

Khachaturyan in Armenia today: his presence in Armenian music, art and architecture, rooted in Socialist Realism

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Aram Il'ich Khachaturyan was born in Tblisi, Georgia, and spent most of his life in Moscow, but when one visits Yerevan, the capital of Armenia, today, Khachaturyan is all around you. His music, itself steeped in Armenian folk traditions, penetrates the fabric of the city; it is played at the Genocide Museum, becoming part of the atmosphere of this memorial to the millions of massacred Armenians; in the concert hall named after him that forms part of the Spendiaryan Opera and Theatre building where the statue of the seated Khachaturyan in front of the entrance leads one inside; in the Khachaturyan museum that is full of sunshine and light as he wanted it, where his music sounds all day long and a bust of him reinforces his presence there. A painting of Khachaturyan by Edman Alvazyan, painted in 1977, was given to the Khachaturyan museum by Catholicos¹ Vazgen I in 1984. One finds Khachaturyan's grave in the city Pantheon where great scientists and artists are buried, and one is reminded of him when one drives on the street that is named after him.

Keywords: Khachaturyan, Armenia, Yerevan, Moscow, Georgia

Khachaturyan hedendaags in Armenië: sy teenwoordigheid in Armeense musiek, kuns en argitektuur, gegrond op Sosialistiese Realisme

Aram Il'ich Khachaturyan is gebore in Tblisi, Georgië, en het die grootste deel van sy lewe in Moskou deurgebring, maar wanneer 'n mens Yerevan, die hoofstad van Armenië, vandag besoek, is hy gedurig met jou. Sy musiek, wat deurdrenk is van Armeense volkstradisies, is oral in die stad teenwoordig; dit word gespeel in die volksmoord museum, en vorm 'n deel van hierdie gedenkteken aan die miljoene vermoorde Armene; in die konsertsaal wat na hom vernoem is wat deel vorm van die Spendiaryan Opera en Teater gebou waar die standbeeld van die sittende Khachaturyan voor die ingang 'n mens na binne lei; in die Khachaturyan museum wat vol sonskyn en lig is soos hy dit wou gehad het, waar sy musiek die hele dag gespeel word en 'n borsbeeld sy teenwoordigheid daar beklemtoon. 'n Skildery van Khachaturyan deur Edman Alvazyan, geskilder in 1977, is aan die Khachaturyan museum geskenk deur Katolikos Vazgen in 1984. 'n Mens vind Khachaturyan se graf in die Pantheon in die stad waar beroemde wetenskaplikes en kunstenaars begrawe is, en 'n mens word aan hom herinner in die straat wat na hom vernoem is.

Slutelwoorde: Khachaturyan, Armenië, Yerevan, Moskou, Georgië

Aram Khachaturyan was born on 6 June, 1903, and died in Moscow on 1 May 1978. Along with Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich, Aram Khachaturyan is one of the great masters of the Soviet school of composition. His art had a great influence on the development of the musical culture of Armenia, as well as countries of the East, Middle Asia and Latin America (Sarkisyan 2004: 101, Sarkisyan 2000: 13, 556).

The future composer spent his childhood years in a patriarchal Armenian family living in a side-street of Tblisi (Shneerson 1959:14). His earliest musical impressions came from hearing folk music in Tblisi and listening to his mother's songs. The Armenian songs he heard as a boy revealed to him the national spirit, life and culture of his people (Shneerson 1959:17). He dedicated his opus one, the *Taparakan ashughu yerg'e* ("The song of the Wandering Ashugh") to his mother in 1925.² The fate of the Armenian people, who were tyrannized by the surrounding countries through many centuries, was tragic. They were fragmented and settled in many European countries and after that throughout the world. Yet from a national pride and the experience of suffering together, they always remained united. Therefore small closed groups of Armenians formed in the large cities and countries. There are groups in Egypt, Italy, France, Germany, America, Turkey and Iran, who keep the old cultural and religious heritage of their home alive. A large number of the descendants of people who fled since the middle ages from Arabs, Mongolians and Turks have now returned to their homeland (Streller 1968: 9).

In the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution and the national unrest in Georgia in the following years, the position of the Khachaturyan family must have been somewhat insecure.

