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FERENC LISZT'S APPRAISAL BY KOMITAS VARDAPET

VALORACIÓN DE FERENC LISZT POR KOMITAS VARDAPET

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Abstract

This article discusses the brief but very meaningful work of the famous Armenian composer, music ethnologist, music pedagogue and musicologist Komitas Vardapet devoted to the Hungarian composer Ferenc Liszt. The work elaborates on the reasons why Komitas spoke about Liszt. The article discusses the scientific viewpoints of Komitas and his thoughts, which gain considerable project importance during the time.

Key words:

Komitas Vardapet, Ferenc Liszt, Armenian national music, Hungarian national music, new romantic piano school, Armenian orchestra art.

Resumen:

El presente artículo trata de la obra, breve aunque plena de significado, del famoso compositor armenio, etnólogo musical, pedagogo de la música y musicólogo Komitas Vardapet, dedicada al compositor húngaro Ferenc Liszt. El trabajo se elabora a partir de las razones por las cuales Komitas habló acerca de Liszt. El artículo, aborda los puntos de vista científicos de Komitas y su pensamiento, que ganan, con el tiempo, una considerable proyección e importancia.

Palabras clave:

Komitas Vardapet, Ferenc Liszt, Música nacional armenia, Música nacional húngara, nueva escuela romántica de piano, Arte orquestal armenio.

In 2011 the world celebrates the 200 anniversary of Ferenc Liszt, and within this event we will discuss the laconic, however very straightforward assessment of Liszt made by Komitas.

In his works Komitas Vardapet has dwelled upon some great representatives of western music: Giuseppe Verdi and Richard Wagner. The articles of Komitas devoted to these celebrities were illustrated in different volumes of "Taraz" newspaper during 1914, published in Tbilisi.

The main focus of this article is the similarities and relations between Liszt and Komitas Vardapet, as well as the motives why Komitas spoke about Liszt. Komitas was the first in the Armenian musicology, who referred to the representative of the Hungarian music school Ferenc Liszt, mentioning the main episodes of the composer fruitful life and activity, as well as peculiarities of his work style and innovative trends.

The brief article written by Komitas includes a huge material for scientific research, which amaze with its dept and the knowledge of questions concerned. The article, which was titled “Ferents Liszt”, was published in one of the numbers / N 19 / of “Taraz” weekly in Tbilisi, in 1904. This article was preceded by Komitas Vardapet’s short but meaningful studies devoted to Richard Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi¹, distinguished representatives of the western music world, which were also published in serial numbers of “Taraz” weekly / N8; N 23 / in 1904.

Why did Komitas touch on the personality and work of these geniuses, who had indisputable investment in the “synthesis of art”; and which was the reason for such interest toward those composers?

It is known that Komitas studied in Berlin and during his further activities he was in cultural touch with the society of European capitals. The advanced European life full of cultural events, the valuable knowledge, accumulated while studying and the unforgettable impression of the years passed in Berlin later did certainly become the topic of further research for Komitas Vardapet. In Berlin Komitas possessed a reach library of Handel’s, Haydn’s, Mozart’s, Beethoven’s, as well as Verdi’s and Wagner’s klaviers². In the history of music Wagner-List relative and creative ties as well as epoch-making importance of their music for the “Future Art” are widely known, and an interested musician like Komitas should have been aware of this.

On April 22, 1896 in his letter to Karapet Kostanian³ Komitas wrote: “Շնորհիվ իմ ուսուցչի, կան մի շարք ստեղծագործ անձինք, որոնք ոգեշնչում են ինձ. Մենք գրում ենք տարբեր ստեղծագործություններ, հավաքվում , քննարկում”⁴

It maybe so, that during one of those aesthetic ideological debates Komitas decided to touch on the European musical giants.

To be more specific, Komitas, as a musician with fresh mind highly appreciated the innovative ideas of the creative representatives of “Future Music” so he delved into the original peculiarities of their music.

