

PANDEMIC AND MUSIC OR CRISIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY

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Do not leave the room! ...That is, give free rein to furniture, merge with wallpaper.

Lock up and barricade yourself with a closet from Chronos, space, Eros, race, and virus.

I. Brodsky

The 2020 pandemic has had a profound impact on global cultural as concert halls, theaters, cinemas and exhibition spaces have been closed. The crisis has engulfed all spheres of music. The solution is not yet clear. Today, I would like to talk about the lost and limited freedom in the Covid-19 era and ways to overcoming this crisis in our lives.

The Chinese use two hieroglyphs for the word *crisis*, one denotes danger and the other an opportunity. The explanation is as follows: The history of evolution of art is also a story of crises and lessons learned from them and opportunities to deal with them in the future. We will try to look at the current crisis from this angle and see distant ways out through the opportunities observed in the crisis. The paper focuses mainly on creative processes occurring in hard times. The study aims to highlight the novelties caused by the crisis and regard them as an opportunity in the prism of crisis.

Musical episodes from the history of pandemics

Any art is a mirror of human feelings and emotions. In our history there are many examples of how tragic events impact music. Even though epidemics left no such marks on the history of music as on literature, painting, and cinema, we can still have an idea about them thanks to individual works. To prove this, I will present some episodes from the history of music created under the crisis situation of epidemics:

1. In the history of academic music, the first work of the plague pandemic era belongs to Guillaume Du Fay,

who is considered the founder of Renaissance-style European polyphony. From 1428, the Flemish musician worked in Pope's choir, exactly when the Eternal City was hit by the plague. Two of Du Fay's motets, dating back to 1430, are prayers for protection from the plague addressed to St. Sebastian, the heavenly from this disease since the 7th century.

2. The first book of 5-part madrigals by Paolo Caracielo in 1582, also dedicated to St. Sebastian, can be viewed as a kind of monument to the epidemic in Lombardy in 1576, killing 15% of the population. This book of madrigals has yet to be performed; its artistic value can be appreciated only through "the eye". We hope that current events will prompt the return of this masterpiece to musical life.

3. Two Mystical Hymns of Philipp Nicolai, a Lutheran pastor of Rhine Westphalia (1597), *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, was created during the plague in Germany. The epidemic took the life of Pastor's 15-year-old student, to whom these hymns were dedicated. The initials of the three stanzas of the song form an acrostic in memory of the deceased (Graf zu Waldeck=Wachet auf, Zionshördie Wächtersingen, Gloriaseidirsungen), Nicolai's songs gained popularity in his lifetime. Their texts and melodies were used for their works by the best 17th-century masters, such as M. Preterius, D. Buxtehude, later by F. Mendelssohn and M. Reger. But most often they were used by Johann Sebastian Bach, notably in the cantatas dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the end of the world: *BWV 1* (1725) *Wie schön scheint der Morgenstern* and *BWV 140 Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*. When we listen to them, we do not even think about the circumstances under which their musical-poetic source was created. Unlike us, Bach's contemporaries were well aware of this.¹

4. A modern listener familiar with the *Erbarne dich*

¹ Schweitzer, Bach, 2004, p.234

aria from Bach's *The St. Matthew Passion* will probably be surprised at hearing it performed to a different text, but the text was authorized by Bach himself and is related to a funeral cantata (1729). While in Köthen, Bach served at Prince Leopold's court, with whom he maintained contact after moving to St. Thomas in Leipzig until the entire family: the prince himself, his wife, and 2 children died of a smallpox epidemic. Bach was commissioned to compose funeral music for the ceremony of translating their remains to the family sepulcher. Apparently, Bach used the usual practice of the time by replacing the existing text of the aria and choirs from *The St. Matthew Passion* created in 1727.²

5. Epidemiologically, the 19th century was a relatively quiet period in Europe until tuberculosis became the "trendy" disease of the century. Verdi was the first to use this theme in his opera *Traviata* in the context of escalating social conflicts to arouse public sympathy for the fate of courtesan Violetta. At the same time, tuberculosis is not the only way to escalate melodramatic passions; it is an important symbol that requires proper interpretation. Tuberculosis symbolically reminds us of the vices of bourgeois society, which is the cause of Violetta's fall and death; before *Traviata*, the only serious illness of female characters in opera was madness, widespread in operatic literature from the second half of the 17th century. Verdi expanded the conditionality of musical theater and the range of diseases allowed by tradition.

