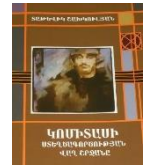


Komitas: His Early Creative Period

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Amrots Group Press, Yerevan (November 2014)



This monograph in the Armenian language analyses the early compositional period (1891-99) of Komitas (1869-1935), the Armenian ethnomusicologist, historical musicologist, music educator, singer, choral conductor and priest who is widely regarded as the founder of modern Armenian classical music. How did Komitas's unique approach to music research and compositional creation develop? What were his aesthetical, artistic and technical priorities, and where did they come from? The main sources for the study are the author's autographs from the Komitas archives at the Charents Museum of Literature and Arts in Yerevan. The book also includes some of his early unpublished musical scores.

Komitas's early period can be divided into three stages. The first was from 1891 to 1893, when he was a student at Gevorkian Seminary in Echmiadzin (Armenia). His arrangements of traditional Armenian melodies during this period are characterized by parallel fourths, fifths and triads. The second stage was 1894-1895, during which Komitas studied harmony, first alone and later with Makar Yekmalian. In the third stage, 1896-99, Komitas was a student at Humboldt University in Berlin. The third stage was dominated by two contrasting approaches: while mastering the techniques of European music, Komitas was at the same time searching for a new compositional style that reflected his Armenian roots. His Berlin compositions include pieces based on texts of German poets (Goethe, Lenau etc.), and Armenian liturgy in German translation with traditional melodies.

The book examines stylistic transformations in Komitas' early compositions. These include:

1. Melody and theme. Komitas was writing according to the principles of Western European music, inspired by Richard Wagner's concept of the never-ending melody (unendliche Melodie) – an approach that disappeared in his later compositions. During the first stage of his early creative period in Armenia, Komitas preserved traditional Armenian melodies and chants without any change; in the third stage in Berlin, he extracted whole phrases, changed their form, and removed notes. The arrangements that he wrote in Berlin demonstrated a new sensitivity for the specific prosodic patterns of different Armenian dialects.
2. Meter and rhythm. In the first stage, Komitas's meter and rhythm were classical: 3/4, 4/4, 6/8. A possible exception is "Tando", a choral piece that includes a polymeter of 5/4 and 3/4. In Berlin, Komitas started to divide measures according to the rhythm of the sung text, which often resulted in measures of unequal length – an unusual and original approach in the context of late 19th-century written European music.

3. Harmony. Until 1893, Komitas often wrote parallel fourths and fifths, reminiscent of organum in European medieval music, which he could not know by that time. Prior to Berlin, 1893-1895, his harmonizations were based on major and minor triads, without modulations; he also employed non-standard functional chord relations (such as the chord C#3-F4-B4 in the key of D minor, or G3-D4-A4 in D minor). Most of his works written in Berlin followed the rules of 19th-century Western harmony and tonality, but Komitas also used multi-layered chords (e.g. the chord E3-Bb3-D4-Ab4, comprising two superposed diminished 5ths, and ninth and eleventh chords (e.g. Cb3-Gb3-Eb4-Db5, a Cb9 chord with missing 7th).
4. Texture. Music from Komitas's first stage is predominately homorhythmic (based on chord progressions). The second stage is more contrapuntal and heterophonic, which is typical of Komitas' later music. Later, he developed a personal polyphonic style - not classical, but typically "Komitasian" - based on the modes and scales of the Armenian music and employing poly-melodic principles.

About the author:

Tatevik Shakhkulyan holds a PhD in Arts from the Institute of Arts of the Armenian National Academy of Sciences and is currently Senior Researcher at the same Institute. She teaches at the Department of Music Theory, Komitas State Conservatory in Yerevan, Armenia, and is choral conductor for the Karin Armenian Folk Song and Dance Ensemble and the S. Jerbashyan music school in Yerevan. She was awarded the prize for the best research contribution in art, language and literature at the Worldwide Armenian Congress (2011), and regularly presents her research to Armenian and international conferences and congresses, publishing her findings in Armenian, Russian, Polish or English. In 2014-2015, she was guest researcher at the Centre for Systematic Musicology, University of Graz, Austria.