitch of the cluster which contained the final note (the ‘finalis’) receives a value of 2000 cents. This processing step is a prerequisite for the comparison of different songs since all of them were sung in different absolute pitches. In order to be able to visually to compare and identify the characteristic features of the pitch distributions for the individual songs, Fig. 6b shows them as a density grid. Each of the 19 columns corresponds to the pitch distribution of one song the name of which is given at the bottom. The number at the top corresponds to the song index. Column 19 corresponds to the average model shown in red in Fig. 6a. Light grey tones correspond to small, and dark grey tones to larger amplitudes. The dashed red lines in Fig. 6a and Fig. 6b show the mean values of the Gaussian mixture model for the average distribution, which one could interpret as scale degree pitches.

For the average distribution, the pitch difference between the pitch of the finalis (2,000 cents) and the third and fourth pitch group above are 503 cents (pure melodic fourth) and 683 cents (slightly flat fifth), respectively. Interesting to note in this context is the observation that the pitch differences between neighbouring pitch groups and except for

one are all significantly below 200 cents<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, even at first glance, it becomes obvious that the tuning system used by the group Lakhushdi-B deviates significantly from a 12-TET (12-tone-equal-temperament) system. This becomes even more obvious for the harmonic interval distributions shown in Fig. 7. The solid red line in Fig. 7a shows (again) the average distribution calculated from all 18 recordings. In contrast to the melodic tuning system, the harmonic fourth and fifth are amazingly pure with 504 and 696 cents, respectively. This is not surprising, since Svan music has a wealth of homophonic chord sequences with fourths and fifths, underlining the important role of harmonic thinking in Svan music.

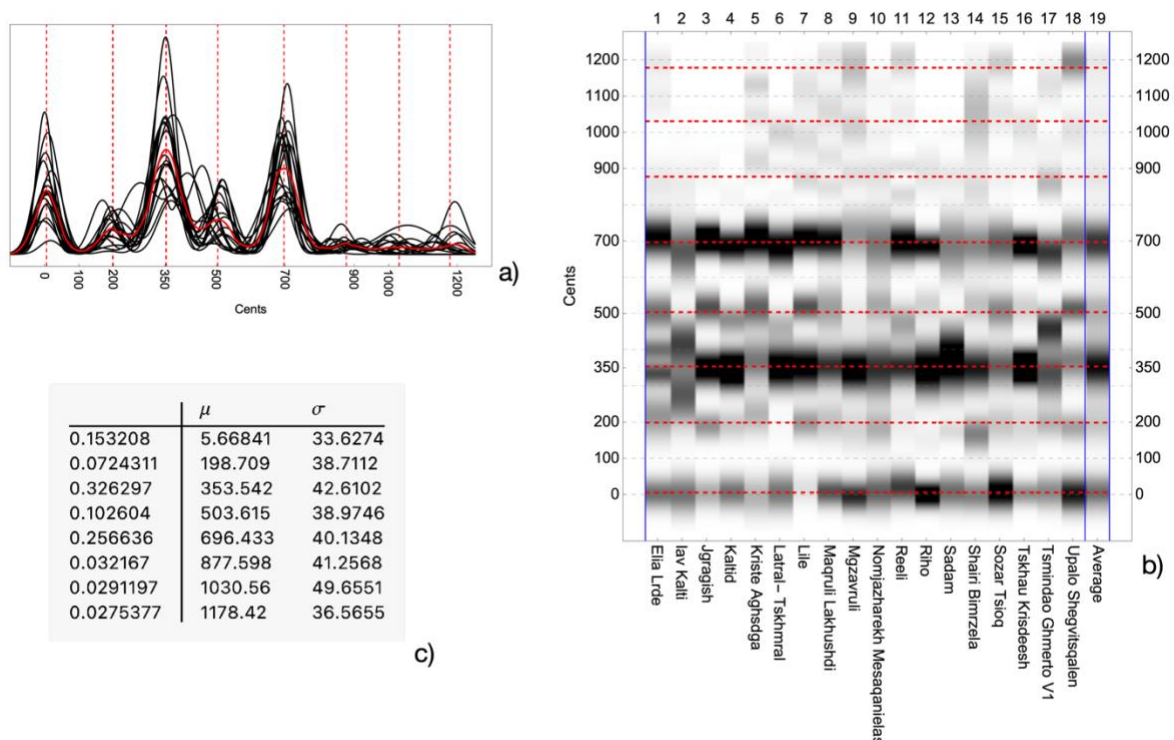


**Figure 6.** Pitch distributions for all 18 performances recorded with the ensemble Lakhushdi-B. For details see the text.

Two other features of the harmonic interval distributions are worth mentioning. First, the interval group corresponding to the harmonic thirds has a peak at the value of 353 cents (a ‘neutral’ third). With the exception of the second song (“Iav Kalti”), minor and major harmonic thirds are missing completely. The corresponding second column in Fig.

<sup>8</sup> The value of 200 cents is probably affected by a seeming ‘outlier group’ which peaks between 2900 and 3000 cents.

7b, however, shows two dark peaks at 300 and 400 cents, respectively, which can also be identified in Fig. 7a. Second, another noticeable exception from the otherwise very simple structure of the collection of harmonic interval distributions in Fig. 7b is related to the 17. song ("Tsmindao Ghmerto V1"). In this case, all the harmonic intervals (except the harmonic second at 200 cents) were sung significantly flat in comparison to the performances of the rest of the 18 songs. Revisiting the pitch- and note trajectories (not shown in this paper) revealed that in this particular case, the middle and bass voice singers consistently sang smaller harmonic intervals for this song, (which is the only Svan church song sung with Georgian text). In contrast, the top voice singer kept his harmonic major second to the middle voice singer consistently throughout the song. This is an interesting observation by itself. It tells us that the top voice singer oriented himself harmonically closer to his nearest neighbour, the middle voice singer with whom he sang a 'dissonant' major second than to the bass voice singer with whom he could have chosen to sing a 'consonant' fifth. In other words, he seemingly preferred the 'dissonant' over the 'consonant' interval.

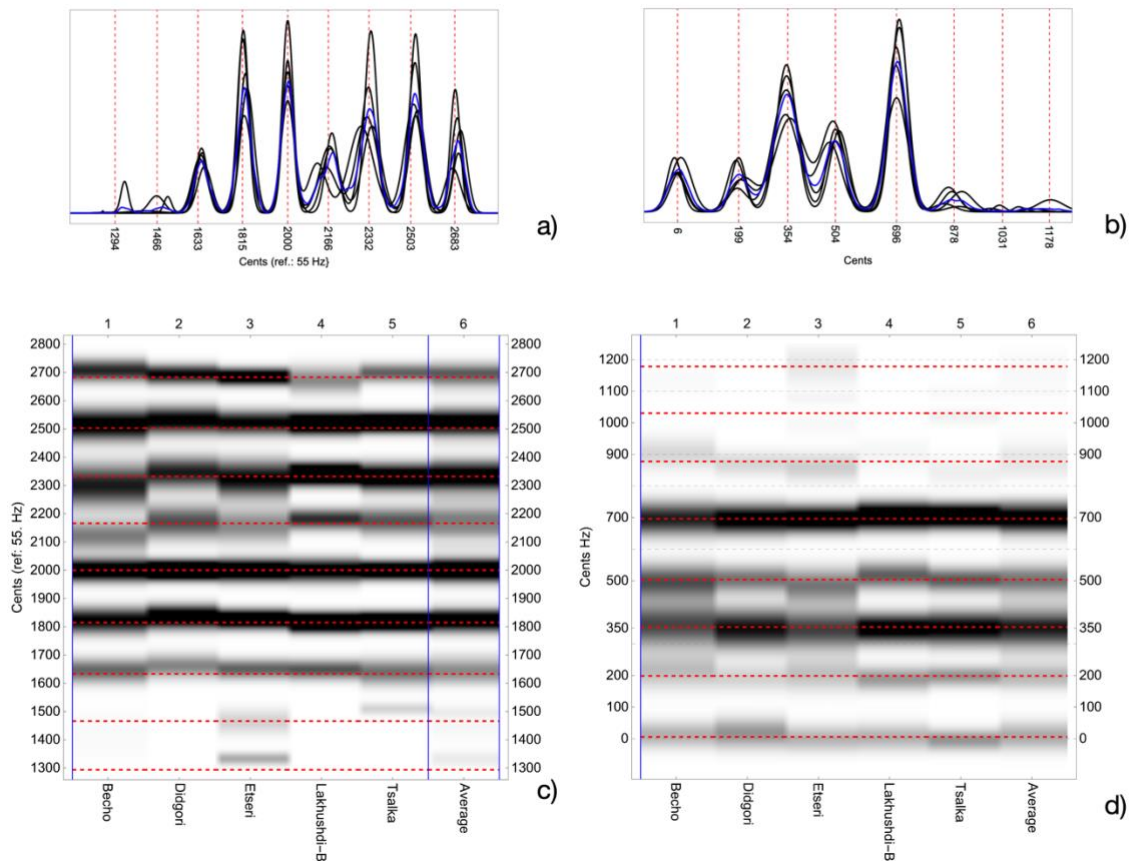


**Figure 7.** Harmonic interval distributions for all 18 performances recorded with the group Lakhushdi-B. For details see the text.

To wrap up the discussion regarding the ensemble related tuning systems for the group Lakhushdi-B, we make the assumption that it is justified to use the average pitch and harmonic interval distributions as a proxy for the characteristic tuning of an ensemble. However, this assumption should not be made in a strict sense. Instead, one should keep in mind that the tuning systems used in individual songs might differ from the average significantly. Judging from the standard deviations for the pitch and interval groups in Fig. 6 b and Fig. 7b the corresponding precision for the respective means of the average models is on the order of  $\pm 40$  cents.

### **Song Related Tuning Systems**

In the following, we address the question of whether different ensembles use a similar tuning system when performing the same song. The most appropriate subset for the investigation of this topic is a set of five recordings of the song "Jgragish." The resulting pitch and harmonic interval distributions are displayed in Fig. 8. The left panels correspond to the pitch and the right panels to the harmonic interval distributions, respectively.



**Figure 8.** Pitch (left) and harmonic (right) interval distributions for the recordings of the song "Jragish" performed by five different ensembles along with the average distributions.

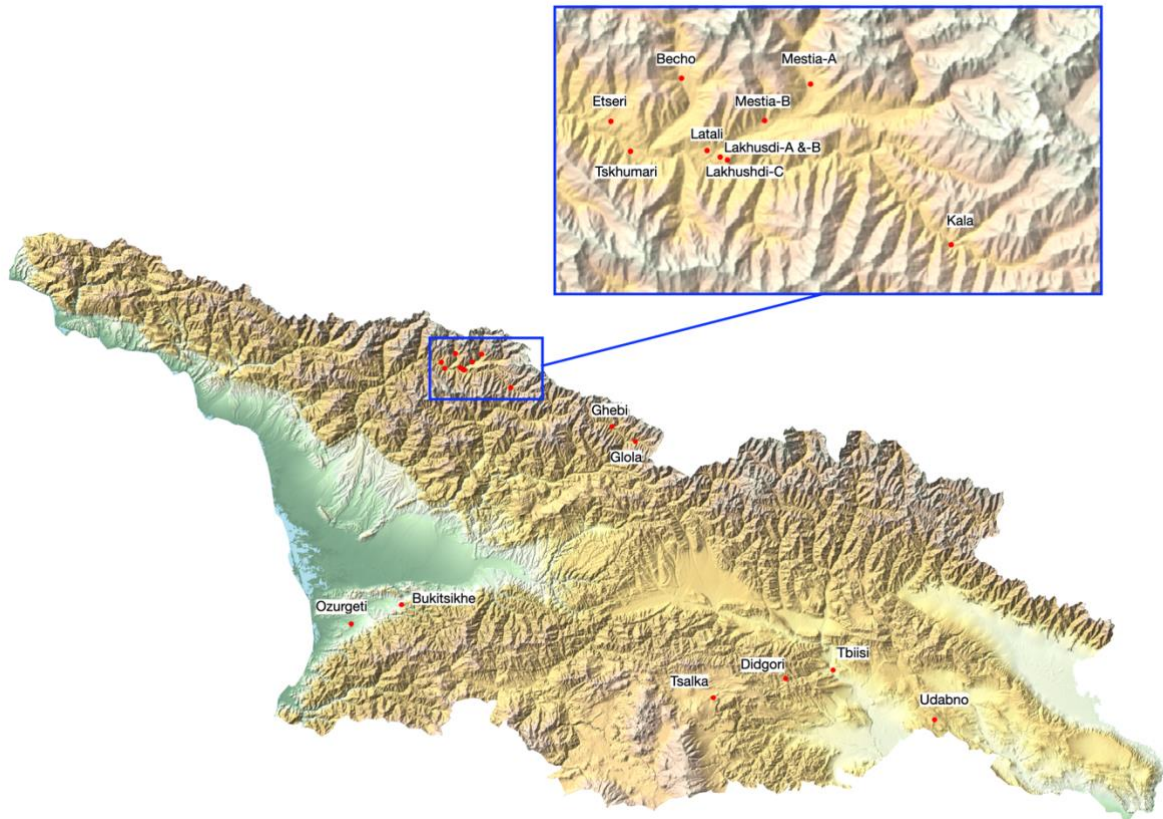
Judging from the high degree of similarity of both distributions, we conclude that all five ensembles have a similar melodic and harmonic understanding of the song. However, one can also see in panels Fig. 8c and Fig. 8d that the bass voices, which contribute primarily to the pitch values below the finalis (2000 cents) differ between the groups Becho, Didgori, and Lakhushdi-B, on the one hand, and Etseri and Tsalka, which also differ between each other, on the other hand<sup>9</sup>.

