



## AN APPROACH TO THE ARMENIAN CULTURAL MUSIC IN IRAN

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### ABSTRACT:

*Music and culture both are social sciences, especially within sociology and anthropology. Scholars such as Miriam, is one of the most influential ethnomusicologists, who as the first scholar studied societies' music in a community from its cultural perspective. This science deals with different aspects of cultural music within each society, such as what are the main factors that influenced music, what is happening in the process of music, is there any changes have been occurred or music has been influenced or got influenced by the other societies? This article is an approach to the Armenian cultural music in Iran and the causes have made its denomination and continuation, which leads to consolidation or the degradation and death of a culture. The reason to study this subject comes from the point that some Armenian community due to their migration to Iran and being interacted with the Iranian culture for many years, made some effects on both cultures and cultural elements, which will be considered in the rest of this article.*

**KEYWORDS:** Culture, Music, Armenian, Iran.

### INTRODUCTION

For a long time, music has been existed in all societies, cultures, different places and times, and will continue to exist. Since all the human being, including the most remote tribes and groups, had a certain kind of music, it may be concluded that music has probably existed at the time of our ancestors before they were scattered throughout the world. As a result, music may be existed for at least 50000 years, and by the evidence obtained can be said that the first music may have been invented in Africa, and afterward communities have evolved its structure.<sup>1</sup>

The origin of music itself is very difficult to determine because in all probability, it is likely to have begun with singing and clapping or beating the hands on different surfaces, for which there is no of course no archaeological record. However, between at least 60,000 and 30,000 years ago, ancient humans experienced a type of 'cultural explosion' they started creating art in the form of paintings on cave walls, and ornaments, and to bury their dead ceremonially. If we assume that these new forms of behavior reflect the emergence of intentionality, then music as we know it must also have emerged at least during this period. Evolutionary scientists believe that a musical culture would have helped prehistoric human species to survive because the music coordinates emotions, helps important messages to be communicated, motivates people to identify with a group, and motivates individuals to support other group members.<sup>2</sup>

Music is sound, and sound is by its nature impermanent. What remains of the music from past eras are its historical traces, which we can divide into four main types: (1) musical instruments and other physical remains; (2) visual images of musicians and instruments; (3) writings about music and musicians; and (4)

<sup>1</sup>Krause, B. "The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places," Little Brown/Hachette, New York (2012).

<sup>2</sup><http://www.ancient-origins.net/ancient-places-europe/origin-music-00972?nopaging=1>

music itself, preserved in notation, through oral tradition, or (since the 1890s) in recordings. Using these traces, we can try to reconstruct what music of a past culture was like, recognizing that our understanding will always be partial and will be influenced by our own values and concerns.<sup>3</sup>

## MUSIC AND CULTURE

Historically, music is not always the same in a community it could be different according to one-person tendencies to another. Therefore, we can see that many of our contemporary cultural musical techniques are not only represent symbols and values but also the rules of Social classification, technological features of our time and have an impact on the growth and tools production. With keeping that in mind, we can say that music as a cultural document and symbol plays an important role in our society and the relationship between individuals that reflects a culture that belongs to it. Man expresses himself through cultural forms; in case of music, he uses a special language, different from every day's language at different levels, in order to be able to understand the expansion of dialogues between various and modern cultures through music and the importance of enthusiasm, with its cognitive and contractual dimensions. It symbolizes the general dynamic of emotions, and includes the abstract structure of emotions. Music experiences our identity through the direct experiences of the body, time, and sociology, which enables us to put ourselves in fictions.<sup>4</sup>

Music is an undeniable element in human culture. It has existed in any well-known human society at any time. Investigating the nature and meanings of music, creates different views and theories that let us work on music and cultural music. Subjects such as art, languages, and religions in culture show that music differs from one culture to the another, and each culture has its own unique music and cultural factors that are learnable and behavioral which make a culture to influence music and vice versa.<sup>5</sup> Recent studies on Neanderthal man show that even they had created a kind of music. <sup>6</sup>Gray Et al (2001) stated that although there is still no significant agreement on the pure musical performance in each community, the way of using musical structure could tell us about societies and their categorizations that guide us through published patterns in any culture.<sup>7</sup>

