



A Traditional Georgian *Ursatz*? Schenkerian-Styled Reduction Analysis and Cross Regional Comparisons of Traditional Georgian Polyphonic Songs

Andrea Kuzmich
York University

This paper considers the application of Western-art music reduction analysis to the traditional music of Georgia for cross-regional comparisons. Georgia, a country located between the Black and Caspian Seas, boasts a millennia old polyphonic tradition. Its multi-voiced form sets it apart from the monophonic musical traditions found in neighbouring countries like Azerbaijan, Armenia or Turkey. While pockets of monophony can be found throughout Georgia, the musical practices typically feature a dense three-part harmony and a non-Western temperament resulting in dissonances unusual for Western ears. The small country divides into approximately fifteen different geographical units, each one boasting its own distinct musical dialect. In some cases, the polyphonic development is seen as quite sophisticated, may involve complicated forms, and may even include up to five unique voices when experienced in the transitory overlap of a song sung antiphonally. Other instances, however, demonstrate a much simpler polyphony and form, perhaps consisting of no more than a repeated two bar phrase with a drone accompaniment. In order to perform a cross-regional comparison of Georgia music, it would thus seem necessary to reduce the various polyphonic structures to their simplest forms.

In Western musicological practices, the reduction of a composition is a method of analysis which removes extraneous layers of elaboration in order to present a compacted concept of the piece as a single holistic event. Schenkerian-styled analysis, a highly specialized method of reduction, is based on the belief that all Western tonal-art music reduces down to a fundamental structure, which is represented by a scalar step-wise descending line and a simple harmonic bass accompaniment. This structure is otherwise known as the *ursatz*. Little attempt has been made to apply Schenkerian-styled analysis to musics outside of the classical music idiom; however, there are many tools and techniques in the analysis which are translatable to the reduction of other musics. In particular, it would seem that applying such reduction techniques to a range of traditional Georgian songs offers the possibility of cross-regional comparison. Furthermore, it would be interesting to consider whether similar to Western art music, traditional Georgian polyphony would also reduce down to an *ursatz*, a fundamental structure.

In order to gauge these issues, this paper applies Schenkerian-styled reduction techniques to four different Georgian table songs. The songs (two from the western province of Guria and two from the

eastern province of Kakheti) represent two divergent musical styles. After a brief description of conventional Schenkerian analysis, the paper discusses how Schenker's assumptions and techniques are adapted to analyze music from an oral tradition which does not exhibit the tertiary relationships of Western tonal harmony. For clarification, examples are drawn from the analysis of the four songs. No fundamental structure or *ursatz* is actually identified, although some striking similarities and differences are found in the reduced forms of these four songs. These observations are further contextualized in a discussion that questions whether Schenkerian-styled reduction analysis can be used for cross regional comparisons of Georgian traditional songs as well as other musics found within the Caucasus.

Short Biography of Andrea Kuzmich

Initially trained as an economist at McMaster University, Andrea Kuzmich turned to music in the early 1990s after returning from her position as a health administrator in Malawi, Africa. She studied vocal music in its many forms, with a specialty in jazz and Georgian polyphony. She sings in the award winning ensembles Darbazi and Zari, has guest lectured at York University and the University of Toronto, and has directed the World Music Chorus at York University, where she completed her Masters Degree and is currently a PhD candidate in Ethnomusicology. Andrea's current research is supported by grants from York University and the Ontario and Canadian Governments.