### Comparison of All Ensemble-Related Distributions

In this section, we compare all the average tuning systems used by the different ensembles included in the 2016 GVM dataset. The recording locations are shown in Fig. 9. The recordings of the non-Svan ensembles are included only for completeness (with respect to the 2016 GVM dataset), yielding a superficial comparison. The small number

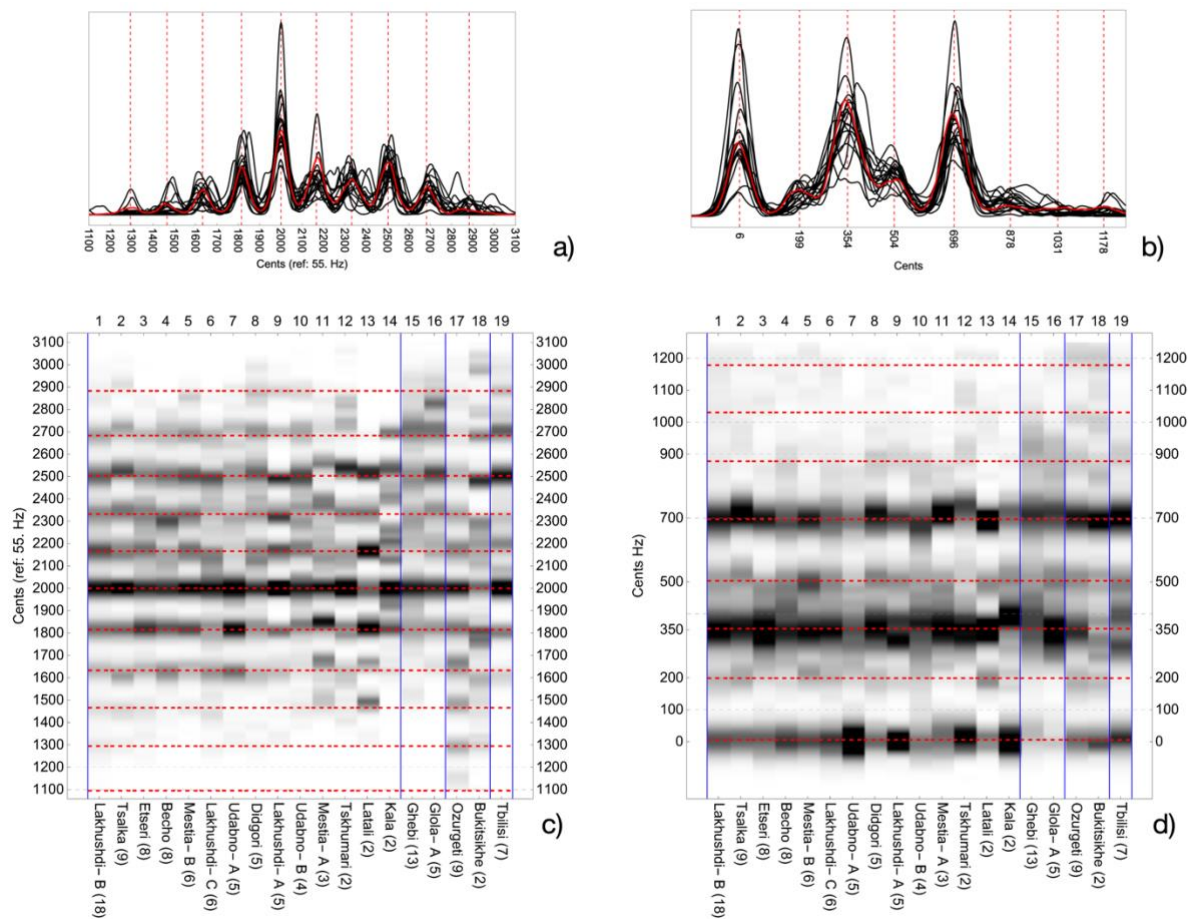
<sup>9</sup> The bass singers from Etseri for example use a pitch range down to approx. 1300 cents which the other ensembles did not use.

of ensembles from Guria, Racha, and Tbilisi does not allow an in-depth analysis similar to what we try to achieve for the Svan subset, for which a total of 83 performances from 14 different ensembles is available.



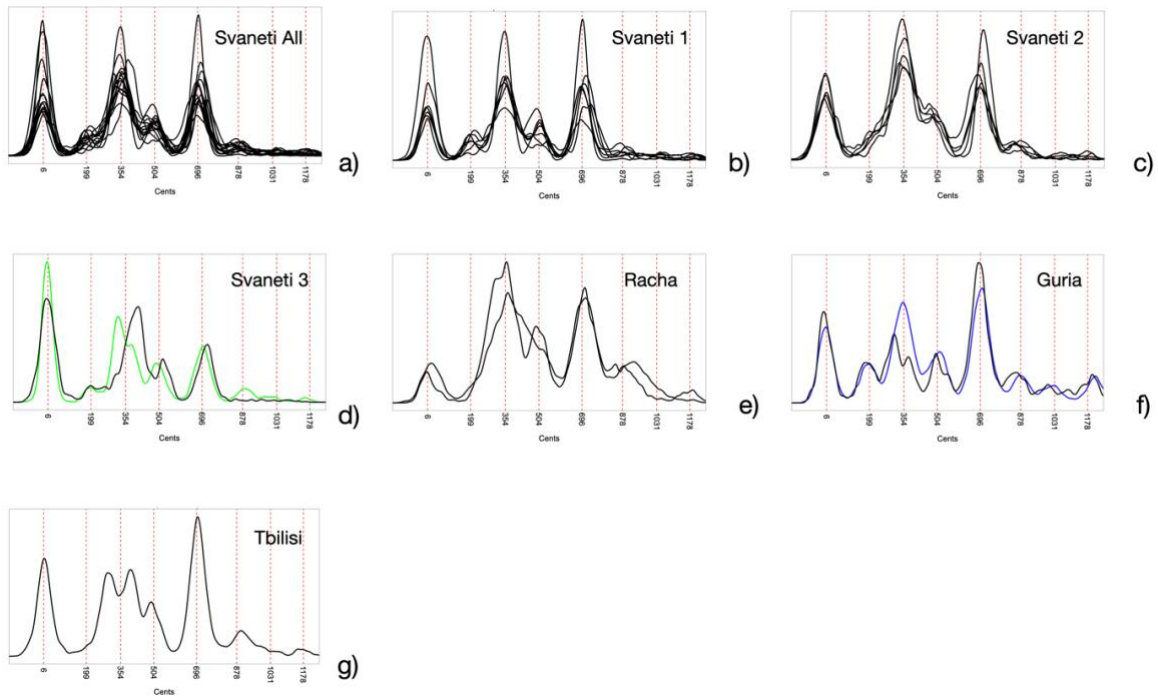
**Figure 9.** Recording locations of the different ensembles used in the present study. The villages of Ghebi and Glola are now located in a part of Racha which in former times was part of Svaneti. Ozurgeti and Bukitsikhe are located in Guria. All of the remaining locations, except for Georgia’s capital Tbilisi correspond to villages in Svaneti or resettlements of Svan villages (Tsalka, Didgori, and Udabno).

As can be seen in Fig. 9, except for the villages of Tsalka, Didgori, and Udabno, which are eco-migrant Upper Svan communities populated a few decades ago, all of the other recordings of Svan music were obtained at locations in Upper Svaneti.



**Figure 10.** Average pitch and harmonic interval distributions for all ensembles (for the recording locations see Fig. 9). The red solid curves in (a) and (b) correspond to the average distributions calculated in the same way as in Fig. 6a and Fig. 7a. The vertical dashed lines in all four panels correspond to the pitch and interval group mean values for Lakhushdi-B and are shown here only for comparison.

Fig. 10 shows the comparison of all average ensemble-related pitch and harmonic interval distributions for the complete dataset. Since the recorded songs differ considerably for the individual ensembles, the corresponding pitch-group ranges (ambitus) shown in Fig. 10c are quite different. Nevertheless, the structures of the pitch distributions shown in Fig. 10a are quite similar in terms of spacing of the pitch groups. The similarities are even stronger in the case of the harmonic interval distributions, which are shown in the right panels of Fig. 10. On closer inspection and by repeatedly dividing the data sets, the final results of which are shown in Fig. 11, we found that harmonic interval distributions for all the Svan ensembles can be grouped in three slightly different groups, only differing in some details.



**Figure 11.** Average harmonic interval distributions for all ensembles and according to different groupings: (a) shows the superposition of all 14 harmonic interval distributions; (b) contains ensembles 1,2,5,7,8,12,13 and represents 43 recordings; (c) represent 29 recordings from the ensembles 3,4,6,10,11; (d) corresponds to the recordings from ensembles 9 (solid green line) and 14, representing a total of 7 recordings; (e) to (f) correspond to the ensembles from Racha, Guria, and Tbilisi, respectively, and are shown for comparison.

Subset Svaneti 1 in Fig. 11 b, for example, shows those ensembles where the seconds, thirds, and fourths are clearly separated. In contrast, there is less of a separation in the group Svaneti 2 (although the peaks are at the same locations). The separation between these interval groups disappears even more in one of the two Rachan ensembles (Ghebi). The two ensembles in Group Svaneti 3 are interesting because, in contrast to all the other Svan ensembles for which the harmonic thirds are distributed between 300 and 400 cents with a peak in the middle, one can identify a tendency to use minor and major thirds, in particular for ensemble 9 (Lakhushdi-A, green solid line). In this particular case, it may be explainable by the fact that they are also familiar with so-called city repertoire which often includes instruments in western tuning.

Overall, in terms of the harmonic tunings systems used, the group Lakhushdi-B seems to be a good representation of all the Svan ensembles in the 2016 GVM dataset.

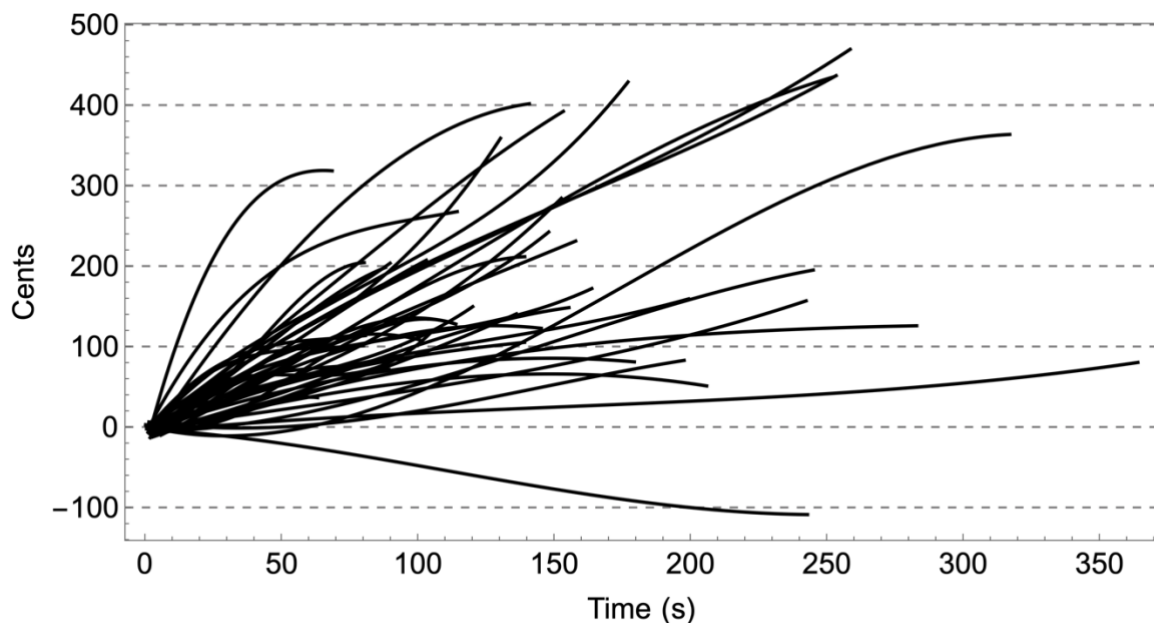
An interesting anecdotal observation is that the peaks of the harmonic interval distribution used by the ensemble from Ozurgeti are essentially the same as those used



by the Svan group Lakhushdi-B, the group with the largest number of recordings in our dataset. Finally, it is worth pointing out that the group of singers from Tbilisi seems to use a 12-TET (12-tone-equal-temperament) tuning system since all the peaks of the harmonic interval distribution appear at integer multiples of 100 cents.

### Pitch Drifts

Here we briefly report on the results of the observations of the gradual pitch drifts, for which we had to compensate in our analysis. The pitch drift compensation curves employed are displayed in Fig. 12. It needs to be emphasized that ensembles used gradual pitch drifts inconsistently. i.e., only for certain songs, but different ensembles did not always do so for the same songs<sup>10</sup>. For example, for the song "Jragish", some of the ensembles performed a pitch drift and some not. Furthermore, neither of the Gurian ensembles ever used it.



**Figure 12.** Pitch drift curves used for the compensation of the gradual pitch drifts observed for some of the recordings.

As shown in Fig. 12, there is only a single performance (from the group Udabno-A) where the pitch drift led to a decrease in pitch. All the other recordings of Svan singers showed an increase of up to approximately 400 cents in the course of a song, independent of its

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<sup>10</sup> It would be interesting to know if the avoidance of pitch drifts could be related to singers having perfect pitch.

duration. It also seems, at first glance, that essentially two different slope groups were used, one with an average slope on the order of 30 cents per minute and a steeper one with an average slope on the order of 100 cents per minute.

### Concluding Discussion

With the field expedition of 2016 and the collection of the 2016 GVM dataset, we tried to contribute to the documentation of the current performance practice of traditional vocal music in (Upper) Svaneti, the region which is believed to represent the oldest layer of Georgian multi-voice singing (Jordania, 2006). The present study aims to investigate what this dataset can contribute to the discussion of Georgian tuning systems. The approach is conceptually different from the analysis of historical audio recordings, in particular that of the Erkomaishvili dataset (Scherbaum et al., 2017; 2020; Rosenzweig et al. 2020), as it replaces the investigation of old recordings (which are usually of low fidelity) with the investigation of modern, high-quality recordings (but for which the link to the past is uncertain). Therefore, it is all the more interesting to compare the results of these two approaches. Because of the different recording setups and the different composition of the pitch inventories in the Erkomaishvili dataset and the 2016 GVM dataset in terms of the relative proportion of the contributing pitch groups, we compare only the mean values of the Gaussian mixture models for the melodic and harmonic tuning systems and ignore the associated standard deviations. The results of this comparison are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the synoptic scale models for the Erkomaishvili dataset from Fig. 23 (the one labelled all voices) of Scherbaum et al. (2020) with the average tuning systems obtained for all Svan ensembles. Scale degree 1 for the 2016 GVM melodic tuning system was calculated relative to the finalis pitch (2000 cents).