## The framework of theories

Ethnological Research provides a complete analysis on the interaction and the unique relationship between music and culture. Merriam's works on music anthropology (1964) are the most influential studies on cultural anthropologist music. She is the one whose research resources are most important to students and colleges. Merriam was the reminder of cultural influence importance on traditional music, who believed that cultural concepts and behaviors should be learned, because it is generally a process of learning behaviors and each culture form this process by its beliefs and values. In studies on acculturation and learning, Maryam says; "A culture continues and persists through instructing and teaching, so it needs to be taught to make a culture persist." This is what Merriam emphasizes, but sometimes it could be changed in the process of instruction and learning, or in some cases, it loses quality and dynamism. This is a fact for

<sup>3</sup>Claude V. Palisca, Donald Jay Grout, Peter J. Burkholder, A History of Western Music, (2005), V.9, Published by W.W Norton & Company.

<sup>4</sup>Frith. S, (Música e identidad, an HALL, S. & DU GAY, P. (Eds.). Questions de identical cultural. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, (2003). pp.181-213.

<sup>5</sup>Patricia.M. Gray, and Bernie Krause, JelleAtema, Roger Payne, Carol Krumhansl, Luis Baptista, The Music of Nature and the Nature of Music, Science, (2001) 291: 52-54.

<sup>6</sup>Radocy, R. and Boyle, JD. Psychological foundations of Musical Behaviour, Illinois, United states America, C.C Thomas, (1979). p.27.

<sup>7</sup>Patricia.M. Gray, and Bernie Krause, JelleAtema, Roger Payne, Carol Krumhansl, Luis Baptista, The Music of Nature and the Nature of Music, Science, (2001), pp. 291: 52-54.

culture as well as for music, which is one of the cultural elements. This process of learning music includes our understanding of the sounds that human produce at different times, which changes music as they change.<sup>8</sup>

Now, in order to know what is the process of music, cultures should be considered, because music cannot be isolated from societies' culture. Considering the fact that music is not separate from culture, some humanities scientists who have spoken about topics and ideas, suggest that researchers on ethnic music help us to know more about people's cultural structure in a community. Music gives us lot of information about a particular culture by its instruments, creators, structures, and their function, which includes the interaction between artists, audiences, or musicians.<sup>9</sup> Lomax (1976) work on culture and cultural music is remarkable because it discovers that culture specifically reflected in musical performance, which shows the correlation between social structures. Lomax believes that the cultural musical performance style "plays a specific cultural and social role in the human communication system." He also carried out researches on the type of celebration that performed for necessities, as well as for social control, which was made for kind of culture and needs of that community. In addition, some research carried out by Feld's (1984), working with the people of Kaluli at the highlands of Papua New Guinea, it clearly shows the relationship between social structures and music experience in order to have a close relationship with the type of social and cultural structure in each nation.<sup>10</sup>

Observations, such as those expressed by Feld (1984), Lomax (1976) and Merriam A. P (1964) show the effect of culture on music and some of them conclude that music is in fact "culture" and cannot be isolated from life experience. Similarly, Dewey recalls, "While art is being produced and enjoyed by some people, these people are those who live in cultures with the common experiences."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, any music is effective and its impact is directly related to the culture and the community. According to a slightly different view, Bilking argues that music is "a product of the behavior of human groups, whether formal or informal, and this human organize this product (music)." Walker has a similar position; he states that music in cultural believing systems shows that somehow it should be organized in an orderly manner. Culture, as part of a music community, helps music to organize such a powerful strength.<sup>12</sup>

### History and Culture of Armenian Music

Armenian music is rooted in highlands of Armenia, where people traditionally sing folk songs. Armenia has an age-long musical tradition, collected and developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Komitas, a priest, and a prominent musician. Armenian culture has roots in the thousands of year's depths. It has created many values that enriched world's civilization.<sup>13</sup> Since ancient time, Armenian culture has faced with western and eastern culture. Therefore, has been exposed to the social progress. It can be said that the Armenian national culture is consistent with Christianity ethics and spiritual values, which met Armenians major criteria. Armenian national culture, along with religion and mother tongue, is an important factor for Armenians persistence. In addition, it can be emphasized that Armenian music took a very long path, from folklore to get to such different types of present time's music. We can say that Armenian music's achievements and success introduced to the world by Comitz, Alexander Spendrian, Aram Khachtorin, Arno Babajanian and other composers, as well as performances of the best

<sup>8</sup>Merriam A. P, *The Anthropology of Music* United states of America, Northwestern University Press, (1964), pp. 145-163.

