THE MUSIC OF ALAN HOVHANESS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Cornell University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

by
Niccolo Davis Athens
May, 2016

ABSTRACT

The Music of Alan Hovhaness

Niccolo Davis Athens, DMA

Cornell University 2016

This dissertation is an attempt to redress the dearth of serious scholarship on the music of the American composer Alan Hovhaness (1911-2000). As Hovhaness's catalogue is one of the largest of any 20th-century composer, this dissertation sets out to provide as complete a picture as possible of his output without discussing all six-hundred-plus works. This involves giving a comprehensive account of the important elements of Hovhaness's musical language, placing his work in the context of 20th-century American concert music at large, and exploring the major issues surrounding his music and its reception, notably his engagement with various non-Western musical traditions and his resistance to the prevailing modernist trends of his time. An integrated biographical element runs throughout, intended to provide a foundation for the discussion of Hovhaness's music.

The first chapter of this dissertation is concerned with an examination of Hovhaness's surviving juvenilia, after which it is divided according to the following style periods: early, Armenian, middle, "Eastern," and late. An additional chapter dealing with Hovhaness's experiences at Tanglewood in 1942 and what they reveal about his artistic values appears between the chapters on the music of the early and Armenian periods. Other pertinent issues surrounding Hovhaness's work are discussed as they arise chronologically.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Niccolo Davis Athens (b. 1988) was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas. He began his musical life as a violist, and started studying composition privately with Timothy Kramer in 2004. In 2010 he received a Bachelor of Music in composition from The Juilliard School, where he studied primarily with Samuel Adler. Upon graduation, he was awarded Scholastic Distinction for "The Walls Between the Worlds Grow Thin," an undergraduate thesis dealing with the music of Alan Hovhaness. In 2010 he began his studies in composition at Cornell University with Steven Stucky, Roberto Sierra, and Kevin Ernste. He received a Master's of Music from Cornell in 2013. In 2014 he was awarded a Fulbright Student Award for his research project "Stylistic Trends in Contemporary Chinese Concert Music." He spent the 2014-15 academic year in residence at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, where he also studied composition with Ye Xiaogang. Niccolo has received two BMI Student Composer awards, in 2006 and in 2009, and in 2012 he received a Charles Ives Scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He currently lives and teaches music in Shanghai.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my doctoral committee, Professors Kevin Ernste, Judith Peraino, and Roger Moseley, for their support and guidance in the writing of this dissertation. I especially want to thank the late Steven Stucky for his consistent encouragement and the freedom he allowed me to pursue a project of this scope. I would also like to express my appreciation for the late Martin Berkofsky, whose generosity in sharing with a young high school student all manner of Alan Hovhaness-related paraphernalia was a boon to me as my interest in this music first began to develop. In addition, I want to extend my sincere gratitude to Hinako Fujihara Hovhaness, who fearlessly opened her home (and most importantly, her basement!) to a young researcher with a passion for her husband's music. I hope that this work will live up to the trust she placed in me. Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to Marco Shirodkar, not only for sharing so many valuable research materials from his personal collection, but also for the friendship he has shown me during our correspondence over the past decade. He has been a kindred spirit, and our ongoing dialogue on the subject of Alan Hovhaness and his work has been a consistent source of stimulation and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"The walls between the worlds grow thin,

And brightness pierces through,

Alleluia."

– Alan Hovhaness (from *Avak the Healer*, 1946)

PREFACE

Participating in a composers' symposium in 1959, Alan Hovhaness once remarked that, "so much music that pretends to be profound is only profound because of the words and endless analytical articles written about it. We have all experienced music that sounds both insignificant and dull, but about which tremendously impressive things are said. The most important thing to do about music is to listen to it, rather than to read all that is written about it."[1] Besides being a critique of "serious" music's growing reliance on the academy for prestige in those days, this has also turned out to be an accurate description of how Hovhaness's own music has been received so far. While recordings of his works have continued to proliferate in the years since his death in 2000, mainstream musical scholarship has for the most part taken Hovhaness at his word and ignored him. This dissertation is an attempt to redress the dearth of serious scholarship on the music of Alan Hovhaness.

As Hovhaness's catalogue is one of the largest of any 20th-century composer, my goal in this dissertation is to provide as complete a picture as possible of his output without discussing all six-hundred-plus works. This will involve giving a comprehensive account of the important elements of Hovhaness's musical language, placing his output in the context of 20th-century American concert music at large, and exploring the major issues surrounding his music and its reception, notably his engagement with various non-Western musical traditions and his resistance to the prevailing modernist trends of his time.

This dissertation is *not* intended to be a survey of Hovhaness's best music. Some of his (in my estimation) finest works have been left unmentioned, as their inclusion would have led to

[1] Cited in: Kelly, John Jerome. "The Musical Style of Alan Hovhaness." University of Iowa, 1965, 4.

redundancy. Others pieces which I feel are weaker *are* discussed because they aid in the illustration of some salient point. I have also tried to avoid tedious "blow-by-blow" prose descriptions of this or that piece unless absolutely necessary, instead relying on isolated individual examples or diagrams wherever possible. This dissertation is also not intended to fill the as yet unmet need for a detailed Hovhaness biography. There is an integrated biographical element which runs throughout, but it is for the most part meant to provide a foundation for the discussion of the music and, in a few cases, to provide clarity on biographical issues about which there exists a good deal of conflicting information.

The last serious attempt to take stock of Hovhaness's output as a whole was Arnold Rosner's 1972 dissertation, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," in which each aspect of Hovhaness's musical language is identified and described, followed by an in-depth analysis of a handful of important works. Aside from the fact that when Rosner wrote his dissertation in 1972 Hovhaness still had more than three decades of musical work ahead of him, Rosner lacked access to many important documents and unpublished works which provide indispensable insight into Hovhaness's development. In addition, Rosner only made a limited attempt to contextualize Hovhaness's work and discuss the various issues surrounding it. Nevertheless, he made many observations of great value, and his dissertation, which has up to the present remained the definitive academic work on Alan Hovhaness, will be referenced often in this one. Several other scholarly works from around the same time deal narrowly with specific aspects of Hovhaness's musical language, among which Brian Israel's excellent 1975 dissertation on "Form, Process, and Texture" in Hovhaness's symphonies for wind ensemble stands out. The only major academic work on Hovhaness from the 1980s was Wayne Johnson's monograph on Hovhaness's piano music, which was written with a degree of cooperation on the

part of the composer. In the 1990s, interest in Hovhaness research seems to have waned almost completely as the composer lived out his last decade. With the approach and passing of the Hovhaness centennial in 2011, there has been a slight uptick in the production of scholarly works on Hovhaness's music. Some of these have been the rather routine efforts of performers and conductors fulfilling their doctoral requirements, while the remainder have mostly focused on various facets of Hovhaness's relationship with non-Western music.

One possible reason that scholars have been reluctant to attempt any kind of comprehensive treatment of Hovhaness's output is that his catalog of compositions is not merely large, but extremely convoluted in its organization. This state of affairs is largely due to Hovhaness himself, who once quipped that "Köchel was more careful than I was, because Mozart was dead."[2] (The allusion to Köchel is apt; Hovhaness's prolificacy was comparable to that of a composer of the common-practice period.) He made at least three separate starts at assigning opus numbers to his works. The final, official tally eventually reached 434, although many opus numbers have multiple works assigned to them. Although some of them share material with other works, there are also over 200 other pieces in addition to those that carry opus numbers, most of which remain unpublished. Furthermore, the official catalogue, particularly in the lower-opus-numbered works, is wildly misleading in chronological terms. This is glaringly apparent in the out-of-order numbering of the symphonies. (*Symphony No. 9* and *Symphony No. 13* both predate *Symphony No. 2*, for example.) Attempts to decipher Hovhaness's catalog are further complicated by his idiosyncratic practice of replacing early works with completely new pieces carrying the same title and opus number, presumably so that his publisher's catalog would not have to be altered. In some cases both versions are extant, as is

[2] Kostelanetz, Richard. *On Innovative Musicians*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1989, 99.

true of the 1938 and 1967 song cycles *Love Songs of Hafiz*, both of which deal with the same basic subject matter but are completely distinct in both music and text. Even in the case of earlier works which still carry both their original date of composition and opus number in the official catalog, Hovhaness often made revisions when republishing them with C. F. Peters in the 1960s, the extent of which is impossible to determine without access to the original manuscripts. Because of all these complications, I have been careful to deal only with works whose different versions can be dated with a reasonable degree of certainty when trying to discern various trends in the composer's development.

Divisions of any composer's work into "style periods" such as those I will rely on in this dissertation are necessarily somewhat artificial. Nevertheless, in Hovhaness's case they describe a genuine process of musical evolution that began to be recognized by critics as early as the 1950s and was at times acknowledged by the composer himself. Rosner initially divided Hovhaness's output into four periods: early, Armenian, middle, and late. Hovhaness himself referred to the Armenian period as such.[3] Because Hovhaness's "true" late period was actually just beginning at the time Rosner completed his dissertation, and was therefore completely unaddressed by it, the aforementioned terminology requires some modification. The first chapter of this dissertation is concerned with an examination of Hovhaness's surviving juvenilia, after which it is divided according to the following style periods: early, Armenian, middle, "Eastern" (for lack of any better nomenclature), and late. An additional chapter dealing with Hovhaness's experiences at Tanglewood in 1942 and what they reveal about his artistic values has been inserted between the chapters on the music of the early and Armenian periods. Other pertinent issues surrounding the music are discussed as they arise chronologically.