Scale degrees	AE melodic	2016 GVM melodic	AE harmonic	2016 GVM harmonic
8	1231	NA	1217	1182
7	1052	NA	1043	1018
6	886	868	874	868
5	705	693	707	703
4	509	509	515	495
3	342	332	355	349
2	176	163	191	205
1	0	0	0	6

Compared to a 12-TET (12-tone-equal-temperament) system, the Erkomaishvili and the Svan tuning systems are surprisingly similar, particularly for the smaller scale degrees.<sup>11</sup> Both systems show a strong presence of pure fourths and fifths, and ‘neutral’ thirds and sixths<sup>12</sup>. In addition, the sizes of the melodic and the harmonic seconds in both tuning systems differ with the size of the harmonic second (close to 200 cents) being systematically larger than the melodic one. This can be attributed, at least partially, to the harmonic second being a necessary side product of the popular 1-4-5 chord in traditional Georgian music.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, we want to emphasize that both our analysis and associated interpretation of the results are purely descriptive and have no normative aspects. None of the measures employed should be seen as a measure of any sort of ‘quality’, nor do we consider such a measure appropriate in the context of what we are trying to do. Our aim is simply to describe certain quantifiable aspects of current performance practices of traditional Georgian vocal music (with a focus on Svaneti and as they are reflected in the 2016 GVM dataset) in an as unbiased way as possible.

This notwithstanding, the current results raise serious questions regarding the practice of transcribing this music into a western notation system, in which neither the ‘neutral’ intervals nor the gradual pitch drifts can be appropriately represented. These observations underline the need for alternative unbiased representation forms of non-western music.

In the present work, we have deliberately addressed only those aspects of tonal organization on which conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the records available to us. This does not mean that we consider other aspects, such as the problem of “augmented

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<sup>11</sup> Because of the smaller ambitus in Svan music, the higher degrees are less well represented in the GVM 2016 corpus.

<sup>12</sup> Essentially the same conclusion was reached by Mzhavanadze (2018) based, on the one hand, on the results of manual transcriptions of the Svan repertoire and, on the other hand, through a thorough comparative study of existing (published and archival manuscripts) notated transcriptions of Svan songs. It turned out that the same songs were transcribed differently by different scholars/musicians, which manifested itself in the different use of accidentals. These accidentals mainly come to the points with vertical harmonic thirds (while there is no divergence regarding harmonic fourths and fifths), which some seem to have interpreted as minor and others as major (to comply with the European notation system) thirds.

<sup>13</sup> This may not be the only explanation as we observed a performance of ‘Tsmindao Ghmerto’ by the ensemble Lakhushdi-B in which the top voice singer maintained a harmonic major second with the middle voice singer despite the fact that the fifth to the bass voice singer became considerably flat.

octaves" described by Georgian authors such as Karbelashvili or Gogotishvili (for a discussion see Jordania, 2006), unimportant. However, a quantitative, evidence-based study of this phenomenon, as well as a systematic comparison of the tuning systems of different regions, requires a much larger data set (including a sufficient number of octaves) and must be reserved for future work.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Re-Evaluating the Roots of Arabesk Music: Grup Metronom<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Grup Metronom played a leading role in the development of Turkish arabesk music during the 1970s. Delineating the social and musical relationships within the Band reveals a new perspective on genre blending, challenging the received view of the history of arabesk. Based on in-depth interviews with prominent actors who shaped the scene and witnessed the historical process, the article attempts to illuminate how a group of musicians with diverse backgrounds—from makam (both folk and art), jazz, and Western symphonic traditions—interacted, performed and were perceived by other musicians in the cultivation of arabesk music, thus challenging the assumption that arabesk music was pioneered by a group of marginal musicians who shared a common cultural ground. The argument is also supported by the musical analysis of selected works to define musical tendencies and eclectic structures. Text analysis (e.g., lyrics, melodic contour, scale, and form), performance analysis (arrangement, orchestration, vocal and instrumental interpretation, and timbre), and other musical inputs (recording, use of decorative sounds, and mix) constitute most of the stylistic interpretations in the paper. The article also attempts to elaborate issues related to Arabic influence on arabesk music; and ground some of them through the stories of the actors in the case and analysis of the sonic environment in their products.

### KEYWORDS

Arabesk  
Popular music  
Music analysis  
Grup Metronom

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## Introduction

*Arabesk* is a Turkish popular music genre which emerged in the late 1960s as a unique blend of various styles including folk, art, pop, western, middle eastern, and even jazz, rock and world music. Owing to its commercial success, *Arabesk* constantly expanded its territory and became the mainstream pop genre during the 1980s. Although it never lost its significance as a style, its dominance as a genre started to decline after the pop boom of the 1990s. Stylistic elements of *arabesk*, such as the arrangement and singing style, atomized and spread to other genres. Fifty years after its foundation, it still is a burning topic in the Turkish popular music scene.

*Arabesk* has been studied in terms of its actors, such as mostly well-known performers, arrangers, music directors and composers, as well as the audience. Another point is its relation with Turkey's journey of modernization, which is very much related to the political decisions of the state in various fields. The third group of studies is about the feelings and emotions produced by this genre. The last group deals with the genre in the framework of tension between traditional musics and popular culture.

Those who evaluate the genre as a social outcome of the post-1950s modernization of Turkish society generally tend to focus on its audience. For instance, Nazife Güngör presents *arabesk* music as a product of a transitional period in the journey of modernization (1990: 214); and Caner Işık and Nuran Erol attempt to present the profile and mind-set of Müslüm Gürses's audience (2002). Meral Özbek's pioneering study on *Orhan Gencebay's Arabesk* elaborates on his musical decisions and interprets his music as a social response of the society to post-1950 modernization. Özbek's analysis of song lyrics also unveils the main theme, love - as opposed to pessimistic themes such as sorrow and fate. The sentimentality of *arabesk* was also discussed by Martin Stokes (1989, 2010). His contribution to the field is based on a long-term study of Turkish society. Betül Yazar's contribution to the literature of the genre features several focal points. She seeks to "[...] further develop a critical socio-historical perspective on the relationship between politics and popular culture by looking at these issues in the context of the history of modernization in Turkey [...]" (2018: 179), in which she examines *arabesk* music as a tool for analysis of the social and political scene of Turkey; especially after the 1980s, fragmentation of the *arabesk* into sub-genres also investigated in relation to the politics

of Turkey<sup>2</sup>. Orhan Tekelioğlu, on the other hand, provided a significant perspective on the cultivation and reception of *arabesk*. He evaluated the genre as a liberal modernization process, as an alternative to state-endorsed ones and as a “spontaneous synthesis” of Turkish society (1996 and 1999). Work by Seeman (2002; 2019) and Akgül (2009; 2018) provides another perspective in the study of *arabesk* music; its laborers. Although these authors’ scope is not limited to the genre, they shed light on portraits of music practitioners who played significant roles in the cultivation of the *arabesk* music as performers, arrangers, music directors and composers.

This paper focuses on the story of the founders of *arabesk* music, *Grup Metronom*, whose contribution was not elaborated on in the literature. The primary sources of such an inquiry are in depth interviews, conducted in a wider context between 2013 and 2021. The performances selected for analyses are referred by the informants - cited or not - for their representative value. Musical transcriptions and analyses provided in the text aim to ground the discourse in stylistic manners; the method of having a thick description of musical flow supported by the transcriptions constructs the main idea<sup>3</sup>. The transcriptions are intended to reflect the arrangements in unity. Therefore, they were formulated in a continuous score. Performative issues could thus be elaborated on in this approach; as opposed to transcribing only the melodic flow, which would only allow analyses on the level of text. Although some of the matters related to individual transcriptions are mentioned in the following parts, it is crucial to note a few preferences related to all. Both vocal and instrumental performances feature sophisticated ornamentation. The reader will notice that such kinds of performances are notated in detail, but some are left only with ornamentation signs above long sustained notes. Our preference for having such an inconsistency is related to the focus points of the analyses; when an individual performance is analyzed in the text, the transcription provides the detail. At other times, when the unity of the arrangement is prioritized, they appear in a plainer form in the transcriptions. On the other hand, the performances contain unclear points for the transcriber, such as parts that are masked in the mix or shadowed by other instruments. The parts in the strings section bring their own complexities to the task.

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<sup>2</sup> Also see (Yarar, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> This approach is also found in Martin Stokes’s narratives (See Stokes, 1989 and 2010) on Orhan Gencebay’s music. Although Stokes’s transcriptions and analyses are plainer, the method used in this text is parallel to his.

Although they appear as the whole family - violins 1, violins 2, viola, cello and double bass - it is not possible to identify them in individual tracks. Therefore, they appear in the transcription in a reduced format, which displays the main musical trajectory.

The analyses provided in the text are intended to lay the foundations for the discussion on stylistic features of *arabesk* music. A narrative based on the musical flux from beginning to end is generally given. When the narrative is interrupted at certain points, it is to detail a musical moment or interpret the musical sound. As the reader will notice, some of the musical features emphasized in the text are parallel to the main tendencies, but others are unique to the selected examples. Therefore, it is hoped that the analyses will develop an overall vision of the genre.

### **Musicians Gathered in *Grup Metronom***

Apart from ensembles that were recruited for individual works, *Grup Metronom* is considered to be the first music band on the *arabesk* music scene both in studio and stage works. Özgür Akgül interpret *Metronom* as a “symbolic orchestra”, which is based on Egyptian or eastern orchestras, in the development of “*serbest çalışmalar*” [free works]<sup>4</sup> (Akgül, 2009: 85-86). Uğur Küçükkan also cites the importance of *Metronom* in the history of *arabesk* music (Küçükkan, 2015). Without excluding those views, the paper

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<sup>4</sup>The term *serbest çalışmalar* - instead of *arabesk* - is used by a few in the literature in reference to Orhan Gencebay. Generically, Orhan Gencebay prefers to use the term free works [*serbest çalışmalar*] to refer to his musical compositions as opposed to the widespread term *arabesk*. In this way, he shifts the emphasis on his music from imitation of Arab musics to reinterpretation of traditional music by using internal and external musical elements freely. According to Ayhan Erol, Gencebay emphasizes the distinction between freedom [özgürlük] and looseness [serbest] in terms of the reception of outside influences by urban people and draws attention to Gencebay’s term [serbest çalışmalar] (Erol, 2002: 260-262). Gencebay rejects the term *arabesk* for several reasons. Firstly, he considers himself as part of Turkish music tradition. For him, his musical innovations are not deviations or a degeneration of local practices as *arabesk* implies. Furthermore, he shares similar goals with other attempts at modernization; to create a synthesis of the local and the global. Lastly, the influences that are found in his music are not limited to Arab traditions. Musical elements from Western, Mediterranean and Turkish local traditions appear in his music in certain ways. Therefore, he concludes his position in the tradition as being open to any innovation that he may find musically valuable. On the other hand, The term *arabesk* is a label for a variety of popular musics. The *arabesk*-ness may originate from the text or most likely from the performance. However, in many cases, it is difficult, even impossible, to find common musical peculiarities to determine its features. One might suggest the mixture of art, folk, Western, or world music instruments; oriental string and percussion ensembles; melodies that are ornamented in Middle Eastern fashion; and sentimental lyrics are among characteristics of *arabesk* music. However, it is not possible to take them as definitive features since they do not always appear. It seems that the biggest commonality of *arabesk* repertory lies in its “negative description”; Gencebay suggests that what labels his music as *arabesk* are “characteristics which go beyond the borders of existing official music politics” in his interview with Meral Özbek. She, on the other hand, insists on orientating him towards determining pure musical features of *arabesk* music. (Özbek: 1991: 250-252).

will elaborate other dimensions of *Metronom*, such as the lineup and collaborative nature of the orchestra and influences from diverse traditions, such jazz and *makam*, in reference to selected performances.

The founders, *bağlama* player and composer Vedat Yıldırım-bora, jazz drummer Burhan Tonguç and singer Mine Koşan firstly aimed to form a stage group for *gazino* and club performances. Over the course of time, the group hosted 15-18 accomplished and gifted musicians from jazz, western classical and *makam* circles; jazz musicians Burhan Tonguç on drum and percussion, İsmet Sıral and Süheyl Denizci<sup>5</sup> on flute; western classical musicians Günnur Perin and Hüsamettin Demiray on double bass, Betül Demiray and Selçuk [?]<sup>6</sup> on violin, Nizamettin Demiray on horn and keyboard; *makam* musicians Mustafa Sayan, Mehmet Şenyaylar, İskender Şencemal, Selçuk Tekay and Yaşar Işın on the violin, Arto Tunçboyacıyan and Faruk Tekbilek on percussion, and Hacı Tekbilek on *kaval*<sup>7</sup>. (Vedat Yıldırım-bora, personal communication, 17 May 2013, and March 27, 2014; Mustafa Sayan, personal communication, 21 June 2017.)

*Metronom* was formed in 1971 and was active between 1972 and 1978<sup>8</sup>. Vedat Yıldırım-bora and Mine Koşan stayed in Cairo for two years to collaborate with the Abdelhalem Novara orchestra. They reformed in a looser format in 1980 until 1985<sup>9</sup>. Having Mine Koşan as their vocalist, *Metronom* was truly a music band. They shared their earnings equally and the group name was highly valued. Of course, the group's instrumentalists were also active in other stage and studio works outside *Metronom*.

Yıldırım-bora told in our interviews how *Metronom* performed in *gazin*os and clubs as follows:

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<sup>5</sup> Süheyl Denizci's participation in *Metronom* is suggested on a web page. Since all other information in the text is consistent with our knowledge from the field, it is possible to assume that Denizci might have collaborated with the group on several occasions including the flute performance in *Anlatamıyorum* analysed in the following part.

<sup>6</sup> None of the informants could remember his last name.

<sup>7</sup> Between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> minutes, one might observe the lineup of *Grup Metronom* in a Turkish movie, *Dikiz Aynası*, in which Mine Koşan takes part as a singer actress (See Erakalın, 1973).