Aram joined in the activities of a group of cultural workers intent on popularising the ideas of Soviet power in Georgia, and in 1921, when his brother Suren made a trip back to the Caucasus to recruit young southern talent, he accompanied him to Moscow. Through Suren he was introduced into the more progressive and revolutionary-conscious artistic circles in the capital of Russia (McAllister 1975: 1154). In 1922 he entered the Moscow State University to study biology (1922-1925) and although he had practically no previous training, was accepted by the Gnesins Music Institute to study the cello. He then transferred to the composition faculty (1925-1929). During this period he wrote incidental music for the Armenian drama studio, where his brother Suren Khachaturov and Ruben Siminov directed. From 1929 to 1936 he studied at the Moscow State conservatory. This was the school of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, and the teaching there was still under the influence of the “Great Five”, as the group consisting of Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov was known. The young Khachaturyan was particularly attracted by Ravel and the central European “expressionists” and their influence is said to be very strongly marked in some unpublished pieces written at this period (Abraham 1943: 44). In 1929 his studies at the Gnesin School were interrupted by his trip to Yerevan as a member of the Drama Studio of the House of Armenian Culture. The Studio played in Yerevan and went on tour of other cities. For the first time in his life Aram visited Armenia’s rural districts where he got a close view of Armenian peasants’ life, particularly of their festivities, and heard and recorded folk music as performed by the people (Shneerson 1959: 28, Yuzefovich 1985: 13,14).

The young man’s inquiring mind benefited greatly by his association with prominent men in Russian culture and art, and yet while drinking in the new impressions of Moscow artistic life, Khachaturyan never lost touch with the art of his native Armenia. He was active in the House of Armenian culture in Moscow, the rallying centre of Armenian artists and talented student youth. It was there that he met Alexander Spendiaryan, a pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, the acknowledged dean of Armenian music. The venerable composer showed great interest in the progress of his young colleague. He appreciated Khachaturyan’s talent and helped him in having some of his works published (Shneerson 1959: 27, Yuzefovich 1985: 37).

Khachaturyan wrote more than 50 works during his student years. He composed in smallish instrumental forms, pieces that showed the marked influence of the sounds and improvisatory techniques of Caucasian folk songs. These compositions range from the *Yerg-poem* (Song poem) “In honour of the Ashughs” for violin and piano (1929) written under the influence of hearing an ensemble of Armenian *ashughs* in Moscow, to the *Trio* for clarinet, violin and piano (1932) in which he tried to reproduce the effect of Transcaucasian folk instruments. This work sufficiently impressed Sergei Prokofiev on one of his visits to the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (hereafter referred to as USSR) in 1933 for him to arrange a performance in Paris – the first performance of Khachaturyan’s music in the West. As his graduation work he composed his first symphony, dedicated to the fifteenth anniversary of the Armenian Soviet Republic (1935) (Sarkisyan 2004: 102). In this symphony, his first large-scale work, Khachaturyan made an attempt to solve in his own manner the hard and novel problem of composing a symphony on themes stemming from the national art of the Transcaucasian peoples. The successful solution of this problem meant an important stage in the development not only of Khachaturyan or of Armenian music – it proved an important event in the history of Soviet and world music. Khachaturyan glorified the nature and people of Armenia. This significant ideological content found expression in a fresh and original musical idiom. The leading idea of the symphony – love of one’s country – is expressed in the first and longest movement. The slow introduction in the style of an epic narrative creates the atmosphere of Armenian life. Its main theme is reminiscent of the free and inspired improvisations of the *ashugs* (Shneerson 1959: 34, 35, Yuzefovich 1985: 58-60).

His Piano Concerto composed in 1936, included Georgian, Azerbaijan and Armenian elements. The expressive themes are rooted deeply in Armenian folk music. The main theme of the second movement of the Piano Concerto consists of the elaboration of the melody of an unpretentious Armenian song. The Concerto won the immediate recognition of Soviet audiences and brought Khachaturyan world fame. It was particularly successful in Britain and America where it was performed by some of the best pianists.

Khachaturyan wrote music for the first Armenian film with sound – *Pepo* (1935, directed by Hamo Bek-Narayan). He retained an active interest in cinema until the end of his life, writing music for six more films. The touching “Song of Pepo” composed in the spirit of Armenian folk music became so popular in Armenia as to be regarded almost as a folk song. Many years after the release of *Pepo*, Khachaturyan on tour in Armenia heard farmers working in a vineyard singing this song. He asked them what it was they were singing, and they told him it was “a very old folk song” (Sarkisyan 2004: 102, Shneerson 1959: 44).