---

[3] *Hovhaness Speaks on "Khaldis,"* 1972. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.

CHAPTER 1 – Beginnings (1911-1934)

Alan Hovhaness was born Alan Vaness Chakmakjian in the Boston suburb of Somerville, Massachusetts on March 8, 1911. Hovhaness's father, Haroutiun Chakmakjian, was an Armenian immigrant who had been born in the Anatolian city of Adana, at that time part of the Ottoman Empire and today located in modern Turkey. (Most diaspora Armenians were "Western" Armenians, that is those that had lived in Ottoman territories. Russian "Eastern" Armenia later became part of the Soviet Union, and eventually emerged as present-day independent Armenia.[4]) Haroutiun Chakmakjian taught French for a time in Beirut before eventually coming to the United States, where he matriculated at Harvard, graduating in the class of 1909.[5] Chakmakjian eventually took up a post as a biochemistry professor at Tufts College, and was one of the most educated members of the community in which Hovhaness grew up, at one time compiling an Armenian-English dictionary for the use of recently arrived immigrants.[6] Hovhaness's mother was Madeline Scott, an American of Scottish descent. A homemaker, Scott was a graduate of Wellesley College and also quite well-educated.

Around 1916, the Chakmakjian family moved to Arlington, Massachusetts, another Boston suburb, where they remained throughout the remainder of Hovhaness's childhood. It was there that Hovhaness began his first studies in music with a neighborhood piano teacher whose skills he soon outgrew.[7] It was also in Arlington that the seven-year-old Hovhaness was inspired

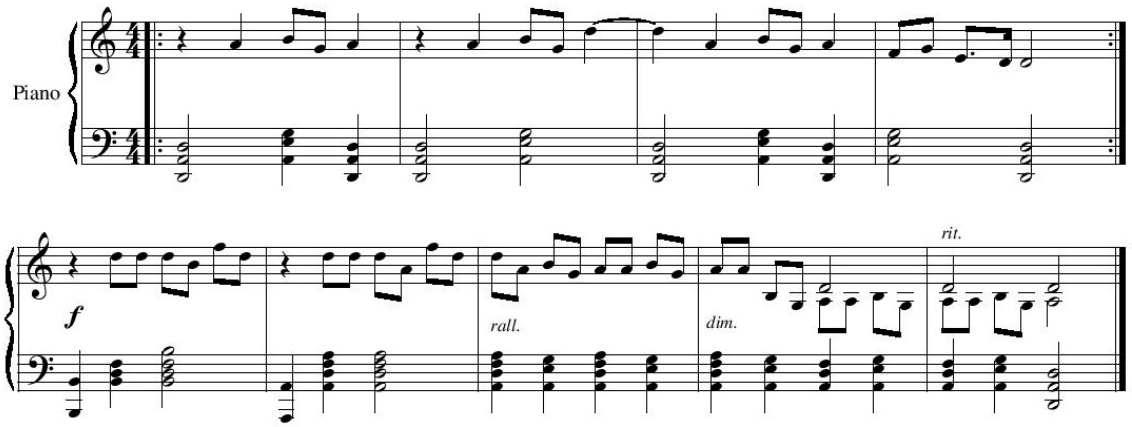
---

[4] Alajaji, Sylvia. "Diasporic Communities and Negotiated Identities: Trauma, Recovery, and the Search for the Armenian Musical Voice." Eastman School of Music, 2009, 13.
[5] Hovhaness, Alan. Interview by Johnston, Lynn, March 1984. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.
[6] Johnston, Jack. Interview by Berkofsky, Martin, August 1, 2008. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.
Chakmakjian, H. H. *A Comprehensive Dictionary: English - Armenian*. Boston: E. A. Yeran, 1922.
[7] Shirodkar, Marco. "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary." Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.hovhaness.com/hovhaness-biography.html.

to begin notating his own works after hearing Schubert's *Ständchen* in class at elementary school.[8] In 1920, he began studying piano with Adelaide Proctor, whom he later remembered as being his first "serious" piano teacher.[9]

Hovhaness's earliest surviving works are a collection of short songs and piano pieces that were recorded in childish handwriting in a single sketchbook appearing to date from the first half of the 1920s. The only date recorded in the sketchbook is the 1925 dedication of one particular song to the composer Roger Sessions (fifteen years Hovhaness's senior), which appears to have been penned in at a later time. One short piano piece found in this notebook was later performed by Hovhaness (in a revised harmonization) as part of a documentary about his music filmed for Seattle public Television in the 1980s, at which time he remembered composing it when he was "eight or nine-years-old."[10] The original title of this short composition was "The Armenian Church," but this was later replaced with the Schubertian "Moment Musical." The entire piece is reproduced in Fig. 1.1.

Figure 1.1, *Moment Musical No. 1* (1919/1920?)



Hovhaness's works from this period are perhaps more important to understanding his

[8] Walkinshaw, Jean. "Alan Hovhaness." Seattle: KCTS, June 10, 1984.
[9] Hovhaness, interview, March 1984.
[10] Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."

output as a whole than are most composers' run-of-the-mill juvenilia. One reason for this is that some of these childhood melodies were reused prominently in much later compositions, perhaps as a way for Hovhaness to construct a kind of personal musical mythology which knit together his entire oeuvre. More significantly, however, these earliest pieces reveal an important aspect of Hovhaness's musical personality which seemingly appeared very early on: his penchant for modality. As Hovhaness later explained, "I have mainly used the lowered seventh … the lowered seventh was associated more the music of Asia."[11] The avoidance of the raised leading tone in Western classical music had by the late nineteenth century already become a marker of the pseudo-archaic and of resistance to the Germanic classical "mainstream." It is unlikely that the nine-year-old Hovhaness was aware of this. Rather, as he later put it, "The Oriental influence was always there. Even in some of my earliest childhood works it was there. People used to think they were very queer because they were 'gloomy' and Oriental. I didn't think they were gloomy at all! … But I never really tried to write anything Oriental. My way of thinking and ideas were just that way."[12]

Another one of these early compositions, the *Morning Song*, has a melody that wavers tellingly back-and-forth between raised and lowered seventh degrees (Fig. 1.2). The lone raised seventh degree in the original tune was done away with when Hovhaness reused the theme two decades later in *Khrimian Hairig*, an Armenian period work for trumpet and string orchestra (Fig. 1.3). The raised sevenths in the original piano accompaniment were also eliminated in the revised harmonization (although the most interesting element in the original piano part, the non-functional use of a German augmented-sixth chord, was incorporated in the revised version).

---

[11] Hovhaness, Alan. From Mountain Climbing to Composing. Interview by Vance Wolverton, October 1993. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Wolverton.html.
[12] Westbrook, Peter. "Hovhaness Interview: Angelic Cycles." *Downbeat*, March 1982. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Westbrook.html.

Figure 1.2, *Morning Song* (1923?)