<sup>8</sup> The time period coincides with the heyday of group music in Turkey, especially Anatolian pop and rock. (See Tireli, 2005; Meriç, 2006)

<sup>9</sup> The group disbanded probably due to the separation of the couple. Other musicians of *Metronom* gathered separately for Burhan Tonguç's daughter Biricik Tonguç, whose boom period was in the mid 1970s, according to Biricik's statement in a biographical radio programme. (See Kuyucu, 2019)

In our repertory, we would play an intro for one and half or two minutes; there was a famous [song] Caravan, Latin music. [Then] we would start with either *Bir Teselli Ver*, *Benim Dünyam*, or *Yağmur*. [...] After two songs, we would play *Dert Bende*, followed by another popular Gencebay song. We would take [into our repertory] other current popular songs such as *Neden Saçların Beyazlamış*. Out of ten songs we performed, let us say three to four songs would be mine, another three to four would be from Gencebay, and two to three others from the *piyasa* [marketplace]. (Vedat Yıldırımboğa, personal communication, 17 May 2013)

Metronom's repertory consisted of songs that are considered *arabesk* hits. However, they arranged the songs in their own style:

We would write new intros to the song or use ones that we composed for our recordings. We always [arranged songs] in scores. They were generally based on *bağlama*. Because both Gencebay and I composed our songs on *bağlama*. [...] We would distribute [the melody] among violins, *bağlama*, *kaval*, and percussion. We would use solo violins and *taksims*. We would have three or four colours. For instance, in *Dert Bende*, I play *bağlama* to the accompaniment of violins, the *kaval* plays solo passages. Sometimes we would perform [on the stage] better than the album [recording]. Our fame was "they play like the recording". There are some recordings, Orhan Gencebay's *Aşk Pınarı* and *Sev Dedi Gözlerim* - very important ones -, which we played live in the studio just as we played them on the stage. It is quite different, because we rehearsed. The technique was competitive but there was a joy in that unity. It is not possible to get the same sentiment playing part by part. No one is complaining now, everyone is happy. Because it needs to be [like that]; you cannot gather those people easily (Vedat Yıldırımboğa, personal communication, 17 May 2013).<sup>10</sup>

Burhan Tonguç and Vedat Yıldırımboğa seem to have been the visionary leaders of *Metronom*. Burhan Tonguç - he was called Burhan *Baba* [father] - was already an influential figure in the Turkish music industry when the group was established. He was an open-minded musician from the Turkish jazz scene, who was playing across genres combining various percussive instruments on the stage and in studio recordings. Unusually for his time, he was fluent in rhythmic notation. He was teaching others sight

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<sup>10</sup> All quotations were translated from Turkish to English by Serkan Şener. Turkish versions are not given in the text for reasons of space.

reading, including several string players, who became influential figures in the string ensemble scene - the trademark of *arabesk* sound (Ayhan Şenyeylar, personal communication, 26 March 2015).

Famous musicians would come to our house and gather for improvised jam sessions in my father's music room for hours. [...] There was music, jazz, constantly... İsmet Sıral, Muvaffak [Maffy] Falay were world class musicians. Pianist Altan İrtel was there. Four or five musicians would group together and we would listen and admire them. I would listen to longplays of Ella Fitzgerald, Shirley Bassey, Frank Sinatra we had. I grown up with them. [...] My father said that he was going to start a group for Mine Koşan. He founded one, called *Metronom*. He put me in the percussion section together with *Papuç* [shoe] Ahmet [Külik], Arto Tunçboyacıyan, my father and *Parmaksız* [no fingers] Cengiz, who was on the drums. [...] We formed a group of 13-14 people. That was my first appearance on the stage. [...] We formed the Western rhythm [section] along with *bağlama*, violins, *kavals* on the other side. Ahmet Tekbilek, Faruk Tekbilek were world-class wind performers we had. [...] Because I was so concentrated on the rhythm part, I was not able to follow what was being sung. (Kuyucu, 2019)

Vedat Yıldırımbara and Burhan Tonguç had a close relationship before their collaboration in the *Grup Metronom*. They met in the early 1960s. Tonguç was like an older brother for Yıldırımbara. They gathered at Tonguç's house and "listened to jazz music for eight years" (Vedat Yıldırımbara, personal communication, 13 May 2013).

Yıldırımbara was a talented *bağlama* player from İzmir. In his youth, he was influenced by Yılmaz İpek, who was one of the leading figures among cosmopolitan *bağlama* players<sup>11</sup>. "Like many kids at that time", Yıldırımbara dreamed about "fleeing" [from İzmir] to İstanbul, the heart of the music industry. He moved to İstanbul in 1966 after he was released from his military duty. After a while, he was accompanying Ahmet Sezgin and others in İstanbul *gazinos* and performing in flourishing recording studios together with Orhan Gencebay and Arif Sağ. Then, he met Abdullah Nail Bayşu<sup>12</sup>, who was a prominent figure in the commercial folk music scene. Bayşu offered his house to the

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<sup>11</sup> İpek had a modern vision of *bağlama* performance. With his brilliant technique, İpek expanded the traditional boundaries of the instrument. It is possible to see him - together with Bayram Aracı - as predecessors of modern *bağlama* virtuosos, who opened the path for their successors, such as Orhan Gencebay, Arif Sağ and Vedat Yıldırımbara. (See Aracı, 2001; İpek, 1963)

<sup>12</sup> Abdullah Nail Bayşu was an influential figure in the industry during the 1960s and 1970s. His house could be labelled as one of the birthplaces of arabesk music Because of its centrality in the marketplace. (See Şener, 2022)

market place as a multi-dimensional sphere, where actors of the music and film industries could gather. Vedat Yıldırım-bora became a resident of the house and collaborated with Bayşu for four years, which linked Yıldırım-bora to the network. His maturation as a bağlama player and songwriter as well as founding *Metronom* took place in this environment and his vision for the *Grup Metronom* was fed by these cosmopolitan musicians. (Vedat Yıldırım-bora, personal communication, 17 May 2013, and 27 March 2014; Arif Sağ, personal communication, 15 November 2016)

On the other hand, Yıldırım-bora developed a special interest in Egyptian urban popular music. Radio performances and commercial recordings of Egyptian stars had been primary influences for him. He yearned for the Egyptian style of musical innovations to be implemented in Turkish *makam* musics. He was conscious that creating a similar sound on the Turkish scene was not an easy task to accomplish:

We found out that Egyptians have transcended the cause; Umm Kulthum, [Mohamed] Abd al-Wahab, Abd al-Halem Hafez, Fairuz [have] large orchestras. How do they play, how is it done? We researched [and] understood that it is a matter of école. At that time, I thought that we would be able to make music of that quality 25-30 years later; it would not be possible with musicians collected from cafés<sup>13</sup>. (Vedat Yıldırım-bora, personal communication, 17 May 2013)

The existence of a string section in *Grup Metronom* is owed to Yıldırım-bora's enlightenment originating in Arab musics and subsequent motivation to pursue the founding of similar orchestras in Turkey. However, modernization of the *makam* tradition in the Egyptian case is different from Turkish one, especially in the process of institutionalization. Egyptians included transmission of *makam* style violin performance in conservatories and state orchestras (El-Shawan, 1980, 1984, and Azzam, 1990), unlike their Turkish counterparts, who prioritized the Western style over the traditional one. Therefore, Turkish conservatory-educated violin players were not equipped with the artisanship of the *makam* style and its cultural background<sup>14</sup>. Although it was not his ideal choice, Yıldırım-bora's alternative solution, in the case of *Metronom*, was bringing together musicians from both the *makam* and Western traditions, which echoes the

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<sup>13</sup> He refers to musicians' cafes, which had been a very important gathering place and hub especially for Romani musicians until the 2000s.

<sup>14</sup> Integrating the *makam* style with western instrument teaching curricula in Turkish conservatories is still a burning subject.

notion of “spontaneous synthesis” proposed by Orhan Tekelioğlu (Tekelioğlu, 1996; 1998).

Yıldırımbara’s experiment with *Metronom* was partly successful. Members of the group benefited from each other’s musical background and achieved a unique blend of sound. But it was not comparable to Egyptian grand orchestras in size and sound, for which Yıldırımbara had a strong admiration. The sound that he had in Turkey did not satisfy him and he travelled to Egypt to collaborate with their orchestras:

[...] Mine Koşan and I went there [Cairo] to perform Arab music. It was unbearable for us to stay in Turkey. I was not able to find musicians to realize my desires. There are no [good] arrangers. [...]. Umm Kulthum’s *tef* player Muhammed al-Arabi invited us to meet Abdelhalem Nowara, the greatest conductor [of Egypt] who was Anwar Sadat’s brother-in-law. He was a friend of Münir Nurettin Selçuk and a musician of matching calibre. I was researching there and we performed Arab music. We performed on television once; the public was so enthusiastic that it troubled us to go out. People are so fond of art; they appreciate any good [performance] no matter who does it. They were shocked when Mine sung Umm Kulthum’s songs; we had a huge success. [...] (Vedat Yıldırımbara, personal communication, 17 May 2013)

Abdelhalem Nowara influenced Vedat Yıldırımbara with his views on the legacy of Turkish *makam* music repertory:

When *Baba* [Father] and I were sitting in his room - I used to call him father - we began to talk about Turkish music. I spoke about Turkish music negatively. He told me that he was offended by my words, asking if I was familiar with Tatyos, Cemil Bey, or Osman Bey. I said that I did not know them well. We were making commercial [*piyasa*] music and had not researched it yet. He asked me to come to their concert, which they would give the next day, to listen to a *semai* by Tatyos Efendi. The [Egyptian] state provided a space [building] for them. They consisted of 120-130 musicians; 100 of them were instrumentalists. We went there the next day. Our piece [Tatyos Efendi’s *semai*] was the next one; I said my goodness, what was happening!? Is Turkish music that beautiful? Tears were dropping from our eyes. I said, we could not understand that Turkish music was so supreme in Turkey; we learned that from Mr. Abdelhalem, who was Turkish from his mother’s side! (Vedat Yıldırımbara, personal communication, 17 May 2013)

Yıldırımbara took an instantaneous decision to make an album project with Abdelhalem Novara Orchestra after that incident. He returned to İstanbul to prepare the repertoire.



Shortly after, they worked on it and produced Mine Koşan's album *Kahire'de* [In Cairo] in 1979. The album features 20<sup>th</sup>-century art music repertory, a few instrumental forms, and *taksims*. The brilliant technique of the orchestra and Mine Koşan's virtuosic vocalization presents a unique blend. But because the orchestra and vocal part were recorded separately, the performance lacks musical interaction and unity.<sup>15</sup>

One of the songs on the album, *Bir Kendi Gibi Zalimi Sevmiş Yanıyormuş* (Atlı, 1979), presents a notable approach in terms of arrangement. First, the arrangement features romantic-style western symphonic tradition. In the one- and-a-half-minute-long instrumental introduction, solo violin and orchestra including both string and wind sections, perform long ascending melodic lines that develop in modulation and create climax points. Then the climax dissolves to a calmer mood represented by sustained notes on the solo oboe, which is immediately followed by the vocal part. The introduction does not inform the listener about the original text of the song or the sonic environment of the *kürdilihicazkar makam*. In other words, it does not sound eastern at all, because of (1) the existence of the wind section and timpani in the orchestration, (2) the expressive performance style of the solo violin and strings in the western manner, and (3) the use of functional harmony, which implies tonality. The only link to the *makam* world can be established through some points in the arrangements as a whole, which resemble western-style compositions, especially marches, of the late Ottoman era. Therefore, Mine Koşan's *alaturka* vocal style and the western-style orchestral arrangement create a significant contrast. Moreover, those contradictory elements prevent the emergence of a melting point or synthesis, which would basically be the most desirable outcome of the whole project. After all, Vedat Yıldırımboğa accepted that reality in one of our interviews:

[...] We had it [the song] with winds. There were 55 musicians in the orchestra in Bach style. We made an experiment to see how Classical Turkish music would be. Yes, it was artful; but we did not like the work. Then Abdelhalem Novara said that "we would not touch our classics; we rather try to perform it well [in its own terms]; they are untouchable. You should implement them [experiments] in your new compositions". I personally think that we should not touch the *makam* pieces, which use coma [microtonal] *perdes*. We should

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<sup>15</sup> Vedat Yıldırımboğa admitted that the conductor was very upset when he learnt that Mine Koşan would not perform live with the orchestra in Cairo. He was upset because they would lose the musical interaction between soloist and the orchestra, which would have an impact on the musicality of the whole performance. Also, separate recording of the singer is sensible acoustically in a recording that complicates the natural mix of sonic environment presented on the album.

not touch *fasıl*. [We can implement] them in new pieces or others that are suitable. Timur Selçuk listened [to the piece] and said “this is such a difficult task; we all think and do those things, but sometimes we are unable to accomplish them”. We have beautiful songs; [...] they should remain as they are. We did not think like that, but we could not do it well. Our predecessors also tried; Adnan Saygun, Muammer Sun, Yalçın Tura, they all tried, but it did not work. I recently began to think that their harmony [of the classics] is [hidden] somewhere else. (Vedat Yıldırım-bora, personal communication, 17 May 2013)

What one can understand from this project in musicological terms is that unsuccessful projects or musical experiments stand in history as being as important, or perhaps even more important, than successful ones. Because musicians test their limits, evaluate outcomes with their own aesthetic, and receive audience reaction. Such projects let them exhibit stylistic dead ends that they should avoid in the future. Therefore, this experiment had an impact on Yıldırım-bora in the course of his musical journey.<sup>16</sup>

Chronologically, the piece *Bir Kendi Gibi Zalimi Sevmiş Yanıyormuş* is in the middle of two songs that I will be analysing in the following part. At this point, the narrative should go back and forward around five years for each to be able to analyse the musical and extra-musical issues that link the story.