In the early spring of 1939 Khachaturyan left Moscow for Armenia. The aim of his trip was to make a thorough study of Armenian musical folklore and to collect folk-song and dance tunes for *Happiness*, a ballet he planned to compose. Khachaturyan spent nearly six months in Armenia, working on the score of the new ballet, meeting Armenian artists and touring the country in search of folk melodies. While composing the ballet he maintained close contact with the Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet Theatre in Yerevan. His long stay in Armenia brought him a wealth of vivid impressions. His communion with Armenia’s national culture and musical practice proved for him as he put it himself, “a second conservatoire”. He learned a lot, saw and heard many things anew, and at the same time he had an insight into the tastes and artistic requirements of the Armenian people. The musical impressions that had so influenced the mind of Khachaturyan the boy and the youth presented themselves in a new light to Khachaturyan the mature artist (Shneerson 1959:45). He tried not to let a day pass without listening to the playing and singing of a folk musician or seeing and hearing a national ensemble of instrumentalists or singers and dancers. Folk musicians flocked to his house in Yerevan and performed their impassionate dance tunes and hauntingly beautiful songs for his benefit. In his own words Khachaturyan “absorbed these live musical impressions like a sponge”. Work on *Happiness* and participation in the festival of Armenian art had brought Khachaturyan still closer to Armenia’s spiritual life and culture. With renewed interest he studied classical Armenian literature, as well as the works of contemporary Armenian writers, composers and painters (Shneerson, 1959: 45, 46). Some of the dances in *Happiness* are genuine folk tunes symphonically developed. The score includes rhythmic and melodic patterns of seven Armenian dances, a number of Russian dances, the Ukrainian *hopak*, and a Georgian *lezghinka*. The two suites comprising the best items from the *Happiness* ballet soon became concert favourites. *Happiness* was performed at the A. Spendiaryan Opera and Ballet theatre in Yerevan in September 1939. In October 24, 1939, the Spendiaryan theatre showed the ballet on the stage of the Bolshoi theatre in Moscow as part of a ten-day festival of Armenian art. *Happiness* became the first Armenian national ballet, although the music of this work, of which the plot is concerned with political conflict in an Armenian border *kolkhoz* (collective farm) was to have a chequered career before its final remoulding into the revised version of the later ballet *Gayaneh* (1957) (MacAllister 1975: 1154, Shneerson 1959: 47, Sarkisyan 2004: 102).

The Violin Concerto appeared in 1940 and brought its composer an immediate and universal success. In 1941 Khachaturyan was awarded the Stalin prize, second degree, for it. Its premiere was in Moscow on 16 December 1940 with the violinist, David Oistrakh, with whom the composer had co-operated closely in the creation of the piece. The work is interwoven with oriental elements, arabesques and Caucasian harmonies. Without quoting folk melodies, it is

imbued with the spirit of Armenian song. The introduction to the second movement is based on themes of Armenian *ashugs* and a brilliant “Armenian market” concludes the work (Shneerson 1959: 51, 54). Late in the spring of 1941 Khachaturyan left for Perm where the Leningrad Kirov opera and Ballet Theatre had been moved, to start work on the score of the *Gayaneh* ballet. The composer was wholly taken up with this work: the grand theme of a determined and optimistic people rallying in the face of the enemy was a powerful source of inspiration to him. The scene of the ballet, as in *Happiness*, is laid on an Armenian collective farm, shortly before and in the first days of the Great Patriotic War (Germany-Russia 1941-1945). Scene 1, opening after a short orchestral introduction, brings the spectators into the atmosphere of the joyful work of the collective-farm cotton-pickers. Musically, the scene is based on a variation of a well-known Armenian song *The Vine*. “In the different scenes depicting the life of a border farm, in the conflict and clash of powerful personalities, in the affirmation of the exalted truth of life and the unmasking of evil and violence, the composer sensed a ‘through-going action’, a single patriotic idea, which inspired him to create vivid and truly symphonic music” (Shneerson 1959: 58). The “Sabre Dance” from this ballet became more popular even than the Violin Concerto. In the spring of 1943 Khachaturyan was awarded the Stalin Prize, first degree, for *Gayaneh* (Shneerson 1959: 56). The Second Symphony, first performed in 1943, is a programme work with a subject dealing with the events of the Great Patriotic War. Soviet music criticism knows the symphony under the title of *Bell Symphony*, which was given to it by G. Khubov, a Soviet musicologist, the author of the first scholarly analysis of this work. The alarm bell sounding against a deafening tremolo of the orchestra creates an atmosphere of anxiety and tension from the first bars. This extremely simple descending motif at once speaks of the horrors of war and calls to fight. It recurs in the development section and in the closing section of the first movement, its echoes are heard in the sorrowful third movement, and the powerful tolling of the bell closes the finale. One of the main themes in the third movement is an Armenian song, *Varskan Akhper*, which the composer heard his mother sing when he was a boy. The *Bell Symphony* is one of Khachaturyan’s finest symphonic compositions, and a major achievement in Soviet music (Shneerson 1959: 63).