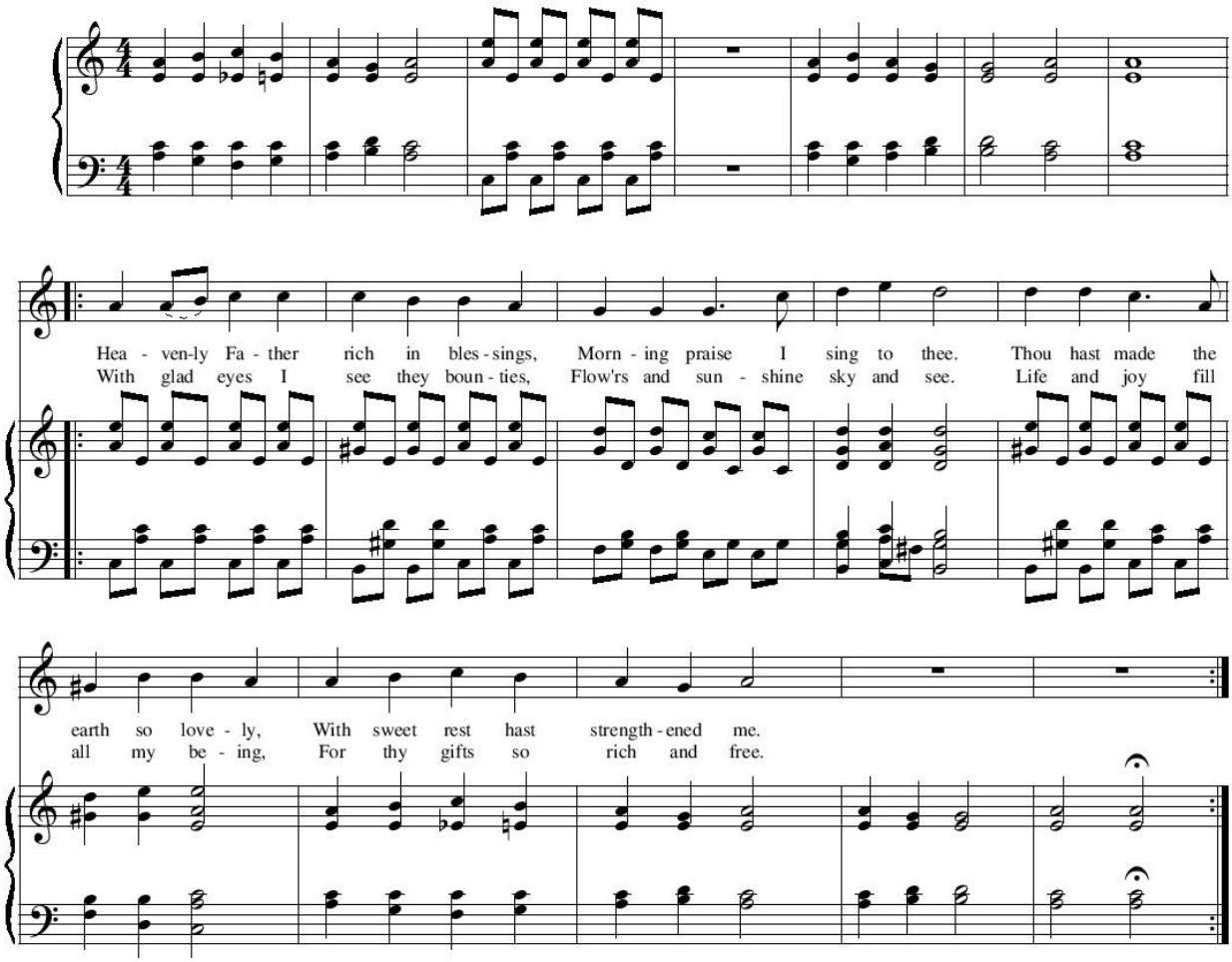
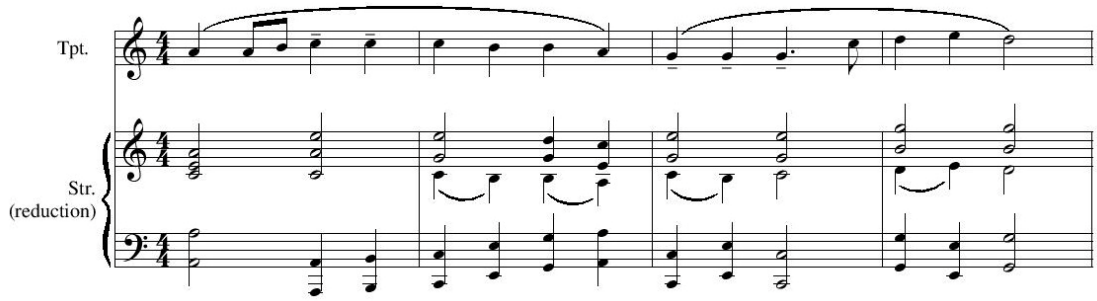
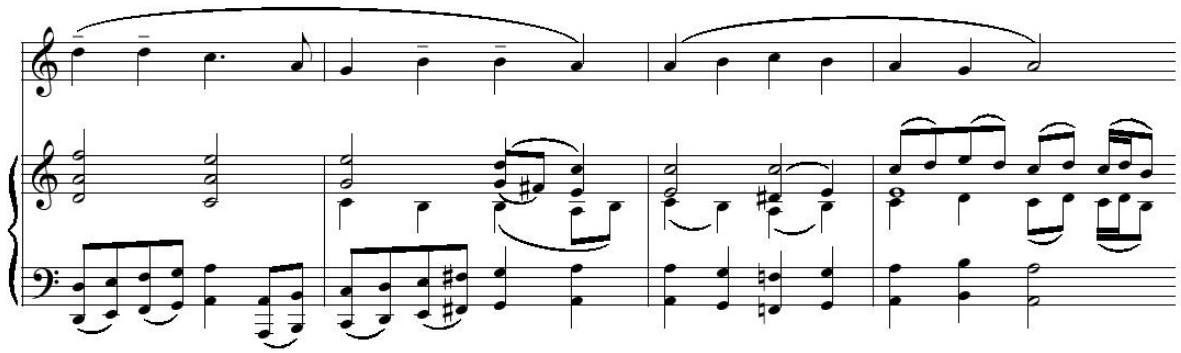


Figure 1.3, *Khrimian Hairig* (1944), theme

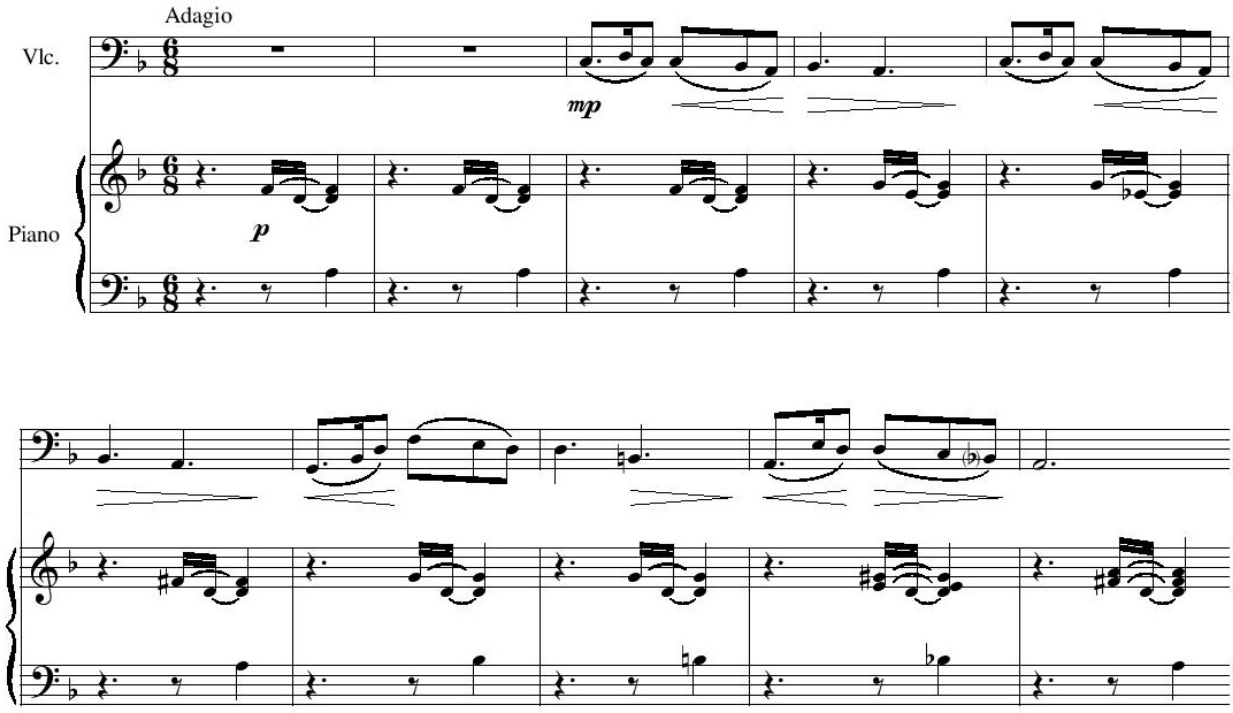




Hovhaness later remembered that he first decided to pursue a career in music around 1925. In May of that year, his first opera *Daniel* (now apparently lost) was performed in the Arlington High School auditorium. It was also around this time that Hovhaness began to study composition with Leo Rich Lewis at Tufts University, and had his first meeting with Roger Sessions.[13] A representative surviving work from these years, the *Suite for Strings and Pianoforte*, shows the continued evolution of Hovhaness's modal harmonic and melodic language. The suite was written in the spring of 1927, supposedly on top of Turkey Hill (located in a park in Hovhaness's hometown). He later reused the music of this work on multiple occasions. An excerpt from the second movement (initially subtitled *Lament by the Lake of Van*, a lake in modern Turkey which played an important role in ancient Armenian history) is reproduced in Fig. 1.4. In contrast to the *Morning Song*, the subtle harmonization of the cello's modal theme successfully avoids any jarring raised leading tone dominants, which are in fact absent from the work entirely.

[13] Hovhaness, Alan. Interview by Abramian, Jackie, 1987. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Abramian.html.

Figure 1.4, *Suite for Strings and Pianoforte*, (1927), II. Adagio (opening)



The suite also contains an early example of a cascading, sequential, pandiatonic motif that later reappears many times throughout Hovhaness's output in different guises (Fig. 1.5). Two much later examples are given in Fig. 1.6 and Fig. 1.7 for comparison.