<sup>9</sup>Lomax, a *Cantometrics*" *An Approach to the Anthropology of music* Berkeleu, University of California Extension Media Center (1976). p.6.

<sup>10</sup>Feld, *Sound Structure*", *Journal of Ethnomusicology*. Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, September, (1984)." pp .383-409&691

<sup>11</sup>Dewey, J. (1958.). *Art as Experience*. New York, United States of America Capricorn Books. P.326

<sup>12</sup>Walker, R, *Musical Beliefs: Psychoacoustic, Mythical and Educational Perspectives*. New York and London, Teachers College Press, Columbia University. (1990). p.195

<sup>13</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music\\_of\\_Armenia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Armenia) 16.6.2015

orchestras and musicians such as Choir group, Quaternary Quartet, Tigran Orchestra (one of Ancient music). Armenian folk tales, such as the dance group, even though in the time of tribulations in 1991-1993 were never diminished and the National Philharmonic Orchestra performed a new performance in opera and ballet by Alexander Spandrian.<sup>14</sup> This is one of the signs that the Armenian cultural music holds its place and will always keep it.

Armenian music has linked its characteristics and features with the cultural music in some ancient tribes as Southwest Asia and Minor Asia and developed its culture from the time of Urartu (Van's kingdom).<sup>15</sup> moreover, at that time, neighboring with some countries and tribes such as Iranians, Byzantines, Arabs, Assyrians, and Turks. This variety and neighborhood with various people caused many traditions to emerge in this society. Since ancient time, three branches of Armenian music had been formed and developed. Peasant, Gusan's professional music, has a structure similar to local songs, which usually consists of three or four stanzas with a variety of repetitions. These songs wide in a range of topics from simple to complex philosophy and developed from personal to the national as well as in several stages and gradually expanding their themes through the preservation properties that can reflect them. In ancient period, there were two types of lyrical or joyful Gassan songs Vipsans created the other type.<sup>16</sup> The secular song called Tagur is another song, which appeared at sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when Armenia is converted between the frequent wars of Turkey and Persia. The themes of this song, in fact, had reflected the political tasks of the time. Other songs include Ashugh, a new song in the development of Gassan's art, which dates back to the late medieval. This art was an allegory language that seems to be glorious and old, had a simple and accessible poetry that was based on the first branch, later continued to form itself as a separate branch in Romantic art and language of pagans, and after Christianity placed as the spiritual music basis. The Armenian epic poems or opuses, mythology and the works of Armenian thinkers in the first century (BC), preserved ancient tradition works. The exclusivity of Armenian music is common, although there are some types of matches and antiphonal or common musical instruments, Armenian music based on a wide system of diatonic stops and surprises with a variety of diver's rhythms.<sup>17</sup>

The Armenian folk music functional theory has a cultural performance. The local music collection can be divided into categories based on performance, which include; songs for plowing, ritual tracks that used in the wedding ceremony or the unique love song carnival, and the most comprehensive and widespread dance tracks. Folk songs always accompanied Musical instruments; they always had a rhythmic and lasting advantage. Traditional musical instruments include Duduk, Zurna, Blul, and Shvi (Winds), Oud, Kamancha, tar (strings), Dhol and Dumbek (percussion) that still exist. Most of the holy folklore songs and music should be owed to Komitas Vartabed (1969-1869). Komitas was a priest who traveled around the Ottoman Empire for about a decade and collected near 3,000 songs related to folklore and dance music.<sup>18</sup>

### An approach to the Iranian-Armenian cultural music in Iran

The Armenian culture and folk music in Iran goes back to the time of Armenian migration. The Armenian music came to Iran with the flow of Armenian immigrants although had been dramatically

<sup>14</sup> Khudaverdyan K, Sargsyan. Y, A country and the people, a guidebook. Translation by Artashes Emin Armenia, Yerevan, V. Movsessian, (1999). p. 94.

<sup>15</sup> Urartu is the name of a civilization in western Azerbaijan today, east of Anatolia, and northern Kurdistan, probably the ancestors of Armenians and the present. From about 1500 BC to 600 BC, they ruled the region.