### ***Anlatamıyorum [I Can't Explain]***

A little-known song from 1974, *Anlatamıyorum* (İrtel, 1974) features in a unique way. The piece was composed by Altan İrtel, a jazz pianist, who performed piano on the recording. The song is based on Orhan Veli Kanık's poem<sup>17</sup> and sung by Mine Koşan in *Grup Metronom's* accompaniment. It is a rare example of performers from *makam*,

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<sup>16</sup> It is arguably possible to describe Yıldırım-bora as an idealist considering how he acted during his musical journey at certain points. He prioritized musical quality over commercial success or income for many times. Together with his wife Mine Koşan, they spent a substantial amount of money in order to produce some of Koşan's recordings. He also advised his close friends, including Orhan Gencebay, not to release mediocre songs in order to fill their albums or publish an album every year. (Vedat Yıldırım-bora, personal communication, 17 May 2013)

<sup>17</sup> An earlier use of Kanık's poem as a song lyric dates back to 1972 on Kerem Güney's album with the same name. This version features an *alaturka* arrangement in *hicaz makam* (See Güney, 1972). Various song writers replaced one word of Kanık's poem with another one, probably to overcome a prosodic problem. Kanık's original line is “Bilmezdim şarkıların bu kadar güzel, kelimelerinse kifayetsiz olduğunu”. The word *kifayetsiz* (scant) consists of four syllables, which does not fit İrtel's musical phrase well. Having three syllables, its synonym *yetersiz* (inadequate), although poetically poor, fits the melody better prosodically than “*kifayetsiz*”. Moreover, Onno Tunç composed İrtel's version of the poem in 1977 and his song became one of classics of Hümevra's. (See Tunç, 1977).

classical, and jazz traditions taking part with their own flavours. In comparison to *Bir Teselli Ver*, in which symphony orchestra performers collaborated with Gencebay, *Anlatamıyorum* feature a more eclectic sound with contributions from musicians from diverse stylistic backgrounds. For instance, the piano, flute, and double bass reflect jazz sound. *Bağlama* and percussion ensemble provide the sonic essence of *alaturka* and *arabesk* styles. String section should be considered in two separate parts; the line-up of the ensemble contains performers of both *makam* and western traditions. Presence of two distinctive sections in the string ensemble is justified in the arrangement, in which the *makam* string section plays only a few responsive passages to the vocal line in its own way while its western style counterpart performs high pitched melodies, leaps and harmonic sequences. This way, both string groups show characteristics of their own stylistic features. See Table 1 for the roles played by separate parts in the arrangement.

**Table 1.** The Arrangement of *Anlatamıyorum*

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>0:00-0:28</b>	<b>0:28-1:15</b>	<b>1:15-1:43</b>	<b>1:43-3:05</b>	<b>3:05-3:32</b>	<b>3:32-3:49</b>
<b>Instruments</b>						
<b>Form Progress</b>	<b>Intro.</b>	<b>Stanza</b>	<b>Refrain</b>	<b>Middle Section. Charles Mingus's theme</b>	<b>Refrain</b>	<b>Coda</b>
<b>Strings 1</b>	Bass and treble sections of strings play an antiphonal instrumental intro extracted from the second half of the refrain.	Play antiphonal passages with vocal lines.	Play unison and antiphonal passages with the vocal line.	Play responsive phrases to flute solo. Plays the theme along with the flute and voice on the repeat.	Play unison and antiphonal passages with the vocal line.	Play the phrase " <i>anlatamıyorum</i> " of the vocal line repetitively.
<b>Strings 2</b>	-	Play unison and antiphonal passages with the vocal line.	Play unison and antiphonal passages with the vocal line.	-	Play unison and antiphonal passages with the vocal line.	-
<b>Voice</b>	-	Sings the stanza.	Sings the refrain.	Hums the theme on the repeat.	Sings the refrain.	Unmetered solo.
<b>Flute</b>	Joins western strings.	Supports antiphonal strings at several points.	-	Plays the theme solo and along with strings and voice.	-	-
<b>Bass</b>	Plays a plain bass line.	Plays a plain bass line.	Plays a plain bass line.	Plays a syncopated bass line.	Plays a plain bass line.	Plays a plain bass line.
<b>Piano</b>	-	Plays arpeggios and <i>kanun</i> -like antiphonal phrases.	Plays arpeggios.	Plays 7 <sup>th</sup> chords, arpeggios, and a glissando in the end.	High arpeggios towards the end of a few vocal phrases.	Plays arpeggios.
<b>Electro- <i>bağlama</i></b>	Added to western strings eventually after flute.	Supports antiphonal strings at several points.	-	-	-	-
<b>Percussions</b>	4/4 <i>alaturka</i> rhythmic pattern. <i>(darbuka and zilli tef)</i>	4/4 <i>alaturka</i> rhythmic composition. <i>(darbuka and zilli tef)</i>	4/4 <i>alaturka</i> rhythmic composition. <i>(darbuka and zilli tef)</i>	Instrument change: <i>Bongo and maracas.</i>	4/4 <i>alaturka</i> rhythmic composition. <i>(darbuka and zilli tef)</i>	4/4 <i>alaturka</i> rhythmic composition continues. <i>(darbuka and zilli tef)</i>

The piece starts from upper register of the *muhayyer kürdi makam*<sup>18</sup>. Western-style strings introduce the main theme in an antiphonal format, in which the low section plays responsive phrases to the theme carried by the high section [See bars 1-5 from Figure 1]. Strings are also used for block chords [e.g., bar 5]. The flute replaces the high part of the strings in the last phrase of the introductory theme. The percussion ensemble, consisting of *darbuka* and *zilli tef*, plays in *düyek usul* repeatedly throughout the piece except the middle section [See percussion in bar 1 for the metric division of the *usul*], although they are masked in the mix especially in vocal parts. On one hand, the *alaturka* percussion, on the other, western-style strings and flute establish an eclectic sound. Furthermore, the entrance of *electro-bağlama* at the end of the introduction brings a folk essence to the blend. Instrument sections accompany the vocal line in their own way. Strings play a significant role in supporting the vocal line both in unison [e.g., 12-13, 17-18] and antiphonal phrases [e.g., 11, 19]. They also create temporary climax points with accelerating melodic sequences [e.g., Figure 1, 2, bars 14, 24]. Although its contribution to the arrangement is limited, the presence of *bağlama* enriches the eclectic nature of the sound. The piano plays arpeggios and an ornamented melodic phrase in a similar fashion to the *kanun* [19-20], at the end of the stanza. The use of piano in *alaturka* style<sup>19</sup> accentuates the eclecticism of the arrangement.

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<sup>18</sup> The scale of *muhayyer-kürdi makam* resembles the modern Phrygian mode. For a detailed description of it see (Aydemir, 2010). The Phrygian mode appears to be the most frequent mode in popular songs of Mediterranean cultures including the *arabesk* (See also Karahasanoğlu and Skoog, 2009: 66-9; Stokes, 2010; Manuel, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> Although *alaturka* piano style is not very popular in *makam* music, there is a recognized performance style among traditional music circles. It could easily be identified with Feyzi Aslangil's own style, which might be summarized with a plain homophony, *makam* ornaments - imitating *kanun* - and unison melodies two octaves apart (See Aslangil, 2000).

# Anlatamıyorum

Composition & Arrangement: Altan İrtel  
Lyrics: Orhan Veli Kanık  
Transcription: Serkan Şener

The musical score is arranged in systems. The first system includes Strings and Percussion. The second system includes Fl., Str., and Bağ. The third system includes Vc., Str., and lyrics: Ağ - la-sam se-si-mi du-yar-mı-sı - nız mis - ra - la-rım - da do-ku-na-bi-lir mi-si-niz göz-yaş-  
The fourth system includes Vc., Pno., Str., and Bağ. with lyrics: la-ri-ma el - le-ri-niz - le bil-mez-dim şar - kı-la-rın bu ka-dar gü-  
The fifth system includes Vc., Fl., Pno., and Str. with lyrics: zel ke - li - me - le - rin - se ye - ter - siz ol - du - ğu - nu bu der - de düş - me - den ön -

Figure 1. Transcription of *Anlatamıyorum*

2

21

Vc. Bir yer var bi-li-yo-rum

Fl.

Pno.

Str.

Bağ.

25

Vc. her-şe-yi söy-le-mek müm-kün e-pei-ce yak-laş-mı-şız

Pno.

Str.

27

Vc. du-yu-yo-rum an-la-ta-mı-yo-rum an-la-ta-mı-yo-rum an-la-ta-mı-yo-rum Fine

Str.

**Figure 2.** Transcription of *Anlatamıyorum*

The middle section [See Figure 3] introduces an unexpected shift in direction. The bass provides a modal and syncopated metric ground that moves the total sound towards a mysterious jazzy environment. The *alaturka* percussion section is now replaced by *bongo* and *maracas* that support this transformation. Afterwards, the flute introduces the main theme of Charles Mingus’s “Meditations on Integration”<sup>20</sup>. The timbre of the flute and the chromatic nature of the theme erase the *alaturka* mood immediately, yet the modal centre is retained in the harmonic structure. As the theme develops, the piano and western-style strings expand the register with arpeggios. Mine Koşan hums the theme along with the strings on the repeat. She modifies her voice colour to match the mysterious sound. Therefore, the middle section transforms the piece into an even more

<sup>20</sup> Although Mingus’s name is cited in the album booklet under the composer Altan İrtel’s name as “(Mingus)”, producers did not specify any piece or recording. Thanks to my colleague Yaprak Melike Uyar who recognized the match between the middle section theme of *Anlatamıyorum* and the introductory theme of “Meditations on Integration” (See Mingus, 1968).

eclectic form. The piece recapitulates the refrain when the climax of the middle section is dissolved. The end features a fadeout, in which Mine Koşan performs a freely metred vocal improvisation.



The image displays a musical score for the piece "Anlatamiyorum". The score is arranged in a system with multiple staves. The instruments included are Flute (Fl.), Bass, Maracas (Mrcs.), Violin (Vc.), Piano (Pno.), and Strings (Str.). The score is divided into three systems, each starting with a double bar line and a measure number: 31, 40, and 51. The first system (measures 31-39) features the Flute and Bass. The second system (measures 40-49) includes Violin, Flute, Piano, and Strings. The third system (measures 51-59) includes Violin, Piano, Strings, and Bass. The score contains various musical notations such as notes, rests, and ornaments. Specific performance instructions include "simile" above the Flute staff in measure 35 and "D.S. al Fine" above the Violin staff in measure 51. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Figure 3. Transcription of *Anlatamiyorum*

Because of its eclectic nature, *Anlatamıyorum* is an ideal sample to exemplify how the music industry works. The significance of the piece originates in the line-up of the orchestra, namely *Grup Metronom*, which is formed by performers from diverse musical backgrounds. This contradicts the assumption that the alternative modernization of Turkish *makam* music, or *arabesk*, is realized by a homogeneous group of musicians or *arabeskçiler* [arabesklers]. On the contrary, musicians from state symphony and opera orchestras, accomplished jazz and *makam* musicians collaborated in the cultivation of the genre. The diversity in the performer profile manifests the source of the eclecticism. Perhaps this applies to emergence of other popular musical genres as well.

At this point, the narrative will move forward in time more than a decade to demonstrate how this group of musicians continued to involve musical novelties in the *arabesk* genre.

### ***Mutluluk Diye* [Diye]<sup>21</sup> [For the Sake of Happiness]**

In this subsection, I will analyse one of cornerstones of *arabesk* history, namely *Mutluluk Diye Diye*, featured in Mine Koşan's 1981 album *Yakında Geleceğim*, released by the German-based music company *Türküola*<sup>22</sup> (See Sayan, 1987). The album is a product of the golden age of *arabesk* music. Music director Vedat Yıldırımboğa and composer Mustafa Sayan cited it during our interviews as one of their best works<sup>23</sup>. Also, studio musicians, who performed in the production of the song or listened to it, refer to the song as one of the unique songs in the history of *arabesk* music. Just like *Anlatamıyorum*, *Mutluluk Diye Diye* may not be Mine Koşan's most famous or commercially successful work, but it has a special place in the memories of the actors who shaped the Turkish music industry. By examining the song stylistically, I aim to discuss the issues relating to canonizing *arabesk* music history, or popular music history in general. In doing this, the focus will be on the perspectives of studio musicians, who themselves constitute an alternative audience, in comparison to the public audience.

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<sup>21</sup> The original name of the track is listed as "*Mutluluk Diye*" in the booklet and digital platforms, but the name of the track should be "*Mutluluk Diye Diye*" to be able to preserve its grammatical and semantic integrity. Informants used both during our interviews.

<sup>22</sup> The company also bought distribution rights of local companies and Turkish stars in Germany.

<sup>23</sup> Both Vedat Yıldırımboğa and Mustafa Sayan claimed their participation in it. Yıldırımboğa was the producer, who was also musically active in the process. Sayan's contribution as the composer and music director makes him a primary musical actor. However, Sayan admitted that some of the string performers, especially double bassist Günnur Perin helped him in the arrangement (Sayan, 2021). Therefore, the production of the song was a collaborative work, rather than an individual effort.

Some issues, related to the performance, recording, and mixing of the song complicate the transcription procedure and analysis. Recording of different layers of strings and their performance was not clear, especially in terms of monophony in general; they stayed instead in heterophony in several fast passages, probably unintentionally, which results in the performance sounding out of sync rather than heterophonic. Also, the layers of the string ensemble were unrecognizable to me because of masking. Similarly, the percussion vanishes in the vocal or tutti parts; such instances, where I assume the percussionists continued their cyclic phrasing of the *usul*, are represented only partially in the transcription. Lastly, the sonic environment of the recording is inconsistent. Intensity levels and timbral differences in antiphonal passages are easily audible, especially between the oboe, strings, and electric guitar as well as the canned applause. These discrepancies in performance and recording of the piece create kitsch or even absurd moments in the flow as well as challenges for the transcriber.

One of the unique features of the piece is that it is eleven minutes long, which is twice as long in comparison with the industry standard<sup>24</sup>. This may owe to the influence of Egyptian grand song tradition. *Mutluluk Diye Diye* can be viewed, then, as an outcome of the attempts by these musicians to emulate their Egyptian counterparts in modernizing traditional music. Having said that, the similarity is not, strictly speaking, about duration but the fact that the song displays a multi-sectional form featuring several introductory sections, vocal and instrumental solos, progressive instrumental intersections together with strophic returns.

A further Arabic influence observable in the piece is the use of canned applause in the arrangement three times; at the very beginning, middle, and the end. It brings an imaginary scene in front of the listeners' eyes, just like concert scenes by Umm Kulthum<sup>25</sup>. Active participation of the audience in the performance in Umm Kulthum's concerts by way of applause is part of the *tarab* culture in Egypt (Racy, 2004; Danielson, 1997). The

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<sup>24</sup> The length of pop songs is generally between four and five minutes on account of assumptions and expectations on listening habits of the general audience and production costs.