Figure 1.5, *Suite for Strings and Pianoforte*, (1927). IV. Lento (opening)

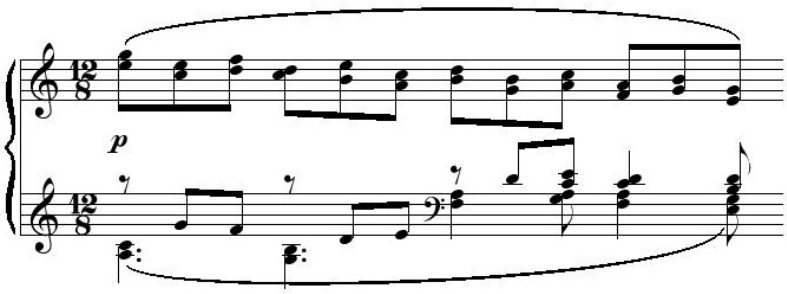


Figure 1.6, *The Garden of Adonis*, (1971), V. Grave

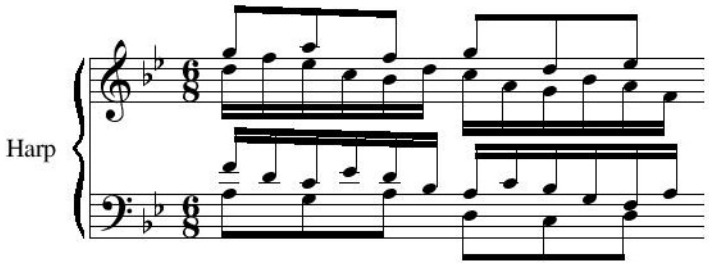
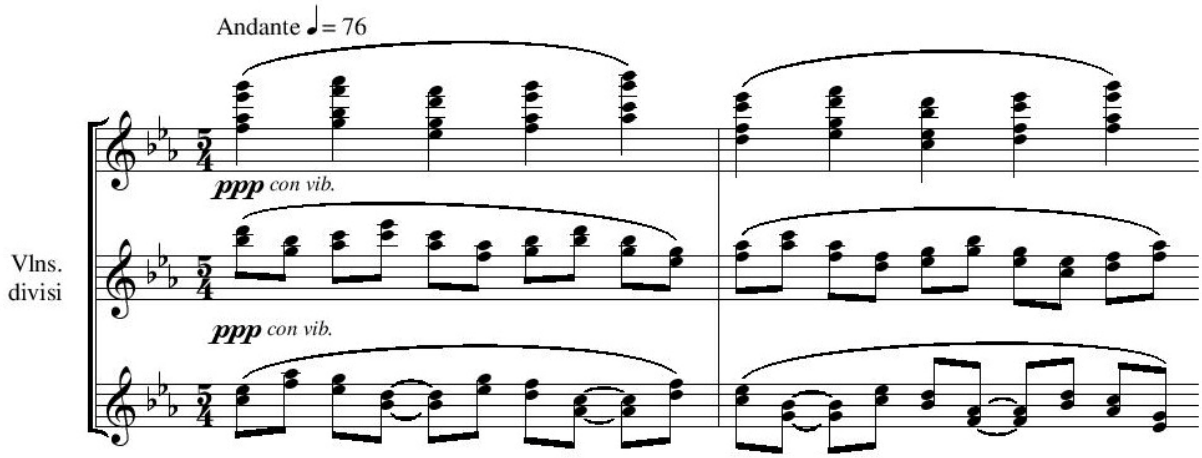


Figure 1.7, *Floating World*, (1964)



The original subtitle of the second movement of this suite (*Lament by the Lake of Van*), the original title of the *Moment Musical* (*The Armenian Church*), and the title of another early work for violin and piano (*Oror* – Armenian lullaby) seem to indicate that Hovhaness had at least some meaningful early exposure to Armenian culture, predating his oft-remarked-upon rediscovery of this heritage in the 1940s. Although some sources claim that his early contact with Armenian culture was limited by his mother's desire for her family to assimilate into mainstream American society, Hovhaness remembered that when he was a child his father owned a record of music by the Armenian composer Komitas Vardapet (1869-1935), who years later became one of

Hovhaness's most important influences.[14] (This was almost certainly a copy of the recordings that Komitas made with the singer Armenak Shah Muradian in Paris in 1912.) Hovhaness later recalled that "I found a greater identity with my own emotions in the Armenian culture as I grew older, as well as from the beginning, although I didn't know anything about it."[15] As such, there seems to be little in common between the musical content of these works and those of the Armenian period proper, aside from a general preference for modality. At this early stage, it seems that Armenian culture represented for Hovhaness an appealing exotic contrast to the strict Protestant upbringing imposed by his mother, just as his cultivation of "gloomy" modality in his early compositions represented an escape from the mundane musical norms of the hymns he heard at Sunday school. Hovhaness later reminisced, "… my grandfather was a minister and sort of Protestant, and this was rather depressing to me. They, themselves, weren't depressing but the whole background and that kind of culture were very depressing to me."[16] Hovhaness sought out Indian religious texts as an alternative to Christianity as a young man, revealing a nascent inclination towards mysticism that accompanied an early fascination with astronomy.[17]

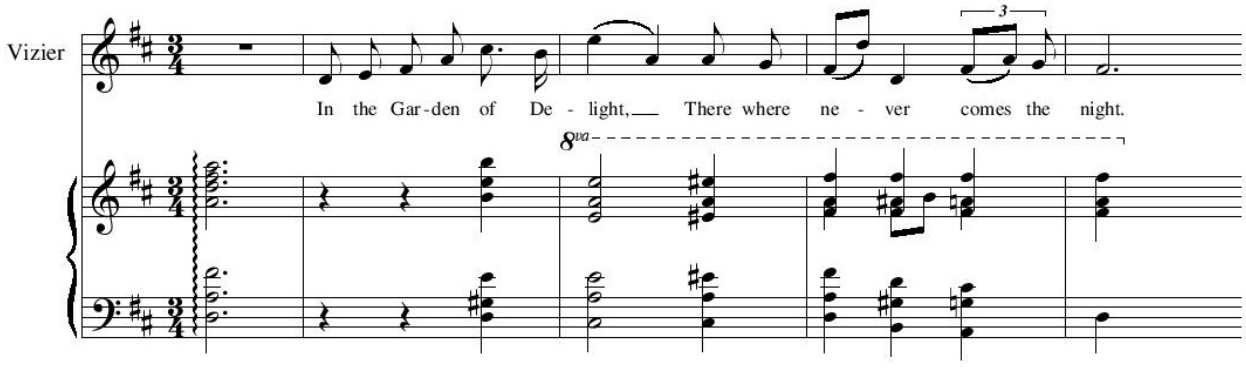
The largest surviving work from Hovhaness's high school years is the opera *Lotus Blossom*. It had two performances on March 8 and 9, 1929 at Arlington High School, where Hovhaness graduated later that spring. Its orientalist libretto, apparently written under the impression that Hovhaness would produce music in his usual "gloomy" modal style, was written

---

[14] Silver, Brian. "Henry Cowell and Alan Hovhaness: Responses to the Music of India." *Contributions to Asian Studies* 12 (1978): 63.
Gagne, Cole. *Soundpieces 2: Interviews with American Composers*. Metuchen, New Jersey; London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993, 122.
[15] Michaelyan, Julia. "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness." *Ararat: A Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1971): 19–31. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Ararat.html
[16] Ibid.
[17] Silver, Brian. "Henry Cowell and Alan Hovhaness: Responses to the Music of India," 68.

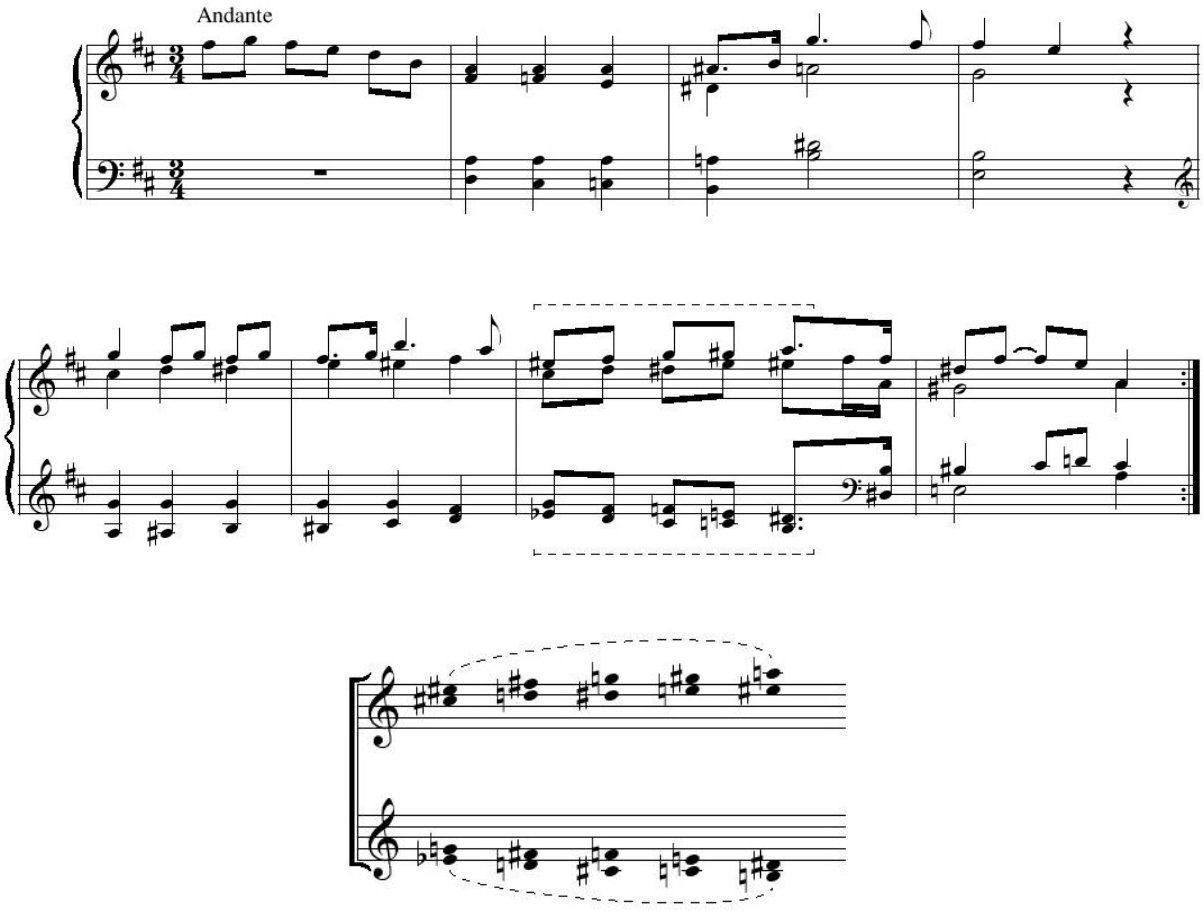
by a childhood friend, Edgar Desmond Hegh.[18] Hegh was likely surprised when Hovhaness produced a score whose musical language he described as "neo-Mozart," but which seems to owe at least as much to composers like Victor Herbert and the style of the early musical theater. Functional harmony with raised leading tones is the norm, embellished by chromatic passing motion in abundance (Fig. 1.8). Beginning in the first bars of the overture, the score is also peppered with chains of major thirds in pairs moving chromatically in contrary motion, the consistency of whose vertical results is ensured by the fact that they belong to alternating whole-tone collections (Fig. 1.9). The incongruity between the style of this music and the "somber" modality that later came to characterize Hovhaness's output generally (and which was already perceptible in the youthful works discussed so far) was noticed by Walter Simmons in his review of a new recording of Hovhaness's *Concerto for Soprano Saxophone and Strings*, part of whose second movement is an arrangement of the intermezzo from *Lotus Blossom* excerpted in Fig. 1.9.[19] Hovhaness thought enough of this opera's music to rework it much later on with a new libretto as *The Most Engaged Girl*, although there is no record of this second version having ever been performed.