6. The death of a child is the greatest trauma for parents, so this topic had long been tabooed in academic art, as evidenced by the personal tragedy of romantic poet Friedrich Rückert whose children died of scarlet fever; to them he dedicated a cycle of poems (1833–1834), basing on which Gustav Mahler (despite great resistance from his wife, Alma Schindler) wrote a vocal cycle, *Songs about Dead Children* (1901, 1904). This work turned out to be fateful for the Mahler family, because their eldest daughter, Anna Maria, soon died of scarlet fever.
7. Main impetus for famous contemporary American composer John Cirigliano's *Symphony N1*, composed

in 1989, was the spiritual experience of losing friends in the early years of the AIDS epidemic. It is a kind of memorial to friends who died of AIDS. Each of the symphony's three parts (Apology-Tango, Tarantella, Chaconne) is dedicated specifically to one musician, whose identities are delicately concealed. Music collage of the symphony is a sort of „quilt (a blanket sewn from scraps of fabric) dedicated to those deceased by AIDS.³

8. Although the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic led to great casualties, its influence on music was surprisingly small, as well as the damage to the music industry, smaller than the current crisis. In contrast to the existential threat posed by the coronavirus, cultural life in the post-influenza period improved quickly. Only a few songs and works have survived from that period as cultural documents (e.g. *The Influenza Blues* from Arizona University Library Fund). Musical Courier, New York, 17 October, 1918, reported that the Chicago Opera Association and the orchestras of Paris Conservatory had canceled performances and concert tours due to quarantine. Musical America⁴ magazine wrote "one can only know for sure that a soloist, conductor or all the staff will definitely be ill. Edison's phonographs were sold with the inscription 'You can attend concerts without a mask, listen to opera, sacred music and not be afraid of the flu.'" Thus, the pandemic greatly contributed to the development of the recording studio business all over the world.
9. After declaring independence in 1918, the First Republic of Georgia inherited all the problems that worried the world at that time. Two diseases: typhoid fever and cholera raged in Tbilisi. Along with these inherited diseases, the First Republic had to deal with the new Spanish flu epidemic. According to historian Irakli Khvadagiani, thanks to sanitary detachments, the newly elected self-governments managed to overcome the problem more or less successfully⁵. This is evidenced by the fact that 1918–1921 marked unprecedented musical activities in Tbilisi, bringing together musical works scattered over time for a premiere. Crowded halls (e.g. the premiere of three classical operas in 1919: Paliash-

² Schweitzer, 2004, p. 356

³ Насонов, *От мотета*, 2020

⁴ Musical America, *Influenza Blues*, 2018

⁵ Rekhviashvili, *Black plague*, 2020

vili's *Abesalom and Eteri*, Arakishvili's *The Legend of Shota Rustaveli*, and Dolidze's *Keto and Kote*), choral music concerts, and others were also held. However, Vano Sarajishvili suffered severely from Spanish flu, which is why he did not participate in the premiere of *Abesalom and Eteri*⁶.

Lessons of pandemic, music in quarantine

Coronavirus has put all spheres of the country to test for sustainability, hitting particularly hard the healthcare system and economy, including the music industry and freelancers, and affecting people psychologically. The education system has also been affected, including art thrown into the whirlpool of experiments. New living conditions let two genies out of the bottle: remote work and online education, which have become an integral part of our lives alongside facemask, gloves, and social distancing.

The challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic have already led to many changes, in both negative and positive context, in terms of introducing new directions, implementation processes, teaching methodology, and many other innovations.⁷

What have we lost and what have we gained in this process, and what has corona taught us?