<http://cryus.blogfa.com/>

<sup>16</sup> Koskoff. E The Concise Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: The Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, Volume.2, (2006), pp.1406.

- [https://books.google.am/books?id=73MO0eiQD\\_EC&dq=armenian+string+instruments&sitesec=reviews](https://books.google.am/books?id=73MO0eiQD_EC&dq=armenian+string+instruments&sitesec=reviews)

<sup>17</sup> [http://melody.su/en/catalog/folklore/768/index.php?index\\_php=&SECTION\\_CODE=folklore&ID=768&PAGEN\\_1=2](http://melody.su/en/catalog/folklore/768/index.php?index_php=&SECTION_CODE=folklore&ID=768&PAGEN_1=2)

<sup>18</sup> Robert Atayan, Aram Kerovpian, and Armineh Grigorian, "Komitas Vardapet," The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 2nd ed., 29 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Macmillan, 2001), 13:763-764

changed and influenced by its surroundings, still remained among the Armenians in Iran. The Iranian-Armenian music history divided into two parts of creation and performances.<sup>19</sup> In addition, some cultural factors can lead to the cultural dynamism, continuation, survival, and consolidation or might cause to cultural death and degradation. Of course, we should not assume that Culture is all about passiveness. In fact, what reduces or increases the factors influence power in any nature considered as their necessary and sufficient conditions or a serious obstacle to these factors that all are related to the culture itself. On the other hand, it should not be assuming that the factors influencing culture are always foreign or external and always happen outside the geographical boundaries, where places for culture's prevalence and durability. It should be noted; some mechanisms and methods that a society uses to preserve, Consolidating, and transferring their culture, are also effective in this regard. Therefore, the factors affecting culture can be classified into three main categories of the intrinsic factors (related to the culture). Augustus Kent in the late 19th century, tried by using this artistic theorem with a scientific approach in sociology, which was considered as a matter of philosophy and somehow appeared in philosophy, to be abandoned and introduced it with the community's stagnation. Durkheim raises the social objects issue and proposes the objectivism aspect of objects, and his purpose was to separate cultural aspects from social issues. Art and aesthetics are in technology and social affairs have been covered and impregnated with cultural roots. Wherever there is a cultural affair, there is a social affair with it and vice versa and it cannot be easily separated from each other. "As far as culture is related to beauty, aesthetics, and art, music which is one of the branches of art, has an instinctive aspect and the rest are acquired aspect." It can be divided as the internal factors (a society in which a culture exists) and external factors (factors outside the geographical boundaries). It should be noted that a culture often not always has a specific social domain. That is why; when we speak about cultural Iranian-Armenian cultural music, we do not necessarily limit ourselves to a particular society. They deal with two different cultures in a geographic location that is inextricably linked to one another, and this connection brings common cultural considerations together.<sup>20</sup> Now with reference to the cases, the factors influencing the Iranian-Armenian cultural music were examined.

1) One of the intrinsic factors in Armenian cultural folk is their music was rooted in a few thousand years ago. There are pictures of ancient times On Oghtasar boulders that clearly represent the dance scenes and special ceremonies associated with songs. The common music and songs related to the ceremonies for prayer and war preparation at the time of Hayasa and Armenians ethnic unity formation. The first millennium (BC) was full of changes in art of music and ancient culture. As a proof, deer's horn found near the Swan Lake. Moreover, some measurements have been found in the 7th century BC in Karim Bloor (related to the era of the Ararat kingdom). At the time of Ararat Armenian, Armenian music got a form of worshipful and secular nature, and worldly music flourished by narrators, speakers, writers, and lovers. This progress continued during Yervandians reign, and with the solidity system in ancient Armenia's society and families, music and singing became more specialized. This kind of music particularly improved by chants in funeral ceremonies and gradually became one of the Armenian literal music used in narratives and myths to tell stories about ancient Armenian history and their early religion (mythology) for their progress. The Khorānatsky's founder, with speaking about the Hayek and Bell legends (Aram), Beautiful thought, Shamiram, Vahagan, Nurek Ankagh sometimes called narrates, song, legend, and passionate. In addition, having a special interest on music and art, and considering a special place for music in Armenian culture, is beyond thoughts.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, it can be seen that music inherited in Armenian culture and carried generations after generations all-around of world. Therefore, when something is so deep in a society's culture it can be its intrinsic point.