Figure 1.8, *Lotus Blossom* (1928), No. 4, "In the Garden of Delight"



[18] Hovhaness, Alan. Interview by Bruce Duffie, 1985. http://www.bruceduffie.com/hovx.html.
[19] Simmons, Walter. "Fanfare Reviews Alan Hovhaness: Exile Symphony." *Fanfare*, June 7, 2012. http://www.bmop.org/news-press/fanfare-reviews-alan-hovhaness-exile-symphony.

Figure 1.9, *Lotus Blossom* (1928), Intermezzo from Act II, major thirds moving chromatically in contrary motion



Hovhaness's mother died in October 1930, at which time the nineteen-year-old musician, still living at home, was working as an accompanist and writing jazz arrangements to support himself as the Great Depression wore on.[20] He also had several small works performed under the auspices of the "Composers' Forum-Laboratory," a New Deal program. In 1932 Hovhaness began studies in composition at the New England Conservatory with Frederic Converse, an accomplished American composer of symphonic works in a Late-Romantic idiom.[21] Hovhaness

[20] Johnson, Wayne. "A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness." University of Cincinnati, 1987, 4.
[21] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."

placed special emphasis on his studies in counterpoint, but never completed a degree program.[22] He studied piano with the German-American pianist Heinrich Gebhard, who also instructed Leonard Bernstein. On May 17, 1932, the New England Conservatory Orchestra performed the first movement of the twenty-one-year-old Hovhaness's *Sunset Symphony* (later revised and recast as the first movement of the *Symphony No. 11*) at Jordan Hall in Boston. The symphony was awarded the "Endicott Prize" of 150 dollars by the conservatory composition faculty. In October of the same year, the then Alan Vaness Chakmakjian changed his name to Alan Scott Hovaness. (He did not begin including the extra "h" in his last name for another ten years.) The official notice, published in the *Boston Globe* on October 19, 1932, read as follows:

> Claiming that his name is extremely difficult to pronounce and that he feels it will be a hindrance to him in his work, Alan Vaness Chakmakjian, 21, of 5 Blossom St., Arlington, musician and composer, has petitioned the Middlesex Probate Court to change the name to Alan Scott Hovaness. The petitioner states that, in addition to being easier to pronounce than his present name, he feels that the name Hovaness will be an aid to him in his work. Scott, he adds, is his mother's name, while his present middle name, Vaness, is a contraction of Hovaness.[23]

Much later, differing accounts of the true motivation behind this name change were put forward both by Hovhaness himself as well as by various writers on his music. These range from the violent subtext in its meaning ("gunsmith") to the name sounding "too foreign for the environment."[24] Multiple sources posit that Hovhaness changed his name to avoid

---

[22] Westbrook, "Hovhaness Interview: Angelic Cycles."
Gagne, 122-123.
[23] "Arlington Musician Asks Change in Name." *The Boston Globe*, October 19, 1932.
[24] Kostelanetz, Richard, *On Innovative Musicians*, 97.
Rosner, Arnold. "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness." State University of New York at Buffalo, 1972, 9.

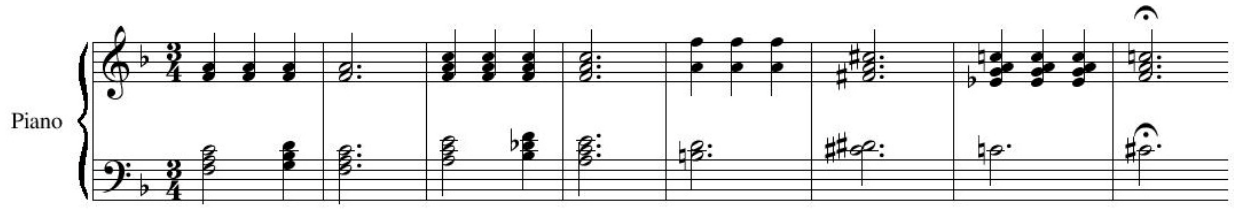
discrimination.[25] It does seem odd, in that case, that he chose another Armenian name, albeit a less-recognizably Armenian one, to replace Chakmajian. (Hovhaness is actually a given name in Armenian, not a surname. The equivalent surname would be Hovhanessian.) In any case, even at this time, it was important for Hovhaness that his name continue to reflect his Armenian identity. Later on, he would drop the middle name "Scott," explaining that, "I really have nothing to do with the Scotch people, as great as they are. I feel myself almost exclusively Armenian."[26]

By 1933, Hovhaness was no longer living at home with his father, and was married to his first wife Martha Mott Davis. Accounts regarding to what extent the elder Chakmakjian supported his son's musical ambitions are inconsistent.[27] Many of Hovhaness's compositions from the early to mid-1930s were written for solo piano, notably a numbered series of "Sagas." These works contain various early inklings of elements that later formed important parts of Hovhaness's musical language, including polychords, consecutive half-diminished seventh chords, and a penchant for canons at the octave two or four beats apart. These piano pieces also contain much material that was later reused in other works (for example in the Symphonies Nos. 1, 11, and 53, the *Cello Sonata*, and the ballet *A Rose for Miss Emily*). However, for the most part these pieces represent a perplexing stylistic retrogression. They are formally primitive, and encumbered by thick, muddy piano textures. The juxtaposition of clumsy experiments with polychords and unctuous late-19th century chromatic harmony is particularly jarring (Ex. 1.10).

---

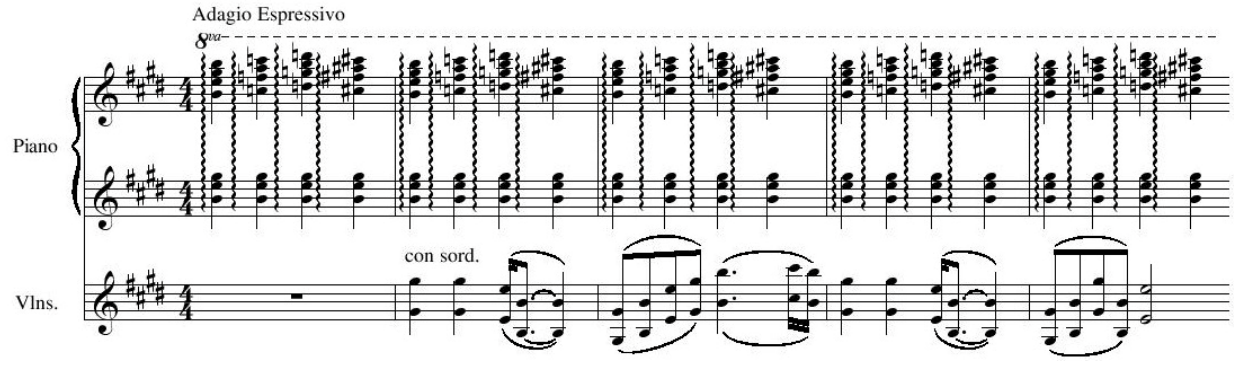
[25] Johnston, Jack, interview.
Gagne, 119.
[26] Michaelyan, "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness."
[27] Gregory, Elizabeth. Interview by Berkofsky, Martin, May 21, 2005.
Johnston, Jack, interview.