<sup>25</sup> In her performance of *Enta Omri* [You are my life], the audience first applauds when they recognize the song while Umm Kulthum sits in the orchestra. Then she stands up and comes forward around the end of the instrumental introduction, which triggers the second applause of the audience, a pattern which occurs the same way in the arrangement of *Mutluluk Diye Diye*. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x90p0m6vg94> [accessed on 08.08.2021] for a live performance of Abd al-Wahab's famous song *Enta Omri* performed by Umm Kulthum.

audience reaches ecstasy with the musical climax created mostly by the diva of the Arab song. The applause frequently disrupts the performance and performers repeat many of the musical sections several times, thus extending the total duration of the songs. Vedat Yıldırım, Mustafa Sayan and Mine Koşan were all fans of Umm Kulthum and Egyptian music. They spent substantial time there collaborating with state orchestras and giving concerts of Umm Kulthum's songs. Therefore, they had experience of the kind of sophisticated participation of Egyptian audiences in their performances. In my opinion, they intended to mimic such a scene in the recording of *Mutluluk Diye Diye* in aural experience.

The lyrics<sup>26</sup> are in harmony with traditional *aşık* poetry as they feature an appropriate poetic metre and rhyme scheme<sup>27</sup>. To understand the poetic structure of the lyrics one has to reorder the verses. The vocal intro is made of a couplet; but there is no following couplet in the rest of the piece. Also, although it is thematically related to the following text, it technically stands for itself by having 14 syllables per line [See Table 2]. The *Zemin* section and its second verse consist of two quatrains having both semantic and technical unity. They feature 12 syllables per line and a consecutive rhyme scheme [bbbc+eeeb], which is probably the most common poetic genre, known as *koşma* in *aşık* poetry. The lyrics in the *meyan* part have a similar unity for themselves and feature a *koşma* in a consistent rhyme scheme [bbbd+bbbb] and 11 syllables per line. The *nakarât* [chorus], on the other hand, forms a *mani*, a genre in folk poetry. Although the shape of the lyrics is rooted in tradition, they also feature an urban, contemporary lexicon and an overtly expressive rhetoric, which form a variant in the tradition.

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<sup>26</sup> The piece is about a man's suffering after being left by his lover.

<sup>27</sup> See table 2 for poetic structure of the lyrics.

**Table 2.** Relationship Between the Poetic Structure and Musical Form

Vocal lines (syllables per line)	Rhyme scheme	Bar(s) reference to the transcription	Musical and Poetic form
-		1-24	Instrumental intro 1
-		25	Violin solo
-		26-48	Instrumental intro 2
<i>Kaderime kızmazdım, yanımda sen olsaydın</i> (14) <i>Ağlatmazdı hasretin, bir ümit bıraksaydın</i> (14)	a a	49	Vocal intro
-		50-51	Instrumental sequence
<i>Alıp başımı bir gün bur[a]dan giderim</i> (12) <i>Nedense güldürmedi beni kaderim</i> (12) <i>Mutluluktan neşeden yoktur haberim</i> (12) <i>Hayatım bir düzene girmedi gitti</i> (12)	b b b c	52-59 [60-67 repeat]	<i>Zemin</i>
-		68-71	Instrumental interlude 1
<i>Gör beni, baktığın her yerde varım</i> (11) <i>Duy beni, söylenen her sözde varım</i> (11) <i>Terk edip gittiğin o günden beri</i> (11) <i>Yanıp da kül olan ateşte varım</i> (11)  <i>Adını gözyaşımınla yazar dururum</i> (12) <i>Maziye her bakışta mahzun olurum</i> (12) <i>Mutluluk diye diye toprak olurum</i> (12) <i>Mutluluk diye diye hep kahrolurum</i> (12)	b b d b  b b b b	72-96	<i>Meyan</i>
<i>El verdim, elden oldum</i> (7) <i>Söz ettim, dilden oldum</i> (7) <i>Çok sevdim (çok) senden oldum</i> (7)	b b b	97-108	<i>Nakarat</i>
-		109-126	Instrumental interlude 2 [ <i>ara nağme</i> ]
<i>Yarından ümidimi çalanlar olur</i> (12) <i>Beni çaresizliğe salanlar olur</i> (12) <i>Zaten nerde dert varsa hep beni bulur</i> (12) <i>Hayatım bir düzene girmedi gitti</i> (12)	e e e c	52-67 [2 <sup>nd</sup> verse]	<i>Zemin</i> [2 <sup>nd</sup> verse]

The piece starts with an instrumental intro in a relatively tranquil tempo, which uses the same theme as the *nakarat* [See bars 1-24 from Figure 4]. The intro is performed by strings at the beginning with the accompaniment of electric guitar, which rings sustained chords with a wah-wah pedal of C, Bb and Gm at the end of the phrases. This combination of oriental strings and guitar demonstrates an eclectic arrangement even from the start.

Accelerating the tempo from 55 to 78, the introductory theme is repeated several times with participation of the humming of the choir and oboe. The string parts feature contrapuntal phrasing at parallel thirds and sixths [e.g., bars 7-10], contrary motion [bars 11-12], and variations of the main theme in contrapuntal fashion [bars 19-22]. The instrumental intro 1 leads to a freely metred violin solo.

# Mutluluk Diye Diye

Composition: Mustafa Sayan  
Arrangement: Vedat Yıldırım & Mustafa Sayan  
Lyrics: Ali Tekintüre  
Transcription: Serkan Şener

The musical score is divided into five systems, each starting with a double bar line. The first system (measures 1-6) features an Electric Guitar with a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 55$  and a 'wah-wah pedal' effect. The strings provide a harmonic accompaniment. The second system (measures 7-12) continues the guitar and string parts. The third system (measures 13-15) introduces a Choir and Percussion. The choir part has a tempo of  $\text{♩} = 78$ , and the percussion is marked 'simile'. The fourth system (measures 16-20) includes the Choir, Oboe (Ob.), and Strings. The fifth system (measures 21-24) features the Oboe, Violin (Vln.), and Strings, with a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking and a fermata over the final measure.

Figure 4. Transcription of *Mutluluk Diye*

The violin solo is performed by composer Mustafa Sayan, one of the most important actors in *arabesk* music in several respects. He composed some notable pieces in the history of *arabesk* music and other popular *makam* music genres including *Tanrı İstemezse* (Gürses, 1998), *Ölüyorum Kederimden* (Sayan, 1991), and *Seni Yakacaklar* (Sayan, 2015). Sayan was a leading figure in the foundation of Turkish string ensembles and development of the solo and ensemble style and sound. His solo in this piece moves around an extended *kürdi* scale on a drone played by the string ensemble. He uses extensive ornamentation during the solo, which mediate between Turkish and Arab traditions as well as Romani styles<sup>28</sup>. His musical phrases are centred around the *karar* [la] and *güçlü* [re] *perdesi* of the *kürdi* scale organized into even melodic fragments, illustrating the *makam* scale in a compact way. [See Figure 5]

**Figure 5.** Transcription of *Mutluluk Diye*

The next section, here labelled “instrumental intro 2”, features a change in mode and meter. Although the change in the metre is easily graspable as a shift from 4/4 to 3/8 or 6/8, the modal change realized by the oboe in the first half of this section [bars between 26 and 33] requires special attention. It is possible to explain the modal development from the perspectives of western and *makam* theory. In neither case, the scale fully corresponds to a commonly recognized formula [See Figure 6].

**Figure 6.** The Scale used in “instrumental intro 2”

<sup>28</sup> Mustafa Sayan’s stylistic legacy is influential among his successors. Although very important, it is outside the scope of this paper.



While from a western perspective, it resembles a combination of a partial hexatonic blues scale in the lower end and a harmonic tetrachord in the upper end, according to *makam* theory, it is a *kürdi* scale with a raised fourth and seventh degrees [or *hicaz* tetrachord on mi, *güçlü*]. Neither of these theorizations provides a complete explanation; however, given the hybrid character of the piece, mediating between the two theories seems logical. The second half of the “instrumental intro 2” is composed of a multi-layered melodic sequence performed by the strings and oboe with a typical alteration of the 6<sup>th</sup> degree of *kürdi* scale in an ascending contour. [See Figure 7]

The musical score for 'Mutluluk Diye' is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 26-33) features the Oboe and Strings. The Oboe part is marked 'pizz.' and 'arco', and the Strings part is marked 'pizz.' and 'arco'. The second system (measures 34-40) includes the Oboe, Strings, and Percussion. The Oboe part is marked 'arco', and the Percussion part is marked 'poco rall.'. The third system (measures 41-48) features the Oboe and Strings. The Oboe part is marked 'poco rall.', and the Strings part is marked 'arco'.

**Figure 7.** Transcription of *Mutluluk Diye*

“Vocal introduction” presents a striking moment in the performance. Here, Mine Koşan performs a virtuosic improvisation in her characteristic raspy alto voice alternating between two modal fragments [See Figure 8, Figure 9]. In the first half of the couplet, she moves around a *saba zemzeme* tetrachord, which is a common alteration of the *kürdi makam* in the *bozlak* tradition. She uses the mode, presented already in the previous section, in a different fashion, which prioritizes the melodic progression without a pentatonic feeling in the second half of the couplet. The way she vocalizes the phrase also corresponds with the *bozlak* style, which adds another dimension to the hybrid character of the piece.



**Figure 8.** Two Scales from Koşan's Vocal Introduction

4

49 Free meter

Voice

Ka-de-ri-me kız-maz-di m ya-nım-da sen ol-say-dı n

Str.

pizz. arco 6

Voice

Ah ağ-lat-maz-di has-re-tin

Str.

Voice

bir ü-mit bir ü-mit bi-rak-say-dın bi-rak-say-dın bir-rak-say-dın

Str.

**Figure 9.** Transcription of *Mutluluk Diye*

The *zemin* follows a short instrumental sequence, which introduces the new tempo and metre as well as announcing the return of the *kürdi* scale. Here, the vocal line introduces a new theme with the accompaniment of the full string section in unison, which creates a “big and soft”<sup>29</sup> sound. The string part here features sustained notes or short drones and simplified motives in contrast to the ornamented and syncopated vocalization of Mine Koşan, which establish a heterophony between the strings and voice [See bars 50-59 from Figure 10]. Strings also link sections together via antiphonal or responsive phrases in order to maintain melodic flow. Similarly, the choir repeats the quatrain with a plain

<sup>29</sup> Orhan Gencebay considers strings (“big and soft” in their nature) as one of the most significant components of his musical style. To him, strings are one of the most convenient ways to modernize Turkish Music with their big and soft character, as westerners and Arabs did. Gencebay’s aesthetic view on the string ensemble can be understood by looking at the “big and soft” concept (Orhan Gencebay, personal communication, 17 April 2014). Apart from Gencebay, many of the informants agreed upon the idea that Turkish *makam* music deserves a glorious nature in performance. It is possible to see its reflection on the persona of the actors, especially Gencebay, who has a calmly self-assured character and realized a significant portion of his “affectionate modernism” (Stokes, 2010) through the “big and soft” string ensemble.

vocalization, while the lead singer skilfully improvises around the melody sung by the choir.

50

5

Voice

Str.

Perc.

A-lp ba-şı-mı bir gün bur-dan gi-de-rim

54

Voice

Str.

ne-den - se gül-dür-me-di be-ni ka-de-rim mut-lu-luk-tan neş-e-den yok-tur ha-be-rim

58

Voice

Choir

Str.

ha-ya - tum bir dü-ze-ne gir-me-di git-ti bur-dan gi-de-rim

A-lp ba-şı-mı bir gün bur-dan gi-de-rim

62

Voice

Choir

Str.

ne-den - se gül-dür-me-di be-ni ka-de-rim a tur ha-be-rim

ne - den-se gül-dür-me-di be-ni ka-de-rim mut-lu-luk-tan ne - şe-den yok-tur ha-be-rim

66

Voice

Choir

Str.

ha-ya - tum bir dü-ze-ne gir-me-di git-ti

ha-ya - tum bir dü-ze-ne gir-me-di git-ti

Figure 10. Transcription of *Mutluluk Diye*

A short melodic bridge by the strings and oboe sets the scene for the *meyan*. The vocal carries the melodic flow to a climax gradually via an ascending and well-ornamented melodic movement. The string accompaniment continues to support the vocal line in the same fashion as in the previous section. The last theme in the *meyan* section resolves the tension owing to its descending character, a feature frequently found in the *şarki* form. [See Figure 11]

68

Ob.

Str.

Perc. *cimlo*

72

Voice

Gör be - ni bak - ti - ğin her yer - de va - rım

Str.

76

Voice

duy be - ni söy - le - nen her söz - de va - rım

Str.

80

Voice

Ter - ke - di - p git - ti - ği - n o gün - den be - ri

Str.

84

Voice

ya - nıp - ta kül o - la - n a - teş - te va - rım rum

Str.

89

Voice

Mut - lu - luk di - ye di - ye top - rak o - lu - rum  
hep kah - ro - lu - rum

Ob.

Str.

Figure 11. Transcription of *Mutluluk Diye*

The *nakarât* is voiced with the catchy theme introduced in the first instrumental introduction. On the second repeat, Mine Koşan recites the lyrics of the *nakarât* in a wailing voice, creating a highly sentimental mood. Commonly used among many *arabesk* singers, this kind of vocalization dramatizes the musical text at times via overt exaggeration, which critics of *arabesk* music viewed as emotional exploitation, resulting in its becoming a significant focus of criticism in the reception of *arabesk* music. As the *nakarât* section repeats itself, the string arrangement of the first section, which features parallel polyphonic motions and variations, is duplicated arguably as an alternative to unison accompaniment. [See Figure 12]

**Figure 12.** Transcription of *Mutluluk Diye*

The next section, entitled in Table 2 as an instrumental interlude or *aranağme*, appears when the vocal section completes the parts of *zemin*, *meyan*, and *nakarât*, at a halfway point for the vocals. The character of *aranağme* is developed around a progressive melody, distributed among different instruments [See bars 109-126 from Figure 13]. In this sense, the *aranağme* could be labeled as a parade of instruments, in which each voice ornaments the melody in its own way or add stylistically suitable melodic phrases to the on-going dialogue. At first, *kanun* performs an embellished melody with the support of strings at the end [109-110] and the *ney* responds by leading the melody to the *karar* in the Arabic style, reinforced by the strings [111-112]. Afterwards, the strings play the same melody in unison with the *kanun* before passing it back to the *ney* [113-116]. Electric guitar and strings share a distant variation of the same theme in antiphony [117-

118]. Again, similarly, the strings and the oboe produce another variation on the theme [119-120] after which the solo violin performs a free-flowing descent in an ornamented fashion towards the *karar*, supported by the strings [121-124]. At the end of the *aranağme*, the strings prepare for the second verse with their persistent semiquaver pulsations on the *karar perde* [125-129].