<sup>19</sup><http://farsi.hooys.com/?p=1895>

<sup>20</sup><http://rasekhoon.net/>

<sup>21</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture\\_of\\_Armenia#Music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Armenia#Music)

2) Internal factors are important controversial issues in a culture. In case of Iranian-Armenian community, the Armenian alphabet emergence in fifth century had a dramatic effect on flourishing of the Armenian music and singing. After that, the holy books were translated into Armenian. Sobor David and church books were provided in Armenian and used in religious ceremonies' choral songs such as Sharagan. Various holly chants had been made by the churches, used over time and have been using until present time. The Armenians were the first people to join Christian community. The Christian religion, hold their ceremonies in church, where accompanied by religious prayers and hymns. It can be said the church's music frontier is Gregorian with his songs. Rubik Gregorian is the founder of " Association of Armenian Culture Lovers". He also recited Komitas music and songs that presented in a Symphony. Based on Budrag, Gomitus's work has four parts (four Budrags) The Holy God, Holy-Holy, Our God, and Only Holy. That was Symphony Orchestras, Grand Choirs, and Solos' (Tenor and Brass Baritone and Soprano and Mezzo Soprano) first experience in Symphonic Oraturio form. Today, this work is the most successful religious music produced by an Armenian and use to celebrate Christ position in Armenian churches all around the world. This Budrag has a historical record in Armenian music and can be said is a part of the Armenian cultural history that has been inherited from ancient times. With an approach to the Armenian culture, it can be noted that music of both church and religious is an inward cultural approach to the Armenian people. It can also refer to the other things such as; the chant people using while farming and animal husbandry, the simplicity and beauty of Shepherds' lives that spent most of their lives in plains and mountains. Shepherds Duduk chants blended with their full of sense breath.<sup>22</sup> Also, the songs Armenian uses during work, celebration, mothers sang nostalgic simple lullabies in their own language for their children, special songs and singing for weddings, as well as pre-Christian epic music, which has a special place in Armenian music.

3) External factors refer to the interaction between two Iranian and Armenian cultures in a geographic environment that received through communication and art of music is the most important means of communication and response to the human reaction in external and internal world. The society's cultural elements are that culture is dynamic and in case of being connected to the people and other societies, it may get change imperceptibly. Armenians role in modern and contemporary Iranian music formation has been impressive. Many Armenian artists had taken important steps in Iranian music's development and expansion. Particularly, during the Ali al-Qaeda the Iranian Shiites music boycott, there was no place for music, instead the Armenians of Iran with Christianity freedom, easily helped music. Although most Armenian musicians tend to classical and less traditional music, we can find some related signs to the Iranian music and the most famous example is opera of Rostam and Sohrab, created by Loris Cheknavarian. In addition, many years of Iranian and Armenian musicians' collaboration in different fields of music, have made it possible to combine the two types of music to make it more powerful and successful. One of them sponsored by Iranian-Armenian musician Hossein Alizadeh in 2007, as well as the Armenian musician and composer Jivan Gasparyan performance. Gasparyan born in 1928, he began his work with Duduk at the age of six, and with such an advance in this field, he is now considering as the world master of Duduk. Among his precious works, the "Endless Perspective" album was that nominated him for the 2007 Grammy Award.<sup>23</sup> Iranian and Armenian musicians have collaborated on some other items that made a great success in the world. It can be concluded that when two rich cultures collaborate with each other on the various cultural fields in which both are rich, they can produce much better results.

## CONCLUSION

We can state that history and culture in each society means its roots. The roots are maintaining a culture and society, and cause their growth and dynamism. In this article, three aspects of Iranian-Armenian cultural music have been considered. First, an intrinsic approach that refers to the historical roots of music rose by Armenian community. Second, the internal churches musical theme is a typical example of music

<sup>22</sup>Zandibaf.H, World Music History and Culture, Publications: SuraMehr, Arts Center, (2009)

<sup>23</sup><http://www.radiobaran.ir/14849/jivan-gasparyan-andreas-mueller-ensemble-hewar-syria/>



intrinsic nature in community culture. Third, the exterior approach, gives Armenian music a better taste and more success with Iranian music.

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