Figure 1.10, *Saga No. 4* (1933), III. Evening in the Hills (opening)



A somewhat more successful work from these years is the *Song of the Sea*, for piano and string orchestra. It was premiered at the New England Conservatory on June 2, 1933, with the composer at the piano. The central section of its ternary first movement was eventually reworked as the *Dance Gazhal* for solo piano (and later into the *Symphony No. 22*), and was a personal favorite of the composer. The second movement employs a polychordal ostinato in the piano as an accompaniment to a sustained diatonic melody in the violins (Fig. 1.11). The effect of this polychordal harmony is more successful than in the preceding example, largely due to the high register and clearly non-functional nature of these chords.

Figure 1.11, *Song of the Sea* (1933), II. Adagio espressivo



It is interesting that some of the surviving juvenilia from the 1920s (such as the *Suite for Strings and Pianoforte*), in its sparseness and modality, seems to have more in common with Hovhaness's mature style than does the slightly later music of the early 1930s. It seems likely that this phenomenon was what Hovhaness was describing when he later related Roger

Sessions's criticism of his music from around this time. Having not encountered Hovhaness since their 1925 meeting, Sessions felt that he had lost his way artistically, and would do well do return to the musical elements that had given his earliest compositional efforts their distinctive personality.[28] This was advice that the young Hovhaness soon took to heart.

Perhaps the most remarkable anecdote from Hovhaness's early years concerns his trip to Finland in July of 1934, where he sought the encouragement of Jean Sibelius, at that time (at least in the United States and England) widely considered the greatest living composer. While visiting Ainola, Hovhaness played Sibelius's Op. 12 *Piano Sonata* for the Finnish composer, along with some of his own fledgling compositional efforts.[29] After returning to the United States, Hovhaness continued to write to Sibelius until his death in 1957. In his letters, Hovhaness mentioned several times the possibility of arranging further meetings, but none ever took place. These effusive "fan letters" to Sibelius, at first written in broken French and later in English, were full of reports back to the Finnish composer on performances of his symphonies in the United States. Hovhaness once wrote to Sibelius that, "your orchestral works resemble the divine architect of worlds."[30] On another occasion in 1938, he wrote to Sibelius that, "Your Northern sadness touches my heart. It is not unlike my Armenian feeling. In some ways these two moods are akin."[31] This is yet another revealing piece of evidence that Hovhaness attached importance to his Armenian identity before the Armenian period of the 1940s.

Because Hovhaness was so vocal in his admiration for Sibelius's music, the perception began to take root that it was a deep influence on his own early work. In 1952, the critic Olin

---

[28] Hovhaness, Alan. Interview by Richard Howard, October 1983. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Howard.html.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Sibelius, Jean, January 4, 1946. The Papers of Jean Sibelius and His Family in the National Archives of Finland.
[31] Ibid., 1938.

Downes (who was himself personally well acquainted with Sibelius) wrote that Hovhaness's early music had a "pronounced Finnish accent."[32] Decades later, Antony Hopkins persisted in hearing Sibelian influence in both *Fra Angelico* and the *Symphony No. 11*.[33] Some of Hovhaness's own favorite works of Sibelius, such as the symphonic poem *The Swan of Tuonela*, do feature long, lonely, modal melodies that bear a passing resemblance to those found in his own early work.[34] Hovhaness's early obsession with chromatic scales also vaguely brings to mind certain passages in Sibelius's *Tapiola*. For both composers, the natural world was an important source of artistic stimulation.

Despite all this, a thorough examination of the works of Hovhaness's early period reveals very little that actually resembles the music of Sibelius. Indeed, the expansive, melodic compositions of Hovhaness in any of his periods seem to have little to do with the terse, highly-developmental symphonic style most characteristic of Sibelius. Walter Simmons, for one, has written that the early influence of Sibelius was "greatly exaggerated."[35] Even Hovhaness himself said as much, telling Wayne Johnson that, "I think I'm just as much like Sibelius now as I ever was, but I'm not really like Sibelius. Back then if anybody heard anything modal, they'd think 'Ah, that's Sibelius.' I don't think there was so much influence from him, as in the fact that I simply saw and heard things the same way as he did."[36] More important than any direct musical influence, in other words, was Sibelius's position as an antipode to what Hovhaness saw as the unfeeling coldness of modernism, embodied by the figure of Stravinsky. In the 1930s, Sibelius (particularly in England and America) represented the resistance of the old symphonic tradition

---

[32] Daniel, Oliver. "Alan Hovhaness." *American Composers Alliance Bulletin* II, no. 3 (October 1952): 3–7.
[33] Hopkins, Antony. *Talking About Music*. BBC Radio 3, March 3, 1981. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.
[34] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[35] Simmons, "Fanfare Reviews Alan Hovhaness: Exile Symphony."
[36] Johnson, "A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness," 5.

to the encroachment of modernism into the musical establishment. (It was for this reason that Adorno treated Sibelius's music so contemptuously.) The figure of Sibelius maintained this significance for Hovhaness for many years to come. In 1983, almost fifty years after his trip to Finland, Hovhaness pronounced that "I like Sibelius better than anybody else in this century … You know Stravinsky could be a very nasty man, he always made fun of Sibelius … I mean Stravinsky is a great genius, yes, he is, he's tremendous, but spiritually, he isn't. That's what he lacks."[37]

[37] Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."

CHAPTER 2 – Early Maturity (1935-1942)

In June of 1935, as Hovhaness continued his studies with Converse and Gebhard at the New England Conservatory, his first and only child, daughter Jean Christina (named for Jean Christian Sibelius), was born. The short orchestral work *Monadnock*, named after one of New Hampshire's highest mountains, dates from the following year. In this piece, Hovhaness made an abrupt return to the modal (in this case Dorian) purity that had characterized some of his music of the 1920s (Figs. 2.1, 2.2). Although *Monadnock* draws on material from piano pieces written during the preceding years (for example, its opening chorale comes from a short piano piece, *Fog on Mount Doublehead*) it represents a significant stylistic advance over these works, completely purged of late 19th-century chromatic harmony and other musical elements which quickly became an anathema to Hovhaness. Other aspects of Hovhaness's mature style are also already in place in this composition, notably the chorale-fugue pairing to which he returned again and again, here utilizing a cleverly managed three-to-one tempo relationship that allows for the seamless reintroduction of the chorale at the close of the work.

Figure 2.1, *Monadnock* (1936), opening chorale

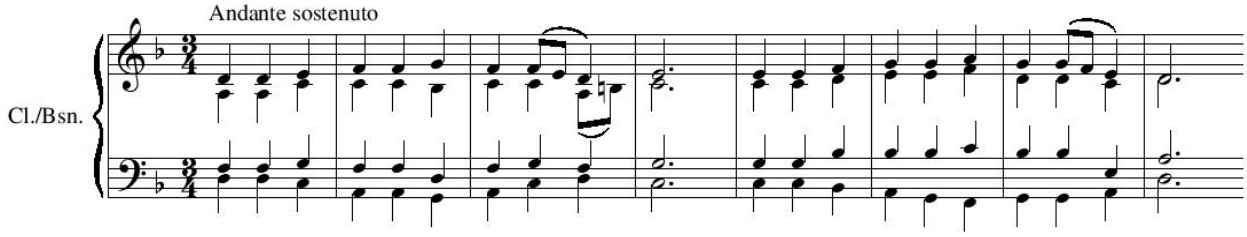
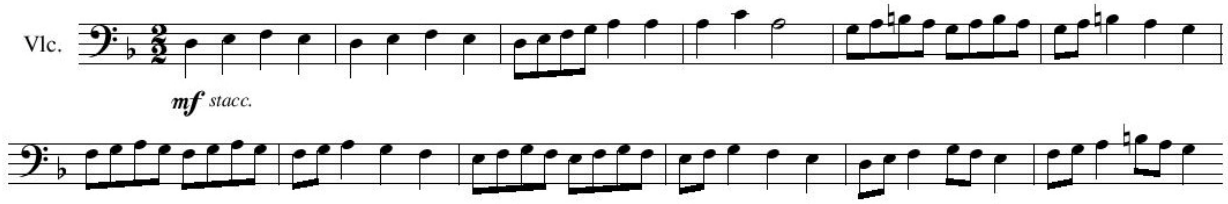


