

Alexi Matchavariani

- Biography -

The folk music of his homeland was always of great importance to the Georgian composer **Alexi Matchavariani**, born on 23 September 1913. In his first works, written in the 1930s, he treated rhythmic and melodic elements of Georgian folksongs. But the progressive tendencies of Soviet music of that period also influenced his work. Matchavariani's style thus shows a polystylistic dialogue, as a mixture of traditional, Georgian music and contemporary compositional techniques.

The musician, recipient of many awards, completed his studies at the Tbilissi Conservatory in 1936. He taught music theory there beginning in 1940 and was appointed professor of composition in 1963. His creative output covers a very broad spectrum: chamber music, romances, symphonies, operas and ballets. The composer's first major success was the Piano Concerto of 1944, but his real breakthrough only took place in 1950 with the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, a very lyrical work with a special attraction thanks to its combination of diatonic folk music and chromaticism. Matchavariani also earned recognition with the ballet "Othello" in symphonic style. This work was performed abroad a number of times, including in Tokyo, Bucharest and Helsinki, and also in Russia. Matchavariani's music can be seen as a reflection of his lifelong search for the synthesis of national musical influences and new compositional techniques.

Only a few years after the magnificent success of his ballet "Othello" in 1957, Matchavariani decided to tackle an opera based on Shakespeare's "Hamlet." He began writing a libretto in collaboration with the Georgian producer Meliva based on a translation by Ivane Machabeli. Interrupted by a long illness, this project proved to be laborious and energy-draining. The opera, in which a dramatic tenor sings the leading role, is cast in two acts and requires an extremely large orchestra. "My father was a person with strong principles and values in regard to truth and democratic ideals," Vakhtang Matchavariani explained. "He frequently came into conflict with the Soviet state." The result was a ban on Matchavariani's works in Georgia. Precisely at the time when the Georgian government prevented the performance of the opera "Hamlet," however, the Leningrad Kirov Theatre produced his ballet "The Valiant Hero in a Tiger-Skin" despite all opposition. Vakhtang Matchavariani himself then produced a three-part orchestral suite Hamlet opera during the 1980s.

Matchavariani died on New Year's Day, 1995. The orchestra of the Georgian State Opera in Tbilissi organised a remarkable concert with works by Alexi Matchavariani on 25 October 2007. His Symphony No. 7 "Gelati" for mixed choir and orchestra received its premiere on this occasion. Gelati is the designation of a church building in the west of Georgia, near the city of Kutaissi, which formed a kind of spiritual centre of the country with its academy in the middle ages. Gelati Cathedral is dedicated to Mary, the Mother God, Mary. The name "Gelati" is derived from the Greek "Genati," which means birth. The famous academy of Gelati was founded by King David the Constructor in the 11th century based on the academy in Constantinople. Until recent times, Gelati was a simple monastery, although the most important Georgian kings are buried within its walls. The Archbishop of Gelati was called "Genateli."