8 106

Ney

Kanun

Str.

pizz. arco

pizz. arco

pizz.

tr

110

Ney

Kanun

Str.

pizz. arco

pizz.

tr

114

Ob.

E. Gr.

Str.

118

Ney

Vln.

Str.

tr

122

Str.

D.S. al Fine

Figure 13. Transcription of *Mutluluk Diye*

The piece displays a hybrid nature in certain respects. The question is how does it stand in relation to the tradition and how modern is it in the light of this analysis, and what is the function of the string ensemble in this discourse? Firstly, the piece is made up of traditional elements as seen, among others, in its use of *makam*, local instruments, the *şarkı* form, lyrics in the form of *aşık* poetry, and *bozlak* style vocalizations. The influence it draws from Egyptian music is evident in many respects including its duration, display of extended *şarkı* form with additional instrumental sections, Arabic-style solo violin and *ney* performances, use of canned applause, featuring of a percussion ensemble, and arguably the presence of a string ensemble. Western elements, either directly borrowed from the west or appropriated indirectly through Egyptians, appear as a significant component of the sound. These include the use of western instruments such as the guitar, oboe, and the string section, polyphonic voicing of the strings, and pentatonic melodic gestures [perhaps deriving from the blues]. Therefore, the piece stands out as a modern interpretation of traditional musical elements, exposed to exterior influences. The production process and the end product may not be as sophisticated or western-oriented as some elites would like, yet it still presents an alternative in the popular music scene. On the other hand, the string ensemble is the most consistent and indispensable section of the arrangement and therefore has a central role in the total performance; it plays main themes, antiphonal passages, sequences, responsive phrases, unison and polyphonic accompaniments to vocal and instrumental lines. Moreover, it provides a “big and soft” sonic environment, which sets the aesthetic orientation of this kind of modern arrangement. On the other hand, the polyphonic arrangement of the string ensemble was a genuine innovation in the *arabesk* music scene, although the texture of the strings was not sophisticated in modern compositional terms, being mostly in parallel or contrary motion without a harmonic progression; yet it was a novel experiment for those who had limited experience in western polyphony.

The piece has a special place in memories of musicians in the field and deserves appreciation for high-quality performance of the participating musicians. But it had a limited impact on the mainstream audience and a little recognition in the reception of *arabesk* music unlike many songs produced by the same group of musicians<sup>30</sup>. So, why

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<sup>30</sup> We do not possess solid statistical data about sale rates of the album or song, except its relatively low listening rates on the digital platforms, unlike another song, *Yakında Geleceğim*, from the same album. Relying on my insight from the field I assume that the song did not become a hit.

could this attempt not have an impact on the transformation of the mainstream music scene and become a usual one in Turkish *arabesk* music?

The song presents a unique blend of traditional and modern elements, but arguably does not match the preferences of Turkish audiences. Rather, it might be interpreted as an experimental project in a commercial product. Therefore, *Mutluluk Diye [Diye]* could have received well by the professionals in the music industry. The piece may not have moved the audience, but it had an impact on the actors who shaped the scene. One can develop an alternative canon which prioritizes acts of professionals over commercial success. Musicians, who have arguably sophisticated musical tastes, are also part of the audience. Their impact on the reception of popular songs might be limited, but their active participation in the network of the music industry multiplies their impact. Therefore, their reception should be considered carefully, especially as to the stylistic development of popular music genres.

## **Conclusion**

One of the findings of this paper is the fact that *arabesk* music was cultivated by musicians with diverse backgrounds. As explained in previous parts, *Grup Metronom* hosted musicians from symphony and opera orchestras, jazz, and *makam* tradition. Furthermore, it brought some key musicians into the Turkish music industry; two Romani violin players, Mustafa Sayan and Mehmet Şenyaylar became the leaders in string ensembles and played very important roles in the music industry for more than two decades.

As exemplified in the musical analyses, Turkish *arabesk* music has an eclectic character demonstrated in the arrangements, lyrics, and musical performance. However, the elements of eclecticism vary. This paper elaborated some of the features which could be found among other performances, such as line-up of the orchestra, use of *makam*, antiphonal structure, multi-sectional form, or foreign influences. However, there is still need for further studies to illuminate limits of stylistic features in *arabesk* music.

Another significant point visited in this paper is the value of unsuccessful experiments. The audience is considered as an active participant of the musical production in popular music studies; their choices affect the visions of the actors, who design the sound. This

perspective is generally used for validation of successful products. Yet, poorly received songs might inform actors in the production chain about the failure of a musical experiment, which should be avoided or redesigned in the next experiment. Therefore, setbacks could be considered as valuable as success in music business. However, - as became apparent in our case - a commercial failure might also be perceived as a cult recording by studio musicians; for whom some of the musical achievements in those products could be reshaped or reinterpreted in the future. In other words, sometimes, musical novelties emerge from unsuccessful experiments.

Our understanding of a musical genre, e.g., *arabesk*, should be fed from a set of stylistic diversity and field data. Focusing on *Grup Metronom's* activities, this investigation presents an alternative and articulates to the existing inquiries. Yet this narrative neither fully comprehends *Grup Metronom's* musical activities nor fills the gap in *arabesk* literature. *Arabesk*, being a mainstream popular music genre in Turkey for decades with contribution of many actors, creation of subgenres, and its atomization into other musical genres, deserves attention.

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## The Issue of Folklore in Contemporary Author's Songs<sup>1</sup> in Georgian Folk Music

### ABSTRACT

In today's Georgia most of the songs by contemporary authors referred to as 'folk' have little to do with traditional musical regularities; the examples, disseminated as specific, established variants, are also called 'folk'. Modernized instruments created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are also regarded as folk. It is strange that their consideration as folk examples is often acceptable to their authors. The article aims to study contemporary author's songs and to reveal their connection with the regularities of folk musical language.

In the modern era author's songs on folk motives have not yet been given scientific name. Georgian researchers refer to such examples as 'para-folklore', 'modernized folklore' and 'pop-folk'. In all three definitions they are called folklore. The difference between them is shown only by the prefix.

This article poses specific problems and shows possible solutions to them, for example: what brings the contemporary author's songs closer to folk tradition? Why are they considered folk? What are their characteristic musical features? What factor contributes to the popularity of these examples? Also, based on the musical analysis and personal interviews, the folk character of the repertoire of contemporary author's song performers (trio Mandili, Gogochuri sisters, group Bani, Davit Kenchiashvili) is discussed.

### KEYWORDS

Author's songs

Folklore

Traditional

<sup>1</sup> The term 'author's song' was very popular in Soviet musicology. An author's song is an example created based on folk motives by a specific author.

## **Introduction**

The safeguarding of and research into traditional heritage is vital for the preservation of national and cultural identity in the modern era. The issue of the relation between tradition and novelty is relevant in Georgian ethnomusicology as well; certainly there are works dedicated to this topic. Nevertheless, current processes in the ethno-musical space have not been subjected to special research until recently.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of rapid technical progress. The increasing role of the media (radio, television) accelerated natural processes already on-going in folk culture and often made them artificial. In the Soviet era, this was also facilitated by socialist ideology, which used folklore for its own interests. In the post-Soviet period, folk music was freed from ideological pressure; however, it was subject to processes of globalization. Today in Georgia there are many musical styles and genres that show certain connection with folk music. Such musical directions are ethno-jazz, folk fusion, etc. Along with them we can mention the so-called “contemporary author’s songs”.

## **The History of Author’s Songs in Georgia**

An author’s song is an example created based on folk motives by a specific author. In certain musical parameters, an author’s song shows a connection with folk-musical thinking. It should be noted that ‘author’s songs’ were created in Georgia even before the Soviet period. The authors of such songs were famous choirmasters: Varlam Simonishvili, Levan Mughalashvili, Piruz Makhatelashvili, Mariam Arjevnishvili, Ketevan Ghogheridze, Valerian Sadradze, Avksenti Megrelidze, Vano Mchedlishvili and others. They themselves were the bearers of tradition and represented musical traditions of the regions they worked in. Choirmasters of this generation mostly had no special musical education; consequently, their songs were created entirely according to the parameters of traditional music. Probably this is why their compositions were regarded as ‘folk’. For example, the famous song *Tsintskaro* was composed by Vano Mchedlishvili, *Dila* by Varlam Simonishvili, etc.

An interesting tendency can be traced in the works of choirmasters in the following period, who received special musical education: Anzor Erkomaishvili, Temur Kevkhishvili, Gomar Sikharulidze and others. The musical language of some of their creations is embedded in the particularities of one particular dialect; in some, it goes

beyond one dialect. For example, Anzor Erkomaishvili's song *Mival guriashi mara* is based on the general principles of West Georgian musical language, whilst his *Khareba da gogia* is a typical Kakhetian song.

It is noteworthy that both old and newly created author's songs are still regarded as folk. Considering them as folk music is often acceptable even to the authors themselves. The processes that began in Georgia at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (stage performance of folk music, the origin and development of folk studies as science, etc.) made corrections in the traditional definition of folk music and posed the problem of defining some terms (including *folk* and *author's*).

### **For the Definition of the Terms 'Folk' and 'Author's'**

In the *Encyclopedia Britannica* we find the following definition of folk music: "Folk Music, type of traditional and generally rural music that originally was passed down through families and other small social groups. Typically, folk music, like folk literature, lives in oral tradition; it is learned through hearing rather than reading. It is functional in the sense that it is associated with other activities, and it is primarily rural in origin" (Nettl, 2022).

In today's Georgia most of contemporary author's songs disseminated as being 'folk' have little proximity to traditional musical regularities; the examples disseminated as specific, established variants are also called 'folk'. Modernized instruments created in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are regarded as folk as well. In the opinion of the author of the present paper, at the present stage it is necessary to identify clearly examples with the definition 'folk music'. It is important to distinguish between what we call 'folk' and what we call 'author's'. These two terms are opposed to each other.

Ethnomusicologist Tamaz Gabisonia has a different position. In his view, the terms 'folk' and 'author's' are not opposites of each other. For the researcher it is acceptable to understand the concept of 'author' in such a way that it implies not only the individual creator of the song, but also the importer of each new component. Based on such an approach, Gabisonia proposes uniting a person with many functions – author-composer, author-ethnophore, author-reconstructor – under the concept of 'author' (Gabisonia, 2015: 158).

When discussing the folk nature of this or that example, first of all, we must specify what is meant by 'folk', and why these people are considered the 'Creators of Wisdom'. In discussing these issues, I will refer to renowned Georgian folklorist Zurab Kiknadze: "People imply a multitude of humans, united by the combination of certain features. Be it language, territory, common past ... People are an organic, reared group of humans, which has a middle, heart, centre, even expressed differently. Folk can be not only a nation, but also one dynasty or one family, which is gathered around one hearth and preserves the memory of ancestors." (Kiknadze, 2008: 15-16). However, the definition of 'people' alone is not enough to consider these people as creators of wisdom. Folk art is characterized by features such as: anonymity, variance, oral forms of dissemination, syncretism, etc.

According to Izaly Zemtsovsky, syncretism is regarded as a natural and constantly accompanying process of oral tradition. Syncretism is constant and inseparable from oral tradition at all stages of its existence and perception. In other words, syncretism is as eternal as folklore. (Zemtsovski, 2004: 8-9). Syncretism can be understood in a new way in relation to contemporary author's songs.

At the present stage it is impossible to talk about the anonymity of the author. Today, when great attention is paid to copyright protection, the creator of an author's song on folk motives cannot remain unknown. However, anonymity can also be understood differently: when the creator of a song is no longer the sole author. Sometimes it is much easier for modern songwriters to attribute their works to artistically valuable folk music, than to present them as their own compositions. This may explain one of the trends in the Internet space, where modern author's examples are referred to as folk music. The opinions of the performers on this matter are presented in detail below; however, it is no less important to consider how this kind of music is referred to by listeners.

Interesting is Bruno Nettle's approach to determining music as folk: "In the long history of folk music research, there is a close relationship between the definition of folklore as aurally transmitted and of folk song as anonymously composed. There is a difference, both in the process and as the subject of research, between a song composed without the mediation of writing. But in both cases, one of the early questions for scholars has been whether folk songs (and, by implication, other music in "oral" tradition) are created by individuals or by the 'folk'" (Nettl, 2015: 297).

Regarding oral forms of dissemination, the opinion of Tamaz Gabisonia is of value: “Under modern communications, oral dissemination may also imply learning via audio-video-TV channels, and not the knowledge obtained voluntarily from direct, multiple observations on the tradition” (Gabisonia, 2014: 26).

Variance is another main feature of folklore. Certainly it takes time to create a variant of this or that song. Foklorist Vakhushti Kotetishvili writes about variance: “variance implies ‘editorial’ changes made by the repeaters and interpreters of the original text, who, in many cases, even appear as ‘co-authors’. The existence of variants is often so important that, according to the prevailing viewpoint in science, if a text does not have a variant, it will not be considered folklore” (Kotetishvili, 2007: 381). What is the case with author’s songs? At first glance, author’s songs are not characterized by any of the main features of folklore: anonymity of the author, or variance. Nevertheless, there is a practice in ethnomusicology when some author’s songs are considered folk. What leads scholars to say this? In this case, musical parameters are their main determinant.

Interesting is Zemtsovsky’s approach to defining a song as folk. In his opinion, when considering this or that piece as folklore, the main thing is not who created it, but what regulations it operates under, how organically and fully it is folklorized. In solving this difficult problem, the scholar offers two main methodological preconditions: 1. Given the syncretic nature of folk art and its coexistence with folk life, it is clear that no single view of folklore essence explains it fully. There is a need for an integrated approach that combines historical, sociological, aesthetic (in the broadest sense of art history), ethnogeographic, as well as semiotic and structural methods. 2. A complex approach should be used with the organic unity of different methods (and not with their mechanical combination). Folklore is a hierarchically complex dynamic system, the definition of which requires both a complex and systemic approach. In the latter, one leading aspect must be distinguished – a feature which can generalize and clarify the entire system; in relation to which all the others will occupy their hierarchically subordinate place. As such, Zemtsovsky offers tradition – one of the main characteristics of folklore (Zemtsovski, 1977: 36-37).

