

Adyghe Traditional polyphony and its transformation in modern conditions

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Originality of Adyghe Traditional multipart singing drew attention of travelers, spies, militarists and politicians, merchants, doctors, etc. Great Russian composer S.I. Taneev (who visited North Caucasia in 1885) was one of the first who has described specific Adyghe two-part texture in musical terms and concepts. In the 20th century scholars started to investigate Adyghe vocal polyphony and for a long time searched for the adequate name. Scholars spoke about «special two voice texture» (Shu), «drone polyphony» (Kivalova), «an antiphonal and responsorial singing» (L. Goncharov), «diaphony with drone», «antiphonal oppositions», «stretta-functional two voice texture» (Blaeva), «a solo-group manner linear two voice texture» (Ashkhotov). After the works of Joseph Jordania, and after the publication of the proceedings of the regular scholarly conferences and symposia on traditional polyphony, organized in Georgia from 1984, the definition «solo-group» or «solo-drone» singing has been established in Russian ethnomusicology for a designation of Adyghe polyphony. The European term «**multipart singing**» - in the Russian ethnomusicology has the generalized meaning connected with the characteristic of any type of polyphony. Terms «solo-group» and «solo-drone singing» were included into an educational practice, and became easily understood for the all-Russian scholarly community. Two distinct parts make a basis for such polyphony: solo and the bass. The soloist in Adyghe is referred as кыхэзыдзэм - kykhazedzem - (lit. "the one who starts to sing"). The part of the bass, sung by a group of singers in Adyghean is referred as «жъу» - (dzju – literally means "group of men", or

“everybody”). The melody of the soloist and the choral bass can have three different forms of interaction: antyphonal, stretal and drone (Sausyrko, Ashmez). (Саусырыко, Ащмэз).

During the 20th century the active and in a certain sense an "irreversible" disappearance of Adyghe traditional polyphonic singing traditions has been taking place. The principal causes of sharp changes in Adyghe musical culture have been several:

1. Evolution of traditional system of musical genres;
2. Transformation of the basic social conditions providing vitality of traditional culture;
3. Formation of new performing forms in connection with the new contents of songs;
4. Formation of new value systems, particularly in the form of a new Soviet mass song;
5. Introduction of new musical instruments in traditional society;
6. Change of aesthetics in connection with the new instrumental sound;
7. Ideological pressure from Soviet officials;
8. Adaptive ability of culture vocal polyphony "has dispersed" into instrumental versions of songs.

It is possible to speak about the changes of the type of musical thinking in Adyghea during the 20th century. In concrete historical conditions of the 19th century the leading part was played by the lyric-heroic song presented in solo-drone form. In 20th century lyrical and mass choral genres became leading genres, represented in forms of solo or choral mass texture. The same way as the dominating ancient epic tradition was changed into lyrical-heroic genre, central genre in Adyghe national musical culture, later on solo lyrical genre became leading. So during the thousand-year-long development of musical culture of Adyghe, we can possibly speak about the natural evolutionary processes leading to the birth of polyphony, and then to its disappearance.

Up to the 20th century the main cultural centers of Adyghe traditional social life were special houses for visitors (*khachesh*). They were on the territory of each manor. In these houses men gathered for the dialogue, to listen to the stories of the older men, to sing, to discuss plots of the songs, their truthfulness and instructiveness, and also to play musical instruments. With the arrival of the Soviet authority the cultural form *khachesh* was gradually

superseded by the Houses of Culture, which were working under the strict ideological control of local Communist Party authority. In *khachesh* traditional songs existed simultaneously in two versions - prosaic and poetic. Before the beginning of a song or after its ending performers would discuss truthfulness of the plot, recall the history of the events that occurred in the song, explained the details of the text, including the events which were not included in a song lyrics, etc. The very same songs, performed on a stage of the “House of Culture”, was already without it’s prosaic versions, and have been calculated only on musical impression. Deprived the prosaic version, the ancient song became obscure to the listeners. Traditional song ceased to exist in natural conditions. So, one of the main reasons of disappearance Adyghe solo-group songs was the *change of conditions of its natural existence*.



Only partly it was kept on a stage of amateur performances and on a professional stage, at drama theatre and a philharmonic society (as an example, traditional songs from the stage musical «The Songs of Our fathers»). However, stage performance transformed solo-drone song too. It was performed in a “shorthand” form, as the part of lyrics were deleted from the text because of the limitation of time. Also, improvisation, always present in traditional performance, was not allowed in a stage version of traditional songs, because the content of concert pieces were always heavily censored by the party authorities, so all the songs were allowed on a stage only after the preliminary approval. Therefore, improvisation on a stage was inadmissible. Some of the best traditional singers refused to sing on a stage, not being able and not wishing to perform the learnt (not improvised) versions of songs, or to face the listeners, or to change sound according to stage conditions. Absence of the “performance

freedom”, necessity of following the scenic behavior rules and specific sound also fostered further changes in traditional singing.