Khachaturyan’s career did not however run as smoothly as might at first be surmised. When he finally decided to write a concerto for his own instrument, the cello, he was already under criticism for supposed Armenian nationalism in his musical works. In 1948, a year after the completion of the Cello Concerto, he was publicly accused of being infected by the “pseudo-innovative discoveries” of Shostakovich, Prokofiev and others, under the guise of technical craft. A critic wrote: “This composer’s talent has lost all relevance in superficial sound structures, without musical images of any content. His dubious artistic theories, his creative arrogance, his rejection of common cultural and professional perfection – all this has had the worst conceivable effect on Khachaturyan’s artistic production and has led him into a formalistic cul-de-sac”. Three years later he was publicly accused of “formalist tendencies” and charged with contravention of Stalin’s new socialist laws although his music had always been conservative. Andrei Zhdanov, secretary of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, delivered the so-called Zhdanov decree in 1948. The decree condemned Shostakovich, Prokofiev, Khachaturyan and other Soviet composers as “formalist” and “antipopular” (Yuzefovich 1985: 190; Machlis 1979: 212). The Soviet government showed its displeasure with its recalcitrant composers by ordering the works of Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Khachaturian to be removed from the repertory. All three composers were forced to apologize publicly. Though the works of the other two were far more threatening to the established order, Khachaturyan, too, apologized to the authorities, saying that his error was to have strayed too far from his ethnic roots in an attempt to become a cosmopolitan composer. The decree affected Khachaturyan profoundly: “Those were tragic days for me...I was clouted on the head so unjustly. My repenting speech at the First Congress was insincere. I

was crushed, destroyed. I seriously considered changing professions” (Ignatieva 1980, Machlis 1979: 220, Yuzefovich 1985: 190). This happened in spite of the fact that Khachaturyan was always enthusiastic about communism. In 1920, when Armenia was declared a Soviet Republic, Khachaturyan joined a propaganda train touring Armenia, populated by Georgian-Armenian artists. He joined the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1943. Composers who found it impossible to accept the Soviet regime – Rachmaninov, Stravinsky, Glazunov – left Russia and pursued their careers in exile. On the other hand musicians like Shostakovich, Khachaturyan and Kabalevsky grew up under the Soviet regime. They are products of Soviet education and culture. They received enormous admiration from their countrymen, honours and rewards from their government. Khachaturyan’s communist ideals, along with his Armenian nationalism, are apparent in his works, especially *Gayaneh* and the Second Symphony. It was the Symphonic Poem, later titled the Third Symphony, that earned Khachaturyan the wrath of the party. Ironically, Khachaturyan wrote the work as a tribute to communism: “I wanted to write the kind of composition in which the public would feel my unwritten programme without an announcement. I wanted this work to express the Soviet people’s joy and pride in their great and mighty country”, he said. Perhaps because Khachaturyan did not include a dedication or programme notes, his intentions backfired. (Machlis 1979: 212, Yuzefovich 1985: 191).

Khachaturyan was always in the thick of the fast-moving artistic life around him. Already in 1932 he was accepted into the USSR Composer’s Union. He served as deputy chairman of its organizing committee from 1939 to 1948, but Zhdanov’s denunciation of him effectively curtailed his activities in officialdom until 1957 when he was appointed Board Secretary of the Composer’s Union, a post he held until his death.

When the Soviets took power and the countries spread widely over Asia were integrated into the Soviet Union, musical orientalism was systematically exploited for the propagation of Socialist ideals and of a culture that was, at least officially, multinational. A whole school of Soviet composers based their work on folk music from the Caucasus, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Mongolia and other “exotic” material. Music had to serve the state and in this respect, the composer Aram Khachaturyan from Armenia was regarded as exemplary. The great difference between Russian composers such as Balakirev, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov, and Khachaturyan is that he comes from that region himself. His whole background is imbued with its folk music and folklore. What to a Russian would appear exotic was to him a normal part of every day life. Khachaturyan stood far closer to the romantic heritage than either Prokofiev or Shostakovich. His use of folklore material accorded, on the one hand, with the Soviet desire to build a melodious music accessible to the masses, and on the other, with the government’s attempt to draw into the sphere of art the songs and dances of the national minorities within its border (Yuzefovich 1985: 258, Machlis 1979: 322).

His large-scale works established him as a leading Soviet composer and he was showered with honours. In 1939 the highest honour in the USSR. – The Order of Lenin – was conferred on him. His services to Soviet music won Khachaturyan the title of merited artist of the R.S.F.S.R. (Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic). In 1954, one year after Stalin’s death, he was given the title of ‘People’s Artist of the USSR’, the highest Soviet decoration for artists. In the 1970s his birthday was celebrated in Moscow, St Petersburg, West Berlin, Paris and in many Caucasian towns. In 1973 he was named Hero of Socialist Labour. (Sarkisyan 2000: 557). In 1948, however, he was denounced.