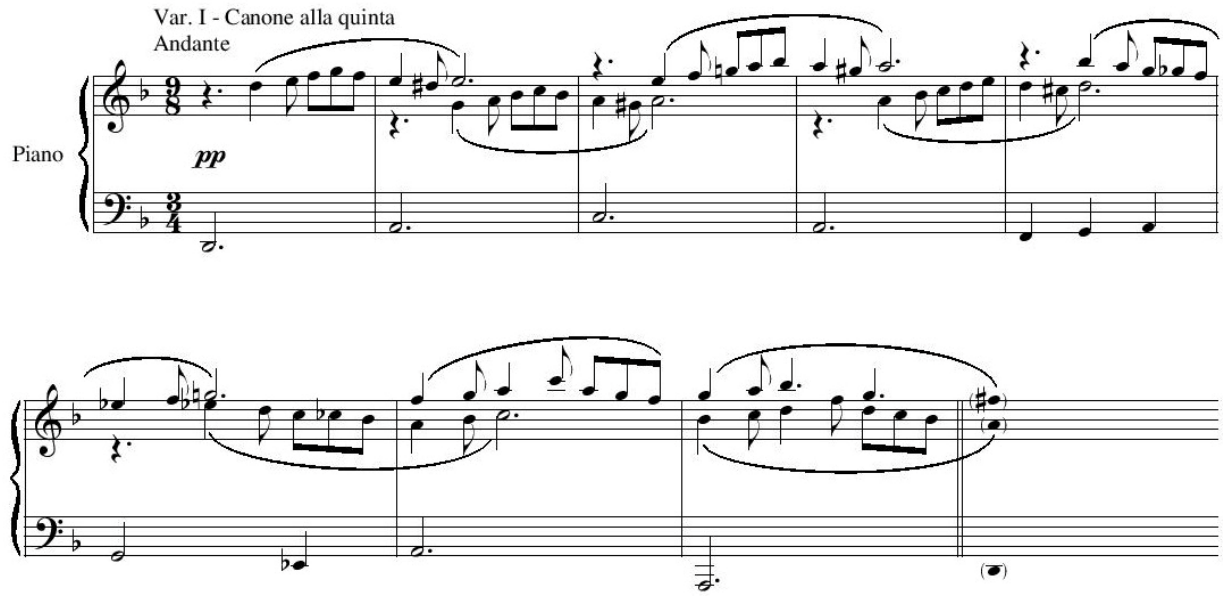
Figure 2.2, *Monadnock* (1936), fugue subject



The well-wrought counterpoint of the fast middle section of *Monadnock* also marks a new compositional achievement for Hovhaness. He later recalled that he had been "faking it" in earlier attempts at contrapuntal composition and turned to Converse for more rigorous training.[38] Surviving sketchbooks from this time are full of attempts to solve difficult contrapuntal "problems." The immediate compositional fruits of these efforts were rigorously contrapuntal works such as the *String Quartet No. 1* and *Partita* for piano (later revised and published as the *Sonata Ricercare*). These works represent Hovhaness's attempt to master what he dubbed, in reference to Bach, the "science" of music.[39] The *Partita*, subtitled "Three Etudes in the Art-Science of Counterpoint," is full of contrapuntal rigors modeled on those found in Bach's *Musical Offering*, including a two-part fugue which is repeated in retrograde and a series of two-part canons at different intervals over a ground bass (Fig. 2.3). The unrelenting dotted rhythms and rough dissonances of the final fugue, however, are more reminiscent of the *Art of the Fugue*.

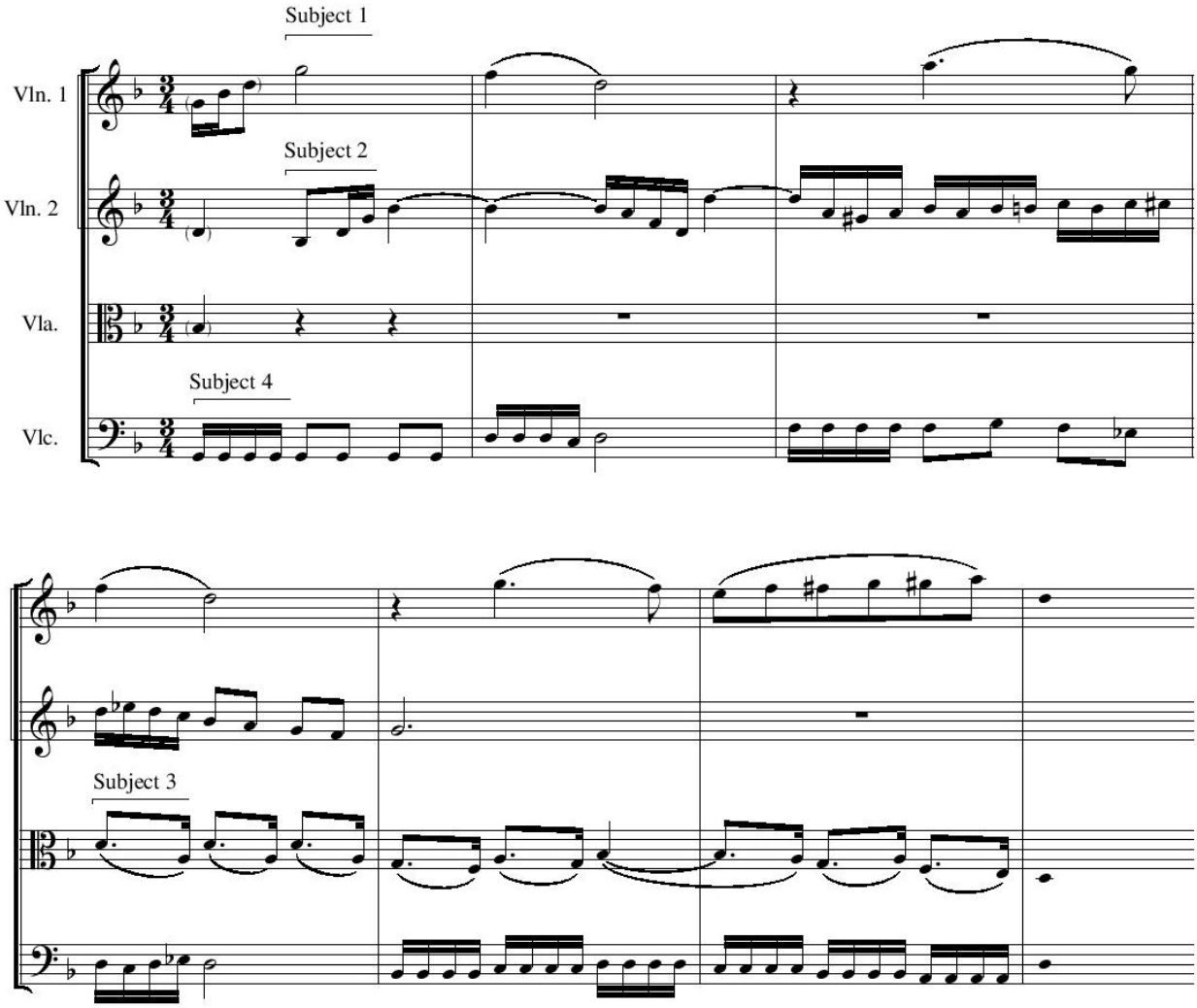
[38] Johnson, "A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness," 4.
[39] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.

Figure 2.3, *Partita* (1935), I. Canon Passacaglia, canon at the fifth



In the more successful *String Quartet No. 1* Hovhaness's contrapuntal "art" managed to take the upper hand over "science." Particularly accomplished is its second movement, an impressive quadruple fugue. Its quadruple counterpoint of four subjects is reproduced in Fig. 2.4. In the 1950s Hovhaness arranged the first two movements of this quartet for orchestra, publishing them as the *Prelude and Quadruple Fugue*, now one of his most frequently recorded orchestral works. The quartet's final movement (also a fugue) was later integrated into the second movement of the even more popular *Mysterious Mountain*.

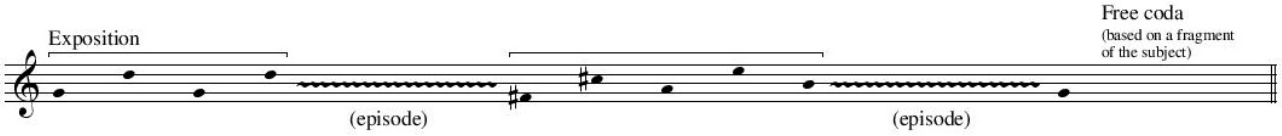
Figure 2.4, *String Quartet No. 1* (1936), II. Fugue with four subjects, quadruple counterpoint of four subjects



Although these particular works are overtly concerned with displays of contrapuntal virtuosity such as stretti, the combination of multiple subjects, and canons at various awkward intervals, such techniques are in fact rarities in Hovhaness's later fugal writing, which tends to adhere to a more melodic "Handelian" model. Nevertheless, Hovhaness's mastery of fugue remained an important part of his compositional arsenal. He later remarked of the fugue that, "it's one of the great forms in music, one of the most perfect. It can say many different things,

but what it says I don't know."[40] Hovhaness often employed fugues with subjects based on melodic material previously introduced earlier in a work, in which case they serve as a developmental procedure making up part of a larger musical form. Whether or not they play this role or stand alone, Hovhaness's fugues generally follow a similar tonal layout. The example of the fugue from the *Psalm and Fugue* for string orchestra is paradigmatic (Fig. 2.5). Hovhaness's fugues typically begin with an exposition in which statements of the subject are arranged conventionally in fifths, after which there is a quick modulation to a tonal far-out-point, followed by successive appearances of the subject which roughly work their way back around the circle-of-fifths towards the tonic. As Hovhaness's subjects are modal, contrasts of major and minor iterations of the subject and the issue of real versus tonal answers do not play a major role in his fugues.