It was Komitas Vardapet who first elucidated the personality and the art of the Hungarian composer Ferenc Liszt in Armenian music.

It was the comprehensive knowledge of German music, Liszt’s huge importance in that music, his charming personality and innovative expressions of his art that Komitas Vardapet was interested

1 V. Korganov was the first Armenian musician who touched upon Dz. Verdi in a biographical essays, in 1897. It was published in Tbilisi, magazine” Caucasian Messenger” in 1907.

2 KHACHIK, Samvelian, 11 (Soviet Art, 1969): 24.

3 Karapet Kostanian- armenologist, teacher, from 1885-1891 Inspector of in Georgian Seminary, in Echmiadzin, close relative of Komitas Vardapet

4 SARGIS, Khachents, 2009: 33. “Thanks to my teacher / R. Schmidt; L. Sahakyan / I have a large epoch of highly honorable creative personalities, which really stimulates me; we write various musical pieces, gather in private houses, play them to discuss to to debate.gather in private houses, play them to discuss, to to to debate”.

in. Besides, deeply studying Komitas' and Liszt's scientific biography we noticed some similar facts. A musician with a powerful intuition like Komitas, could not miss this and it may have served as another reason for touching upon the one of the classics of Hungarian national school. Surely, it is possible to find various similarities between geniuses, especially when they are from previous era. However, between Komitas and List there are too many such connections, which seem impossible from the first view but exist in reality.

These two geniuses are known in the history of music as the most popular representatives of national music. Due to the Ferenc Liszt's activity the national school of composers was established. Komita Vardapt was the founder of Armenian musical science and the school of composers. The art of Komitas is based on the national music.

Liszt had his own approach toward the branches of Hungarian national music / rural, urban /, showing preference in the urban folklore.⁵

The major topic of musical research for both composers was the peculiarities of language, style and ways of expression / melody, harmony /, which further was used in their music, of course in different variations.

Komitas Vardapet acted as a performer as well / conductor, singer / and really succeeded in this field, exploring the "language" and the opportunities of chorus in his own way.

Ferenc Liszt, who was one of the prominent conductors of his era, is known in the history as unequalled, virtuoso pianist, who explored the "language of the piano" in a new way / Definition of Milshtein /, opening new horizons in this sphere.

For both Komitas Varapet and Ferenc Liszt the role of pedagogy in their educational activity was very important, so they educated various young musicians.⁶ 1879 in Weimar Ferenc Liszt educated the composer and musician from Izmir Stephan Elmass. The Armenian musician devoted 6 **etudes** to his well known teacher.

Both Komitas Vardapet and Ferenc Liszt were patriots and were always concerned with the destiny of their motherlands. List lived and composed in Europe and was popular there, however, he founded the first Musical Academy in Pest, in 1875, putting forward all his efforts and energy.

Komitas moved to Kostandnupolis in 1910 to realize his desired wish- the program of founding a conservatoire for Armenian talented musicians; here Komitas passed away.

Both composers were tightly related to the church and spiritual music. Since 1865 Liszt was living mostly in Rome /the center of Catholics / as an abbot; this had a great impact on his way of life and music. The relationship with Franciscan Union provided an opportunity to live a secular life, to write and compose, as well as to bestow charity. Liszt's spiritual compositions were written at this very period. It is worth mentioning that Liszt's name / Frants, Francisc / was originated from the name of the union, the supporter of which was Liszt's father, Adam Liszt.

5 BARTOK, B., 1911; 1931.

6 Liszt had approximately 380 students, and almost always gave lesson free of charge.

The role of the Holy Seminary of Echmiadzin is known to be indisputable in the life and creative development of Komitas Vardapet. The spiritual status promoted Vardapet's song-collecting activity in Armenia as well as his concerts and scientific activity in Europe.