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the world that everyone is equal before the virus, including royal families, prime ministers, and tramps. Nor does national identity matter to it. On one hand, the isolation of some countries and closure of borders questioned the idea of globalization. On the other hand, if we look at the ongoing processes in the music world, relations have proven vital to people—we can see this easily if we look at the music life of recent months, which has gone online and taken on an unprecedented mass character. Music turned out to be a form of self-expression for people locked at home during quarantine, and a way for communication with one another, as evidenced by the abundance of home videos posted online, regardless of whether this is Italy, America, or Georgia.

- There has appeared a new concert form, one without a listener
- Live streaming
- New genres of academic music created with new technologies, especially for musicians relocating to virtual space
- New forms of performance adapted for online space
- Online competitions and festivals
- New folklore pieces related to coronavirus.

All these music forms involve musicians with limited freedom. I would like to refer to Merab Mamardashvili and paraphrase his words about theatre: "Music has lost the magic of attendance." The theater and concert hall audiences have gone online, to free access to the best performances and concerts (from Metropolitan, Vienna Opera House, Royal Opera Theatre, Bavaria and Bolshoi Theatres, and the like), to absorb the proposed repertoire. What was previously unavailable (due to distance, prices), suddenly became accessible and put us face to face with wide choice. Abundant spiritual subsistence appeared during the quarantine and lockdown. Live streaming has emerged. Consequently, art has lost the magic of attendance; the possibility of live communication is gone.

Why do we sing in crisis? Music evokes a sense of participation and interpersonal synchronization, an antidote for social distancing and geographical isolation set up by pandemic-related regulations. Music is a social balm in this situation. To this testifies *They Long to Be with You*, a recording comprised of the videos of thousands of participants who "stayed at home,"⁸ Or the song *You'll Never Walk Alone* performed by 300 virtual choirs and orchestras from 15 countries.⁹ Georgia's polyphonic musical message to the world, *You Are not Alone*, is also suffused with the same attitude.¹⁰

An unprecedented fact of sacred music performance online took place on 3 May, 2020. In this unique and difficult time, 65 churches and movements in the United Kingdom, numbering thousands, gathered online to pray to God for the salvation of the earth. The message of this

6 Kashmadze, Saradjishvili, 1948, p. 40

7 Video meeting cycle, 2020

8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=59&v=HezxlnuN1YA&feature=emb_logo

9 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gpoJNv5dIQ>

10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=A-hEt0TUYis&feature=emb_logo

action was God will not leave us, blessed be the Church, He is with you.¹¹

Probably everyone has seen the world singing on-line: the citizens of Wuhan cheering one another with patriotic songs from the windows, Italians singing on the balconies to support and encourage one another, or Vakhtang Kakhidze's new humorous song *Everything Will be Fine* adopted to Kakhidze's old melody. Equally frequent are humorous songs about coronavirus, such as the latest folk example with a Gurian yodel of the Georgian students stuck in quarantine in the Italian city of Bari.¹²

Nor did ballet lag behind as we watched *Swan Lake* with a holographic *corps de ballet* and two Odettes. In this period, voiced was the microcosm of coronavirus, created via the transformation of coronavirus "spike proteins" as a structure melody; it also has its own musical language.

Important works were also created, a peculiar document of the epoch in the field of electroacoustic music, specially for virtual performance, e.g. Koka Nikoladze's *Pandemic* showing the truly destructive power of this invisible virus and the scale of the disaster befalling humanity. The work was commissioned by the Oslo Philharmonic for a digital concert recorded under a special program by more than 100 orchestra musicians in lockdown. The world premiere took place online on April 20.¹³

Eka Chabashvili's nano-opera *Pandora*¹⁴, designed specifically for virtual space, was created during the state of emergency declared due to the 2020 pandemic, with its online presentation held a week before the conference. With this so-called opera, Chabashvili laid the foundation for a new genre of documentary video-opera in Georgian music. This eight-minute video collage used documentary footage spread during the pandemic, accompanied by original electronic music, with 4 recordings of vocal and verbal sounds as the primary source. The music of the nano-opera is the sound produced by transformation (voice mutation, change in speed, fre-

quency, and so on) of these recordings, which is partially mounted on the film sounding principle (via Premiere software).