According to Evsevi Chokhnelidze, “the concepts of folklore and tradition are inseparable, since everything is traditional in folklore; the problem is that folklore and

modernity deal with the relation between the traditional and the modern” (Chokhonelidze, 1995-1996: 1-2).

According to Zemtsovsky, for folklore any connection with modernity, with people’s modern interests, is historically predetermined - it is embedded in the nature of folklore. Modern is everything that functions in specifically considered modernity, as for re-created folklore; according to Soviet musicology, modernity in art is determined either by a formally accepted chronology, or by the novelty of the expressive means, or else the novelty of the subject – in-depth compliance with the tasks of the modern era is necessary. Modern folklore can belong only to the folklore characteristic of the more or less important definite stage in the recent history of mankind (Zemtsovsky, 1977: 30-31).

### **The Popularity Issue of the Performers’ Viewpoint**

Contemporary author’s songs are created on of folk motives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and connected with various stylistic directions. Such examples are often performed with the accompaniment of modernized *panduri*<sup>2</sup> or a small number of instrumental bands (chromatic *panduri*, accordion, bass guitar, drums, etc.). These types of bands and individual singers have a repertoire of mostly patriotic and lyrical content.

When researching the folk nature of contemporary author’s songs, it is important to answer the following questions: 1. What peculiarities are characteristic of author’s songs created at the present stage? 2. Do these peculiarities determine the fact that these examples are called folk? While working on these issues, I myself talked with some performers of contemporary author’s songs. When selecting the performers, I considered two main factors: 1. They are the most popular and requested by listeners in today’s Georgia and 2. The performers I discuss below are distinguished by their repertoire or performance style. As examples, an instrumental band, a family ensemble, a trio and an individual performer are discussed.

The *Bani Group* was created in 2011. Its members are not professional musicians. They are united by love of music. The group has no leader. The opinion of all its members is equally important. Their repertoire comprises modern compositions based on folk

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<sup>2</sup> During the Soviet period, the folk *panduri* was reconstructed. The so-called ‘modernized’ *panduri* is similar to the ‘folk’ one in shape, but it has more frets, and its tuning is also different from that of the folk one. From the 20<sup>th</sup> century, folk *panduri* was gradually replaced by the classical one.

motives. Both the lyrics and the music have specific authors. In this way, they make their own Bani versions. They do not call themselves a folk ensemble, and the instruments used are chromatic *panduri*, bass guitar and drums.<sup>3</sup> They consider that the folk *panduri* is 'undeveloped' and only a few simple East Georgian songs can be performed on it; this is why they prefer chromatic instruments. This is their subjective opinion, which is explained by incomplete knowledge of the artistic and technical parameters of folk instruments and is far from reality. They have a clear answer to the question as to which musical direction do they belong – folklore, however, they also admit their proximity to ethno-jazz band Egari (Giorgi Nikoladze, personal communication, 20 January 2019).

*The Gogochuri sisters* clearly distinguish between old, traditional examples and new songs created by them. Researcher Malkhaz Razmadze recorded a special interview with one of the members of the ensemble, Ketevan Gogochuri, who conveys the general position of the group: "Ketevan Gogochuri confirms that they do not like it when they are referred to as a folk ensemble; however, they do not specify what they call themselves in the light of the fact that they perform authentic folklore as well as music "having a claim to folklore". They note that authentic folklore is more important for them" (Razmadze, 2016-2017: 611). She adds that, "it is desirable for specialists to name the direction they represent in the near future" (Razmadze, 2016-2017: 612).

Recently, videos of the *Trio Mandili* have been especially popular on the Georgian Internet. The trio's official website reads: "In 2014, three charming girls from Georgia "blew up" the World Wide Web and became stars. This "fairy tale" began on the day when three friends, during a walk in the village, decided to sing a song. Tatuli made a self-video and uploaded it to the Internet. This video dramatically changed the girls' lives. Within two weeks the video was watched by a multi-million audience" (Trio Mandili, n.d.).

Even though the members of trio Mandili travel to many countries of the world and perform at folk festivals, traditional music does not occupy a major place in their repertoire. The trio members are young ladies, one of whom plays a chromatic *panduri*.

Trio Mandili mainly performs contemporary author's songs. Their repertoire also includes pop songs, soundtracks of Georgian films, potpourris... Mandili also sing Kazakh

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<sup>3</sup> See Nikoladze, 2014.

and Hungarian folk music. Their repertoire comprises compositions called *Guruli*, *Svanuri* (regions in West Georgia), although their intonational material has nothing to do with the musical characteristics of these regions. The closest to traditional musical regularities is a composition based on Acharan songs.<sup>4</sup>

Davit Kenchiashvili is one of the most popular individual performers of modern author's songs in Georgia. He has no special musical education. As a child he sang in folk ensembles. He comes from the family with musical traditions; therefore, he has had an interest in music since childhood.

Kenchiashvili's repertoire mainly comprises pop-style modern author's songs. He uses chromatic *panduri*, folk percussion and electronic instruments. The compositions are mostly by him. There is no clear answer to my question as to which musical direction he considers himself to belong. He believes that he has created his own, original musical direction and cannot name other groups or individual performers as followers of the direction (Davit Kenchiashvili, personal communication, 21 February 2019).

The audience mostly regards Kenchiashvili's compositions as folklore. He himself has a negative attitude to this. Kenchiashvili explains that he does not perform folklore, although his original songs are based on folk harmony. Musical analysis of these songs reveals that they deviate from the principles of folk musical thinking and resemble folk examples only in general parameters of musical language.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Issue of Folklore in Contemporary Author's Songs from the Choirmasters' Viewpoint (Results of a Sociological Survey)**

I was also interested in what contemporary choirmasters thought about the terms 'folk' and 'author's'. For this, I conducted an anonymous Internet survey. 67 choirmasters from all over Georgia took part in it. The age of the participants ranged between 18 - 75 years: 18-25 – 5.1%; 25-35– 35.6%; 35-50 – 35.6% and 50-75 – 23.7%. The majority of the participants (35.6%) received education at various higher education institutions; 28.8% studied at Giorgi Mtatsmindeli High School for Ecclesiastical Chanting; 25.4% at Tbilisi State Conservatoire; and the smallest number – 10.2% – at the Church Choir Conducting

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<sup>4</sup> See Trio Mandili, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> See Kenchiashvili Official, 2016.



Department of Theatre and Film of Georgia State University. The participants had to explain what the term 'author's song' meant to them. I also asked them to indicate whether they themselves created songs in the folk style or performed original works created by other choirmasters. In both cases they were asked to name examples.

When asked whether they have composed author's songs in folk style, the majority (83.3%) answered negatively. Among the variants of those who gave a positive answer, one can name *Naduri* songs, *Alilo*, *Simghera Tskaltuboze* and Megrelian songs: *Vardis do Chucheles*, *Chkimi qorofili chkim kholos*, *Miorkini si koichku*, etc. One of the applicants even named his own piano work as being an author's songs. In the list of author's songs, I also came across arrangements of Laz examples: *Ele mele kismeti*, *Mzogha ucha*, *Kulanishi destane* and others.

When asked if they performed songs composed by other choirmasters, the majority (68.9%) answered in the affirmative. Most of the named examples are author's songs composed by choirmasters: Varlam Simonishvili's *Dila* and *Baghia chveni kveqana*; Giorgi Iobishvili's *Natvra*; Artem Erkomaishvili's *Skhivadaskhvagvari siqvaruli* and *Khelovneba*; Anzor Erkomaishvili's *Khareba da gogia*, *Tu ase turpa iqavi*, *Mival guriashi mara* and others. In addition, the list of author's songs also included different choirmasters' variants of a number of traditional songs, for example: the Sikharulidzes' *Chven mshvidoba*; the Berdzenishvilis' *Perad shindi*; Vepkhia Antia's *Ia patnepi*, etc. The list also included the songs of composers Revaz Laghidze, Iakob Bobokhidze and Nana Belkania.

As far as the present author is aware, a definition of the term 'author's song' has not yet received due attention in Georgian ethnomusicology. Consequently, the choirmasters' definitions of this term were particularly interesting to me. Most choirmasters define 'author's song' as "a song that has a specific author." Here are a few different definitions: "A song composed not by a collective, but by one person or a small group of people", a "non-folk song", "primary piece", "song created by a composer", "A piece created by a person, or a folk piece transformed to a level in which the elements introduced by this person predominate over those of the folk original", etc. Of many definitions, only two could be considered truly convincing: "a folk-style song that has an author, even a non-professional" and "a melody based on a folk motif, on someone's own or a folk poem."

Thus, it can be said that a small part of today's choirmasters do create author's songs in 'folk style', however, they realize that these are not folk, but their own author's works.

### **The Issue of the Definition of Contemporary Author's Songs in Scientific Literature**

It is clear that the process of creating modern examples based on folk motives takes place all over the world. Corsica provides an example. Ethnomusicologist Caroline Bithell distinguishes four directions in her attitude towards Corsican polyphony:

1. Polyphonic arrangements of original monodic songs;
2. Revival of half-forgotten polyphonic repertoire;
3. New polyphonic songs;
4. Experiments in cultural fusion (collaboration with jazz musicians, etc.)  
(Bithell, 2000: 43-44).

Of these four directions we consider the so-called 'new polyphonic songs' as relatives of contemporary Georgian author's songs.

Let us return to the main subject of the present research.

In the modern era, several Georgian ethnomusicologists have attempted to give a name to author's songs based on folk motives:

Ethnomusicologist Tamaz Gabisonia suggests the term "parafolklore" to describe author's compositions created today: "The previously mentioned non-academic music with ethnic colouring, nourished by folk or pseudo-folk motives and accessories, is predominantly characterized by oral transmission and enjoys popularity among a certain segment of listeners, and is referred to as "folk". For these features, as well as the fact that this phenomenon has almost no connection with the traditional direction and develops in parallel with it, we call it "parafolklore" (Gabisonia, 2015: 146-147).

Malkhaz Razmadze has a different position: he refers to the music of this style and direction as "modernized folklore". In his opinion, "certainly, a similar style with a claim to folklore can today only conditionally be called folklore, since the share of folklore is very small in it" (Razmadze, 2016-2017: 613). According to the researcher, "this is the

direction that has originated in the vicinity of folklore, grown from it, has been arranged, transformed, and adapted to modern requirements... It is characterized by modernized (including electronic) instruments, sound, even style of dress, etc” (Razmadze, 2016-2017: 613). For these and other objective reasons, Malkhaz Razmadze refers to this musical direction as “modernized folklore”.

In terms of performance, Razmadze distinguishes two types: the first group includes performers close to folklore; they are characterized by natural sound, polyphony, tertiary parallelism of upper voices against the background of a bass drone, singing in a duet without bass, live accompaniment. Among such performers the researcher names family ensembles, such as the Gogochuris, the Nakeuris, the Tsiklauris, the Zviadauris and the group TSU Gordela. The second group includes performers distanced from folklore. They are mainly characterized by solo performance, singing to a recording, emphasizing vocal performance... Among such performers the scholar names Davit Kenchiashvili, Ana Malazonia, Mariam Elieshvili, Ana Chincharauli and others (Razmadze, 2016-2017: 609).

Ethnomusicologist Teona Lomsadze suggests the term “popfolk” for contemporary author’s songs: “in modern day Georgia “popfolk” (previously known in folk circles as “pseudo-folklore”) is a very popular musical direction with a folk nuance. Its democracy and wide dissemination, standardized lyrics and some elements of rethought folk music mean that this music is presented as a kind of symbiosis of folk and pop music styles; therefore, we consider naming it with the term “popfolk” to be logical especially since the latter well reflects the musical diversity of this phenomenon (Lomsadze, 2021: 14-15).

As we have seen, Georgian authors refer to modern author’s songs as “para folklore”, “modernized folklore” and “pop folk”. In all three definitions they are still referred to as folklore. The difference is only in the prefix. As for the performers themselves, some call their work “folk”, some “author’s”, others find it difficult to give definition. The main problem, however, is that such examples are disseminated as folk music on the Internet and, therefore, are perceived by the public as folklore.

In my opinion, it is preferable to call this style of music ‘contemporary author’s songs’, because they are the heirs of author’s examples on folk motives created in the Soviet period. This will make it easier to distinguish them from ‘true folk’ examples.

## Conclusions

- Music of many styles and genres is heard in Georgia today; it shows certain connections with folk music. An important place among these styles and genres is occupied by so-called 'contemporary author's songs'. Such examples are encountered on the Internet as folk music and, therefore, are perceived as folklore by the audience. Naming the musical examples of this style 'contemporary author's songs' will also facilitate distinguishing them from 'true folk' examples.
- Of the main characteristics of folklore, neither anonymity nor variant nature is characteristic of author's examples. In such cases, the main determinants are their musical parameters. Contemporary author's songs are distinguished by the simplicity of their musical language and are mostly based on the musical and intonational sources of the East Georgian mountains. These examples often show connections with North Caucasian motives. They are characterized by simple, repetitive, sequential phrases, couplet structure and two- or three-sound bass. In my opinion, all these features contribute to their easy memorization and popularity.
- Some of the contemporary song performers interviewed by me think that they perform folk music, some categorically distance themselves from what the audience calls folklore, yet others believe that naming of the direction which they perform is the competence of researchers.
- Choirmasters interpret the term 'author's song' differently from each other. A few of them also create their own works in folk style, although they are well aware that these are not folk music.
- The term 'folklore' ('para folklore', 'modernized folklore', 'pop folk') is encountered in the works of Georgian ethnomusicologists when attempting to describe contemporary author's songs. In the opinion of this author, their authorship should be emphasized when naming such examples.
- The study of the folklore aspect of author's songs, as well as of folklore and contemporaneity in general, of the relationship between the traditional and the contemporary is a dynamic and lengthy (almost constant) process, which depends

on the essence and nature of folklore itself, on the constant variability of folk life, the vitality and stability/development of tradition. And, if we consider tradition as the main aspect in determining the essence of folklore, then it would seem premature to regard contemporary authors' songs as purely folk music. Time is the main factor in their folklorization.

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