Both composers had most of their concerts, and develop educational work in the capitals of Europe. Both Komitas and Liszt were endowed with the talent to arrange the music, to expose it to differential development and crystallization. In both his personal compositions and arrangements of the music of other composers Liszt had a very original and principal approach. For example, Liszt's famous "Hungarian Coronation Mass" is based upon highly -skillfully arranged motives of "Rakosi Song", as for "Hungarian Rhapsodies", they are based on the harmonies of Hungarian melodies, which Liszt listened from Hungarian gypsies and wrote down in 1940. / as would be defined by Komitas /.

Liszt's musical principles were formed due to the excellent knowledge of peculiarities of foreign music / French, Germanic /. He had huge investment in spreading Czech, Polish and Norwegian music.

Komitas's knowledge of European music was based upon the appropriation of the merits of national and eastern music. He played a great role in studying Turkish, Kurdish and Jewish⁷ music. Both composers were especially interested in literature and philosophy, which was very often expressed in the content of their music, in the selection of music genres. Public speaking was one of the most important fields of the activity of two composers, who seem to be too far from one another. Both of them minutely felt the problems of music art and reacted to them.

Enormous literature is devoted to Komitas' and Liszt's lives and activities. They were touched upon by both their cohorts and successive researchers.

In the present musical science there is enormous literature devoted to Komitas⁸.

Among the materials published Liszt's inter vivos the most valuable ones are letters / Published in La Mara, in 1886 /, as well as Trifonov's, Stasov's and his student Zilotti's memoirs.

The monographs of Hungarian musicologist Gaal⁹ and Russian musicologist, pianist Milshstein, who was one of the honorable members of Liszt's society, also have a scientific value.¹⁰

Hungarian composers had their own place in Komitas' biography.

In 1896 Komitas arrived at Berlin and was presented to the famous Hungarian fiddler inspector of Royal Conservatoire, Joseph Yoakhimin¹¹, who was Liszt's friend. It was he, who advised Komitas to take lessons at Schmidt's. Velez Yegon, who was a famous Hungarian musicologist, doctor of Philosophy, expert of Byzantine music, further researcher of Mahler's and Schonberg's art, also highly appreciated Komitas' polyphonic art.

These similarities could have served as preconditions for Komitas to touch upon Liszt. His article is a real scientific value, which even today astonishes with its concrete definitions and founded view-points.

7 Komitas view points on Jewish music are discussed in GNESSIN's work, "Communist", Yerevan, 5th of April, 1946, N 81

8 SAHAKYAN, Lusine, 2010.

9 GAAL, D., 1986: 58.

10 MILSHTEIN, Ya, 1956.

11 Up to dates it is unknown who advised Komitas to be presented to Joseph Yoakhimin, we are still looking for this fact.

In his brief article Komitas touched upon all the important facts of Liszt's life and work in a chronological order; childhood, teachers, Hungarian benefactors, his debuts and victories, his famous cohorts / Paganini, Chopin, Berlioz /, the important episodes of educational activity, Liszt's stylish peculiarities, innovative trends and the creative research, connected with the spiritual status. Komitas Vardapet in his article highlighted several biographical facts and important episodes that played a great role in the formation of Liszt's personality. “Վիեննայում, երբ նա ավարտեց Հրաժեշտի բալադը, Բեթովենը, որը հմայքով լսում էր, բարձրացավ բեմ և համբուրեց նրան”.¹² This majestic episode was touched upon by both Liszt's biographer and Komitas himself, for him this was one of the most valuable and sacramental memory.

“New hurricane of applause. And suddenly silence. It was Beethoven, he went on the stage. The greatest musician hugged and kissed Liszt. And ovations... It was no longer applause, it was a storm! They stood next one another on the stage: Beethoven and Ferenc Liszt.”¹³

In his further recital, Komitas with evident admiration mentioned that in 1839 Liszt wrote to the Committee caring about Bonn Beethoven's monument and inquired that he would be responsible for the missing / huge amount / expenses¹⁴.