Khachaturyan had long cherished the idea to compose a ballet dealing with the heroic image of Spartacus, the rebel slave who successfully led a revolt against his Roman captors, only – through the treachery of corrupted followers – to be betrayed and brutally put down. *Spartacus* has proved one of the most enduring and popular of Soviet ballets. It had its première at the

Kirov Opera and Ballet Theatre on December 27, 1956. The nine scenes into which the libretto falls enabled Khachaturyan to give free rein to his imagination and to show fully his sense of the dance element. The dramatic content of the ballet enabled him to elaborate symphonically the musical characterizations of the *dramatis personae*, to employ the leitmotif principle and to develop musical “through-going action”, welding the plot of the whole, cementing as it were the immense score of the ballet (Shneerson 1959: 87). The subject was ideally suited to the aesthetics of Socialist Realism, which was for long periods the official art policy of the Soviet Union and its satellite countries. The score, which was awarded the Lenin Prize in 1959, is folk-orientated, lush, full-blooded and tuneful. To Western ears it sounds as an uninhibited blend of nineteenth century Russian Nationalist School (Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov in particular), Ravel and Gershwin – and yet it retains its own fresh individuality (Roseberry, 1991).

The middle of the twentieth century witnessed an upsurge in musical production in a number of Soviet republics where original national schools of composition were emerging, holding great promise for the future, daringly developing the ancient traditions of folk art in a new way. This upsurge was particularly in evidence in the Transcaucasian republics – Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia – where operas, ballets, symphonies, instrumental and vocal chamber music works, written by Armenian, Azerbaijan and Georgian composers, displayed fresh content and expressive means (Shneerson 1959: 98, 99) The important role played by Khachaturyan in bringing about this development of national music cultures is beyond dispute. His work offers an example of an organic unity of the two sources of music coming from the East and from the West (Shneerson 1959: 116, Sarkisyan 2004: 107).

Khachaturyan was the first composer to place Armenian music within an international context. By synthesizing the musical achievements of his age with Armenian traditions such as the peasant song, urban instrumental folklore and the art of the *ashugh* (see footnote 2), he created a new aesthetic. He employed many dance melodies as a basis for extensive motoric dynamics and his use of folklore sources, especially of the *ashugh* tradition, had an impact on the rhythmic diversity of his compositions. Polymetric and multi-layered rhythmical structures were widely employed in his ballets and symphonic works (Sarkisyan 2004: 107).

The *ashugh* influence determined both the virtuosic writing of his instrumental works and the hedonistic optimism that his music is often held to express. His harmonic thinking, rooted in oriental folk music, is highly original. Many of the peculiarities of Khachaturyan’s harmony stem from the modes and tuning of Caucasian folk instruments, such as *tar*, *kemancha*, and *saz*. The early musical impressions buried in his subconscious, developed naturally in the process of his study of the foundations of classical harmony as practised in Russian and West-European music. In his article “How I understand the national character in music”, Khachaturyan stated that his harmonic language came from “imagining the sounds of folk instruments with their characteristic tuning and the resulting range of overtones”. This explains his widespread harmonic use of seconds, fourths and fifths, all associated with the tuning of the folk instruments. To the Armenian peasant and folk musician certain seventh chords are concords while the normal major or minor triad is a discord. When Khachaturyan brought the harmonic sense of the untaught Armenian into “art” music he added a new element and approach. The avoidance of chord structures based on thirds, the abundant layers of seconds and the syncopated rhythm are similar to the styles of his contemporaries G. Gershwin, I. Stravinski and B. Bartók His often garish orchestral writing combines European tradition with Eastern sound worlds; the orchestra is frequently augmented by folk percussion instruments and many other eastern instruments are actually imitated (Sarkisyan 2004: 107). His unique musical idiom was indelibly marked by his Armenian heritage; his scores are noted for their sensuous, singing melodic writing, colourful

orchestration, and elemental rhythmic drive. As the composer has put it simply “Being an Armenian I cannot help writing Armenian music” (Sarkisyan 2004:107).

Gerald Abraham remarked already in 1943 that “the real Khachaturyan” was far from being an “advanced” composer as we understand “advanced modernism” in Western Europe. The reasons for this retreat from modernity were probably complex, he said. No doubt the fundamental reason was Khachaturyan’s discovery of his true creative self, which is essentially lyrical. He was intensely interested in folk-music, and, despite the example of Bartók, love of folk-music is not easily reconciled with advanced modernism. But it was not improbable that this natural tendency was strengthened first by the later phase of Khachaturyan’s musical education and then by official frowns on modernism in music (Abraham 1943: 44). He strove to and succeeded in writing colourful, straightforward, “upbeat” music and left experimentation and innovation to others. Socialist Realism was the language in which Khachaturyan distinguished himself above all (Ignatieva 1980).