Changes in traditional forms of singing has been caused by changed structure of listeners, as well as changes in ethnic and social characteristic of the region. It is mostly unknown to the Western world, that as a result of the Caucasian war and mass exile of the population during the second half of the 19th century there was only one percent of original Adyghe population left on traditional Adyghe territories. Northern Caucasus in the second half the 19th century was actively occupied and re-settled by Russian Empire. Adyghe multipart song for the perception of Russians was rather inconvenient (unusual and alien) phenomenon for them, but it was different with the accordion accompanied traditional dances. Therefore, ancient multipart song was marginalized and mostly replaced by entertaining and exotic colorful dances.

Ancient songs become a sign on the past life. For the Soviet authority many of the songs were ranked in the category of "harmful", because the deeds of local noblemen, who were fighting with the imperial Russian authority and Russian military forces, were praised in most of these songs. Understandably, the majority Adyghe songs were connected with the Caucasian war, therefore for the Soviet authority they were objectionable. Instead of the traditional polyphonic songs in traditional solo-drone texture the choral performance of Soviet mass songs with optimistic and patriotic character began to be cultivated in Soviet clubs. “International” – the mass song of proletariat was translated into Adyghe, performance of

newly composed songs about Lenin, Stalin and Communist Party became mandatory on each Soviet holiday. So, there were plenty of reasons for the traditional song to gradually decline.

The problem of the relevance of the content and the form of performance of traditional songs is also very important. In the 19th century traditional songs, in which the great heroes were praised, the important historical events (fights, revolts, collisions between tribes) were depicted, together with the strong lyrical feelings of heroes separated from their beloved were described, the existing solo-drone form of the performance was relevant. Songs from the 20th century had totally different content: the new socialist life became the leading theme, collective-farm everyday life, new heroes (mechanics, collective farmers, milkmaids, etc.) were depicted and praised. Solo-drone form for such songs was somewhat inappropriate. Traditional form of singing carried deep sense of a solitude and empathy, and the new solo form and particularly a mass song corresponded to the new ideological norms much better. Ideological content of the new mass songs became the most prominent characteristic feature of the new genre.

Nevertheless, some "rudiments" of Adyghe traditional polyphony were present in new song forms and performing conditions. Here we are referring to the following:

- New versions of monophony songs were created, in which traditional polyphonic "vertical" was expressed in "horizontal" linear development of a melody. In new solo versions the melody included the most important moments of the bass (*dzju*) as well. Quite often function of keepers of traditional polyphony was carried out by women, who kept in memory both melody and *dzju*, often reproducing them both in the original antiphonal manner (musical example "Si Kabzy").
- Examples of traditional vocal polyphony moved into the repertoire of accordion players (pshine in Adyghe). It was easy to reproduce complex vocal and instrumental texture on accordion. For example, in the songs of Umar Tkhabisimov which were performed with the accordion accompaniment, the bass (*dzju*) is heard in accordion.
- In a part of new professionally composed songs the interaction of solo and *dzju* parts played the crucial part in construction, composition, and musical language (song of Tkhabisimova – Kofa).
- Interestingly, one of the venues for the revival of traditional polyphony became contemporary pop- and rock music (example - Islamei).



Ensemble Dzju

Is the revival of traditional forms of polyphony possible? It is possible and very much probable, because after the disintegration of the USSR the national consciousness and feel of identity strongly increased in Adyghea. Numerous new ensembles – mostly female ensembles were formed. Women demonstrated bigger flexibility towards the new requirements of Adyghean society. In the 1990th the woman-professional singers appeared on a stage and started singing the ancient male repertoire, demanded in a post-socialist society. Almost 10 later new men's ensembles appeared as well (for example, the ensemble «*Dzju*») with the repertoire based on "new" ancient songs. It is necessary to note, that revival of tradition is mostly connected with so called “memorial” genres – epic songs, heroic songs and dirges (*gybze*). The ancient lyric-heroic tradition can and should become a part of a modern life as a sign of Adyghean ethnic culture, as a representative of aesthetic and ethical ideal and, finally, as a sample of spirituality and high aesthetic level of national musical thinking.