This is to highlight both Liszt's noble nature and his hereditary ties with heroism of Beethovenian art. As if Komitas mentioned Liszt's generosity and Beethoven's greatness. It is known, that in 1923 Ferenc Liszt with his father leaved Berlin for Paris to enter the Conservatoire of Paris. The authors of studies, devoted to Liszt's biography insist that he was not admitted because he was a foreigner.

“We were warned that there would be obstacles on my way of admission at the Conservatoire, but we were not aware of the law, prohibiting foreigners to study there. Cherubini was the first who told us.”¹⁵

The Director of Paris Conservatoire, Luigi Cherubini, who was of Italian nationality, considered the Conservatoire of Paris school only for Frenchmen / more specifically only for Parisians /, however, in 1825 he himself invited Mendelssohn, who was of Jewish nationality, to study there. In the works devoted to List this fact was commented in different unfounded ways. Komitas was the first who gave a concrete and logical explanation. “When they moved to Paris from Wien Liszt's father wanted his son to graduate the full course of Parisian musical school, however, the director of the school, Cherubini, did not like children with unique talents, so he did not admitted Liszt, reasoning that he was a foreigner.”¹⁶

Very often talented musicians resisted against the academic nature of Paris Conservatoire.

It is known, that C. Debussy, who was the founder of French musical impressionism, was not in harmonic relations with D. E. Durand¹⁷, his teacher of harmony. Hector Berlioz, the brightest representative of French romanticism and Liszt's relative, had discrepancies with Lessuer, who was a professor in the same academy / especially connected with Beethoven's music /. There is plenty of this kind of examples.¹⁸

12 KOMITAS, V., 1941: 180.

13 GAAL, D., 1986: 58.

14 KOMITAS, V., 1941: 180.

15 MILSHTEIN, Ya, 1956: 68.

16 KOMITAS, V., 1941: 178.

17 MARTINOV, I., DEBUSSY, C., 1964: 6.

18 BERLIOZ, H., 1967: 46.

The fact that Liszt did not study at the Conservatoire of Paris did not serve as a hindrance for his perfection as a further musician. The Parisian society who loved music, greeted the resounding performance of young Hungarian musician with exultation.

Liszt's compatriots also played an important role in his life, full of creative events. Shandor Teleki, Mikhay Vyoroshmartin, Baron Miklosh Veslenin, Albert Apponin are the personalities who really supported Liszt materially and morally, the composers' correspondence come to prove this¹⁹.

The role of Hungarian Benefactors in the early epoch of Liszt's life was very often ignored and many researchers / especially in the Soviet period / just went round this very important fact. Komitas not only touched upon this fact, moreover, he mentioned the amount of assistance / 600 gulden / and the terms of becoming a master and musicologist. Most probably Komitas learned about this from the mass media, while studying there.

Komitas did not miss any biographical particularity and even touched upon the political and ideological atmosphere, in which Liszt's personality was formed: July Revolution, contacts with Parisian intellectuals and, of course, a huge impact of Paganini and Berlioz, who were the founders of romantic music.

To highlight the innovative and original nature of Liszt's art, Komitas Vardapet thorough explored the most peculiar and key characteristic of Liszt's art- programming.

Liszt as a romantic in his compositions gave importance to the programming, he had his own principles of reproducing literary characters via instrumental music, his original, generalized programming.

Komitas Vardapet defined the creative principle of romantics / Liszt, Berlioz / that Liszt, Young Musician, was sure that music should reproduce poetic ideas, so with Berlioz hand in hand began creating programming, i.e. drawing music / programmusik /²⁰.

The word "drawing" that Vardapet used very precisely defines the generalized expressions of List's programming music, the composer's creative principle: "to draw, to present the ideology, character."²¹

In "Simphonische Dichtungen" / Symphonic Poem /, created by Liszt, the ideology and characters had inevitable importance. According to one of the figures of Renaissance, Leonardo Da Vinci: "painting is a lyric to see, and lyric is a painting to listen."