Socialist Realism is a doctrine with sources in nineteenth-century aesthetics but which is now chiefly associated with Marxism or communism. The great paradox of that policy was that it espoused revolutionary aims in the socio-political sphere while adopting a conservative canon of aesthetic values. It has its roots in neo-classicism. Socialist Realism was first used as a term to describe the idealization of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the arts in 1932. Art was subordinated to the needs and dictates of the Communist party. The idea of what constituted Socialist Realism evolved negatively firstly out of a series of cultural purges orchestrated by Zhadanov, Stalin’s mouthpiece on cultural policy until his death in 1948, and secondly in the pages of *Pravda*, the party newspaper. It was enforced at local level by the union branches. Such words as “formalism” and “intuitivism” were used as terms of abuse in the search for cultural enemies. The policy was enforced ruthlessly in all spheres of artistic endeavour. Artists who strayed from the official line were severely punished. Socialist realism remained in limited force as the official state art style until as late as 1991. It was not until after the fall of the Soviet Union that artists were finally freed from state censorship. The Soviet Union exported socialist realism to virtually all the other socialist countries, although the degree to which it was enforced there varied somewhat from country to country. It became the predominant art form across the Socialist world for almost fifty years (Norris 2000: 17, 599; Elliot 1996: 28, 917).

For music it was described, for instance, in the Central Committee’s message to the Second All-Union Congress of Composers in 1958. The method of Socialist Realism demanded from Soviet composers a systematic struggle with aesthetic over-refinement, lifeless individualism and formalism, as well as with naturalistic primitiveness in art. Soviet musicians were called upon to reflect reality in moving, beautiful, poetic images, permeated with optimism and lofty humaneness, the pathos of construction and the spirit of collectivism - all that distinguished the Soviet people’s perception of the world (James 1973: 88).

Christopher Norris points out that fine music has come from the spirit, if not the bureaucratic letter, of Socialist Realism, by composers within the Soviet Union and beyond. There is no reason to suppose that gifted composers have not been genuinely moved by social inequity and genuinely responded. According to Norris, Socialist realism, as an effort to liberate such response, is not a codified and now obsolete musical style but rather an expression of humane values (2000: 17, 600).

Khachaturyan’s presence in architecture

Aram Khachaturyan is considered to be the central figure in twentieth century Armenian

culture and how central he is can be gauged from his omnipresence in Armenia's capital city, Yerevan. The Aram Khachaturyan Concert Hall forms part of the Spendiaryan Theatre of Opera and Ballet, one of Yerevan's best examples of Soviet architecture. The theatre complex, with its surrounding parks and restaurants, is one of the two hubs of the city, the other one being Republic Square. The building was designed by Alexander Tamanyan, (1878-1936), a neoclassical architect, who is remembered today especially for his work in the city of Yerevan. He was awarded a gold medal for the design at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1936. The plan of the building and its miniature presented to the Exhibition featured winter and summer halls with two amphitheatres separated by stages. During the various festivities, these two stages would then combine into a hall with a total capacity of 3000 seats. The unique floor of the foyer, once destined to become the jewel of the hall, was initially to have been built with a double layer of glass. One layer was to serve as a floor for the concert hall and was intended to be ornamented like an Armenian carpet. The other layer was to have become the ceiling of the buffet below the foyer and covered with corporeal (flesh-coloured) glass. Chandeliers were to have been placed between the two layers, to light the area of the buffet. However, technical problems and conditions and Tamanyan's untimely death in 1936, prevented the project from being fully realized (see websites nos. 1 and 2).³

Today the Spendiaryan theatre complex combines two auditoria in one building with one roof over both stages. The opera hall holds 1,260 people, and the concert hall 1,400. The latter was built by Tamanyan's son Georgy, who completed all his father's works after his death. Both halls are shaped like amphitheatres and have excellent acoustics. The theatre is named after the Armenian composer Alexander Spendiaryan (1871-1928) whose opera *Almast* was performed in 1933 as a first performance at the theatre. The first Armenian ballet to be performed there was Khachaturyan's *Happiness*, the ballet that later became *Gayaneh* and was performed all over the world (Shneerson 1959: 7, Yuzefovich 1985: 131).



Figure 1

The Spendiaryan theatre complex in Yerevan showing the entrance to the Aram Khachaturyan hall and Khachaturyan's statue by Petrossyan (photograph: Carol Steyn).

The middle and late thirties were a period of megalomaniac projects for public buildings that would reshape the image of cities right across the USSR. Given real priorities in industrial development, and later, in military preparation, very few of them were built. The injunction to convey the content through “national” forms was pursued with less subtlety than after the war, when experience in these new modes was greater. There were important and effective examples, however, such as the Agriculture Commissariat in Armenia in Republic Square in Yerevan, by Tamanyan (Cooke 1993: 99, 100.) The theatre complex was built, but on a lesser scale than originally envisaged.