The name of the opera, *Pand-Ora*, is symbolic of the situation in the world and pun of the word "pand-emic." The dramaturgy of the video is based on the transmission of current processes in two worlds through parallel editing. Episodes 1-3-5 reflect the reality around us, episodes 2-4 what goes on in our microcosm. The opera consists of 5 episodes (5 mutations), an analogue of a traditional opera; the last part commutation plays the role of an epilogue. Each episode has a name; the combination of their initial letters makes the word Covid-19.

Mutation 1: **C**-luster (the cluster transferred to sound)

Mutation 2: **O**-axis (our microcosm)

Mutation 3: **V**-erdict (current processes in the world)

Mutation 4: **I**-llusion (The virus also appeared in a new world)

Mutation 5: **D**-emocracy (bat and prevention)

Com-mutation: **19** apostles (the hope from Pandora's box)

The final episode (commutation) depicts the hope that was last to fly out of Pandora's box, which implies that as long as there is a diversity of opinions among people, there is a chance to find a solution. In the overlapping texts of the discussion's one can hear vaguely but intelligible phrases: "Some do not understand this well," "May not hinder but lead the wrong way," "Hopefully humanity will get rid of this someday"—the words of the author, Eka Chabashvili, can be heard in the video from afar.

The opera has three main characters: Virus, Bat, and Pandora, who have their own nano-light-timbres (Virus-child's voice, Bat-male voice with rock-vocal effect, Pandora-female voice). There are also characters presented as a team: mayors of Italian cities in the form of a cluster (with their famous video appeals), 19 "apostles" (discussion participants of the festival "Woman and Music") *integritin*, and so on.

11 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PUtl3mNj5U&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR3QULRbv1ceYbRUPWR4eb2-b1uqU3PW_Zt-jl3EKNWTIXMKtbe4jB2uKQuU

12 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iS4Q6vzMLw>

13 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxOFnuS9Uio>

14 <https://www.facebook.com/ekachabashvili/videos/10223963338939459/UzpfSTE0NzcwODI1ODU6MzA2MDYxMTI5NDk5NDE00-jEw0jA6MTU5NjI2NTE5OTotMTMzMjIwNjQ3NjIwMDM5MzQ0Q/>

"I tried to gather the events experienced in the last few months in one work; it is as tiny as Pandora's Box, where the vices of all mankind were locked...." Without any bias, I wanted to use these shots to create the musical mood that would help us see reality. Sometimes distinctive sound in the footage reveals more of the truth hidden in the visual. My nano-opera is not theater, though not entirely a cinematic example either, it is an intermediate multimedia product considering the form of image, collection of symbols, from the sources of inspiration and sorting of the construction according to the principle of the nano world; and music serves the purpose of opening the artistic content," Eka Chabashvili says. Deep emotion becomes clearer without words, because it gets inadvertently imprinted on the image and becomes part of the music. This is why original sound has been removed from most of the video (and the mayors' appeals and the voices of the participants in the festival discussion are used as a musical-sound component).

The documentalist approach emphasizes the main function of Chabashvili's dramaturgy, the specificity of narrative. The video opera brings to the forefront the atmosphere of historical authenticity, without applying the means of artistic hyperbolizing based on the documentary concept. The composer assigns the role of an eyewitness to the listener, who should make the final

conclusion and summarize facts.

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The pandemic has proved that the most important value in the 21st century is human safety, and for its preservation humanity is ready to sacrifice the achievement of the civilization that has been part of our daily lives. In this process, music has not lost its significance for people. Humanity gets adapted and mobilized in response to Covid-19.

Pause is a necessary thing in music and onstage, it says a lot. Musicians are well-aware that in a good performance a pause does "sound." The same can be said about life. Today we all have been held and paused, and the question is whether this time has been taken from us or given to us, how expressive is this pause, how does it sound?

Not only a virus, natural cataclysms and natural disasters, change life; we also do change it. Cataclysms only give us impetus for this. In my deepest belief, today's unusual situation is not just a loss that affects health and live relations, but is an achievement to some extent. Universal relocation to the virtual world due to the pandemic will involuntarily lead us to break old models, and whenever the fight with the virus in this undeclared war is over, the world can no longer be what it used to be.

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