This very lyric, that was very often drawn by Liszt through sounds of piano and orchestra.

"Liszt is the king of pianists." / The definition of Russian musician Vielgorski /

There are legends about pianist Liszt. One of Liszt's cohorts, Russian earl and pianist Yu. Vielgorskin, who first presented Russian national music to Liszt, was astonished with Liszt's proficiency of Performance. The listeners mentioned that Liszt used detsims easily, simultaneously paying attention to the equality and purity of sounds. The peculiarities of List's piano performance are discussed in the second part of Ya. Milshtein's monographs. In his essay, Komitas Vardapet concisely but precisely touched upon one of the important fields of Liszt's activities, highlighting his technical and performing unlimited

19 LA-MARA, 1886, Part 1.

20 KOMITAS, V., 1941: 179.

21 ACHARIAN, Hr., 1977, Part C: 456.

abilities, especially connected with fingers positions on the piano and free springs / so called detsimas / .
 "Liszt filled the gap of his performance / tension of fingers and springs /."²²

In the Armenian musicology it was in Komitas Vardapet's article where the personality of Joseph Fetis / more precisely Feti /, one of the founders of Belgian and French schools of musicology and musical criticism, was first touched upon. Joseph Fetis was the first musicologist who studied the musical aesthetics, as well as ethno music / especially civilization of not European peoples /. In Europe Fetis' "Histoire générale de la musique depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu' à nos jours" / "Universal Music History" / till the 15th century / consists of 5 parts // thorough research is widely known, another famous work is "Esquisse de l'histoire de l'harmonie considérée comme art et comme science systématique"²³ research.

In his article Komitas wrote that famous Chronicler of music Joseph Fetis in 1882 carried out a discussion on the philosophy of music, explaining the future and the advantages of new sounds. This inspired Liszt, and he, full with fresh ideas started writing in a comprehensive, live and free style, which in its turn served as a basis for German new school.²⁴

This fact is not studied and recorded in Liszt's scientific biography. The scientific origins of this fact are also unknown. Vardapet did not mention which discussion had such a great impact on Liszt, however, in our view point it was the abovementioned discussion about the harmony, which was published in Paris, in 1840. Fetis, Berlioz's ideological opponent, became Liszt's proponent because of his studies on the civilizations, unknown to Europe, with his revelations of new harmonic language, the origins of which are free mentality of national music.

In the further text of the article there is another important fact; Liszt established a musical school in Weimar. "Weimar became a central meeting hall for talented musicians / Raff, Byulov, Tausig, Cornelius and others / and the complex of North German school."²⁵

Without exaggerations, we are astonished with the comprehensive definitions, their scientific explanations and original style of writing of Great musicologist. Komitas' appropriate and precise conclusions are based on the exclusive musical abilities and intuition, on the comprehensive knowledge of musicology and the sense of appropriateness. Vardapet's thoughts, his evaluations of musicians / even provisional viewpoints / have a central meaning. Komitas' article which consists of several pages includes materials for a whole research. Referring to Hungarian musician Liszt for the first time, Vardapet succeeded in comprehensively presenting the most important facts of composer's saturated life and the values of Liszt's original music. The deep knowledge of Armenian, as well as French and German is also amazing. He was the first Armenian musicologist who tried to write titles and names as they are in the original text / this is an important principle in present musicology /. He was famous of his fresh and advanced mentality. He was brave enough to express his thought and opinions and to give logical grounds for them.

22 KOMITAS, V., 1941: 179.

23 Essay on the History of Harmony, as an Art and Systematic Science /, which is about the origins and development of harmony. Yerevan, 1953: 96.

24 *Ibid.*, 180.

25 *Ibid.*, 181

His last evaluation of Liszt would fit his personality as well: “Liszt was an honest citizen, untiring musician and kind Christian during his life”²⁶. This is another similarity.

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26 KOMITAS, V., 1941: 181.