The Central Committee’s message to the Second All-Union Congress of Architects in 1955 was that: “Soviet architects must proceed from the demands of Socialist Realism to develop and multiply the best national traditions in the classical architecture of the peoples of the USSR. Socialist Realism is incompatible with formalist techniques, blind copying of architectural modes of past epochs or negligent attitudes to the architectural heritage. Simplicity, purity of form, attractive external appearance and economy of design, attention to functional facilities – these are the guiding characteristic features of Soviet architecture” (James 1973: 88).

In 1978 the government of Armenia signed a decree concerning the establishment of an Aram Khachaturyan Museum. This event was preceded by long years of discussion on the highest levels about how this museum should be organized and where it should be situated. Aram Khatchaturyan took a very active part in these discussions. He thought that it should be established in Armenia and wished to donate to the museum his manuscripts, letters and all the things that would tell of his life and creative work (Museum brochure 2002).

The final decision was taken only after his death when the project was awarded to architect Edward Altunyan. Later, when the construction began, Khachaturyan’s remarks about how he would like the museum to be became a plan for Gohar Harutiunyan, the head of construction. “More light”, Aram Khachaturyan had written, “more wood and less matter...” He wanted to see his museum cosy, clean and hospitable. The museum opened in 1982. Aram Khatchaturyan’s son, Karen Khachaturyan, transferred to the museum part of his father’s personal belongings - his bedroom, study and dining-room furniture, his grand piano and conductor’s tail-coat, his baton, some letters sent to him and written by him, and valuable photos (Museum brochure 2002).



Figure 2
The Aram Khachaturyan Museum in Yerevan (photograph: Aram Khachaturyan Museum brochure 2002).

The Aram Khachaturyan Museum has become one of the centres of musical life in Armenia. Significant musical events take place there – competitions of young performers, concerts of celebrated musicians, jubilee celebrations, interesting meetings. The Aram Khachaturyan string quartet was born and has grown up at the Museum.

Khachaturyan’s dream has come true. The illumination is a remarkable feature of the interior of the Museum. The building is constructed in such a way that light fills every corner of the two top floors and penetrates the concert hall from two sides. Illumination is reduced only in the rooms of the ground floor. The exposition of the Museum is on the third floor. This is a suite of spacious halls where the valuable exhibits are housed.



Figure 3

Interior of the Museum (photograph: Aram Khachaturyan Museum brochure).



Figure 4

Interior of the Museum (photograph: Aram Khachaturyan Museum brochure).

A park has been laid out on the top of the Tsitsernakaberd elevation with the memorial complex to the victims of the 1915 genocide in its centre. Twelve massive basalt pylons slope to form a mausoleum. In the centre of the mausoleum is a depression with a large chased copper bowl in which a perpetual flame burns. The music of the Armenian composers Komitas and Khachaturyan can always be heard here.

Khachaturyan's presence in art

Khachaturyan is most prominently present in the statue by Yuri Petrossyan that is situated in front of the concert hall at the corner of two of the busiest streets in the city, Sayat Noya avenue, named after an eighteenth century bard, and Meshrop Mashtots avenue, named after the inventor of the Armenian alphabet. The statue was erected in 1999.

This seated statue shows a marked similarity to the seated statue of Beethoven in the Beethovenplatz near the Konzerthaus in Vienna, created by Casper Clemens von Zumbusch and unveiled on May 1, 1880. Both statues show the composers in a thoughtful mood, looking slightly downwards, Beethoven with his head turned to the left, Khachaturyan to the right. Both are wearing long flowing garments with collars and long sleeves, the folds arranged over their knees. Both are on high square pedestals, although that of Beethoven is embellished, that of Khachaturyan unembellished. The 20th century Khachaturyan statue is therefore still very much in the 19th century tradition of realist statues of composers. (See Steyn 2004:143-54).



Figure 5

Khachaturyan statue, Yerevan, by Petrossyan (photograph: Aram Khachaturyan Museum brochure).



Figure 6

Beethoven statue, Vienna, by Von Zumbusch (photograph: <http://www.lvbeethoven.com>).

Christine Lodder defines Socialist Realism in sculpture as an essential descriptiveness which is reliant for its impact on a stark monumentality combined with a degree of simplification of the figure, and an idealisation of facial and physical features in accordance with the “heroic” qualities of socialist man(Lodder 1993: 17).

Since the nineteenth century Armenia had strong contacts with Moscow and St Petersburg, and following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the establishment of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1920, numerous sculptors who had been forced into exile returned to Armenia. With the establishment of institutions to support and encourage the arts, and along with the new political situation, diverse types of sculptures were produced. Monumental sculptures and decorative reliefs, in particular, appeared in association with the rapid development of urban construction. Monumental sculpture was a particularly important emotional and visual component in the replanning of Yerevan by Alexander Tamanyan in 1924 (Stepanyan 1996: 2, 436).

Inside the Aram Khachaturyan museum there is a marble bust of Khachaturyan by Nikolay Nikogesyanyan (b. 1918). This bust strongly resembles a bust of Komitas,⁴ in the National Gallery of Yerevan, that might also be by Nikogesyanyan. It also resembles the marble bust of Gustav Mahler by the French sculptor, Auguste Rodin, in the Rodin museum in Paris.



Figure 7

The bust of Khachaturyan by Nikogesyanyan (photograph: Carol Steyn).

The marble bust of Mahler follows the pattern of the numerous busts that Rodin made of society women, for example Lady Sackville, which shows a smooth female face rising above the textured stand which differentiates the surface treatment of the parts of the single block of marble. Estelle Maré comments that it resembles the treatment of a 1886 marble sculpture by Camille Claudel (1864-1943) titled “Thought”, which represents an idealised female face deeply attached to the roughly textured marble stand. This technique of synthesising opposing textures was also followed by Constantin Brancusi (1876-1917) in his first version of his Sleeping Muse of 1906 that depicts a fragmented female face (Maré and Steyn: 2007: 94, 95).

Most probably Claudel and Brancusi’s technique of not uniformly finishing the entire bust derives from Michelangelo’s “captive” figures in the Galleria Accademia, Florence. Rodin recognised in them expressive possibilities that would be lost in a “finished” piece. Though Michelangelo considered figures such as the four slave figures as unfinished, it became a modernist convention to show figures, more especially faces, as emerging from stone that enclose or keep them captive; alternatively merging back into the material in which they are partly embedded (Maré and Steyn 2007: 95).

A painting of Khachaturyan by Edman Alvazyan, painted in 1977, can be found in the Aram Khachaturyan Musum. It was given to the museum by Catholicos Vazgen 1 in 1984._



Figure 8
The painting of Khachaturyan by Edman Alvazyan (photograph:Aram Khachaturyan Museum brochure).

Another, and in this case, very realistic bust of Khachaturyan can be found in the foyer of the Aram Khachaturyan Concert Hall.



Figure 9
Bust of Khachaturyan in the foyer of the Aram Khachaturyan Concert Hall (Aram Khachaturyan Museum brochure).

Conclusion

Khachaturyan's omnipresence in Armenia, and more particularly, Yerevan, is of course due to the Armenian people's embracing and celebrating him as a famous son who earned world-

wide recognition. Remarkable, however, is the inter-connectedness of his music, with its overwhelming Armenian characteristics, and his presence in Armenian art and in architecture, a connection that is strengthened by the prevalence of the doctrine of Socialist Realism in Armenia during the twentieth century.

Despite its thoroughly romantic insistence on the individuality and spontaneity of the artist, Socialist Realism very quickly succeeded in unifying cultural life by “fusing all hearts together with the same love and the same fear of Stalin” (Groys 1992: 71). “Socialist Realism” is taken to mean the total negation of artistic experimentation, though it is itself an artistic experiment on an unprecedented scale. It explores the almost unknown interstices between artistic genres by uniting poet, painter, sculptor, composer, singer, actor, dancer and director in one common socio-aesthetic system (James 1973: xii).

Socialist Realism embraces all kinds and genres of art, manifesting itself in a form appropriate to each genre. It progresses with time, so that the Socialist Realism of the thirties no longer obtains; and it varies according to country, so that Soviet Socialist Realism cannot simply be transplanted elsewhere (James 1973: 88).

The doctrine of Socialist Realism involved all domains of visual and literary arts, though its most spectacular achievements were made in the field of architecture. Considered a key weapon in the creation of a new social order, it intended to help spread the communist doctrine by influencing citizens’ consciousness as well as their outlook on life. During this massive undertaking, a crucial role fell to architects perceived not merely as engineers creating streets and edifices, but rather as “engineers of the human soul”. The general theme, extending beyond simple aesthetics into an urban design, was meant to express grandiose ideas and arouse feelings of stability, persistence and political power (see website no. 4). This is apparent in Tamanyan’s Yerevan, which embraces Khachaturyan in all its aspects.

Notes

1. The Catholicos is the head of the Armenian Church.
2. Ashughs are popular, travelling musicians.
3. Because information on some aspects of this article was only available in Armenian or Russian, languages which I am not familiar with, I had to make use of sources not always considered reliable. In all these instances the information was substantially verified by me during my visit to Yerevan, however.
4. The pioneer Armenian composer and ethnomusicologist, 1869-1935.

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2. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/alexander>.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/socialist_realism. Accessed 14 December 2008.

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