Figure 2.5, *Psalm and Fugue* (1940), tonal layout of subject entrances



As Hovhaness's musical language developed, a "motet" style (that is a series of thematically unrelated imitative contrapuntal episodes) emerged as a common alternative to the fugue in contrapuntal sections of his works. Hovhaness's contrapuntal style, by virtue of its modality and copious suspensions, has sometimes been described as "neo-Renaissance." Although there are some obvious differences between Hovhaness's counterpoint and Renaissance polyphony (primarily that Hovhaness's counterpoint usually appears as though it was conceived in terms of harmonic movement), the polyphonic art nevertheless represented for

[40] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.

Hovhaness a kind of "ars perfecta," a symbol of purity and one of the highest achievements of Western art.[41] As a symbol of ancient tradition, Renaissance polyphony was for Hovhaness akin to the non-Western musical techniques he later came to value so highly: a discipline to be mastered and employed for its own inherent value rather than advanced.

In the midst of his immersion in the study of counterpoint, Hovhaness also had his first contact with Indian music, which proved to be an extremely significant influence over the coming years.[42] Hovhaness first encountered Uday Shankar's dance troupe in 1936, although they had begun touring the United States three years earlier. The troupe was accompanied by an ensemble made up of Indian musicians playing compositions by Vishnudass Shirali (a "modern type of Indian music," Hovhaness later remembered, but still "thoroughly Indian").[43] The ensemble included Uday's sixteen-year-old younger brother Ravi, the sitarist who later went on to become a major figure in East-West cultural synthesis.

In 1937, Hovhaness's short stint as a family man came to an end. After separating from his first wife, he only had sporadic contact with his daughter Jean, who was subsequently legally adopted by her mother's new husband, and who went on to have a remarkable career of her own as a harpsichordist and scientist.[44] The remainder of Hovhaness's life saw the unstinting channeling of all of his creative energies into musical composition.

Hovhaness's *Symphony No. 1, 'Exile'* was written in 1937, and received its first performance that same year by the BBC Midland Orchestra in England conducted by Leslie Heward, which constituted a major career breakthrough for the twenty-six-year-old composer.

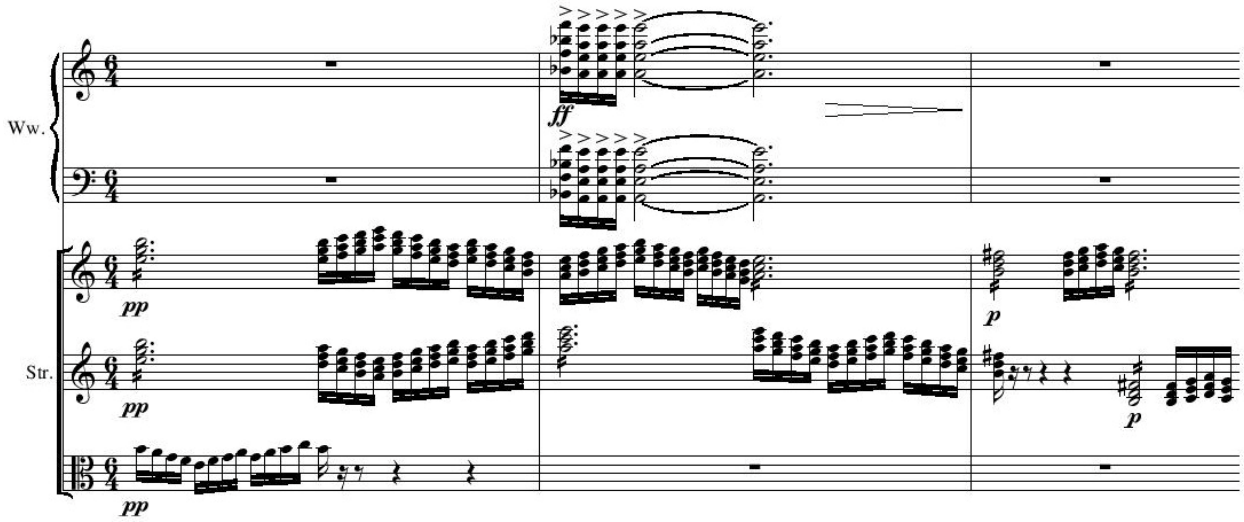
---

[41] Hovhaness, Alan, and Dennis Russell Davies. Interview by Charles Amirkhanian, August 28, 1981. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Amirkhanian_2.html.
[42] Silver, "Henry Cowell and Alan Hovhaness: Responses to the Music of India," 68.
[43]Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[44]Nandi, Jean. *Unconventional Wisdom: A Memoir*, 2000. http://www.elverhoj.org/archives/nandi.html.

Like *Monadnock*, the symphony is practically ascetic in its avoidance of chromatic harmony. Its first movement also contains several rare traces of the influence of Sibelius. The lamenting melodic chromaticism of the opening clarinet solo almost unmistakably alludes to the clarinet solo which opens Sibelius's own first symphony. Further, the texture of the first movement's central section, an unbroken murmuring in the strings punctuated by fragmentary motivic interjections from the rest of the orchestra (Fig. 2.6), is reminiscent of many such passages in Sibelius's tone poems and symphonies. Such textures are not found in Hovhaness's later works. However, these motivic interjections, a continuation of the brass fanfares which punctuated the first section of the movement, are an occasionally recurring "topic" in Hovhaness's music with an evidently martial connotation.

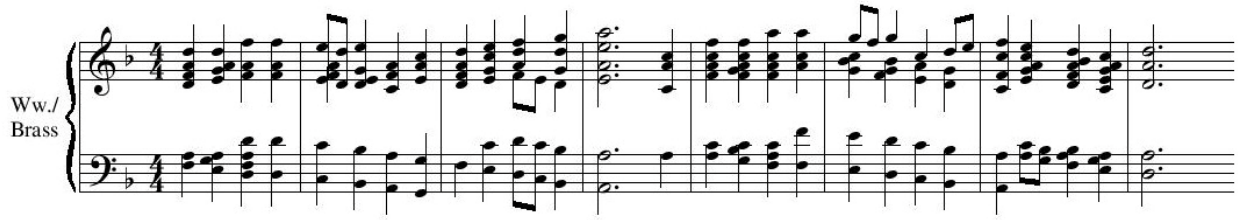
The second movement of the symphony employs canons at the unison in many parts, splashed across the full score and proliferating throughout much of the orchestra. Although such passages are also common in Hovhaness's subsequent orchestral works, other elements of the movement, including the blaring repeated minor-seventh chords, pounding timpani figuration, and grotesque chromatic scales in the winds are so out of character for Hovhaness's mature music that he later scrapped this movement and replaced it with a completely new one in the 1970s. While undoubtedly less flawed, this new second movement with which the symphony has now been recorded is regrettably somewhat stylistically discontinuous with the outer movements.

Figure 2.6, *Symphony No. 1 'Exile'* (1937), first movement, central section



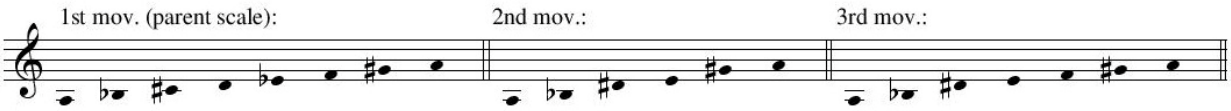
Although none of them is clearly recognizable as such, all three movements of the *Exile Symphony* have tonal structures which evoke sonata form to some degree. For example, the first movement is laid out in a clear ternary structure, with *lamentoso* woodwind-dominated outer sections surrounding the central *allegro* excerpted above. However, the tonal layout of the two outer sections is distinct, with the first moving from D to A, and the second remaining in D throughout, thus adhering to the tonal scheme of a sonata form exposition and recapitulation. The symphony's finale appends a chorale and fugue treatment to the end of a similar tonal structure. The chorale theme, played by the winds and brass, was adapted from the choral work *O God Our Help in Ages Past* which remained unpublished until the 1960s. The harmonization of this chorale is notable for its almost exclusively stepwise bass motion, and is typical of Hovhaness's modal music of the period (Fig. 2.7).

Figure 2.7, *Symphony No. 1 'Exile'* (1937), third movement, chorale



In the *Exile Symphony* Hovhaness attempted to expand his modal vocabulary beyond the white-key "church modes" on which he had frequently relied beginning with his earliest compositions. All three movements make use of similar scales. Those that appear in the second and third movement might be analyzed as derivations of the first movement's "parent scale" (Fig. 2.8). (A large, unpublished *Piano Sonata* from the same year, originally designated Op. 22, makes use of similar scalar material.) Although these scales are distinct from the "exotic" modes on which Hovhaness later came to rely, the technique of knitting together the different movements of a larger work through modal rather than thematic connections is one to which Hovhaness would often return.

Figure 2.8, *Symphony No. 1 'Exile'* (1937), modes



The *Exile* symphony's subtitle refers, in Hovhaness's words, to the "Armenian Problem," and is yet another indicator that Hovhaness's Armenian identity was important to him even during this early period.[45] The connection between the situation of the Armenian diaspora and the original subtitles of each movement of the symphony, "Lament," "Conflict," and "Triumph,"

[45] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.

needs no elaboration. Hovhaness also used the word "Exile" in the title of his unpublished setting of Emma Lazarus's Statue of Liberty inscription, making the connection with dispossessed immigrants (and perhaps with his own father, who like so many ethnic Armenians was never able to return to the place of his birth) even more explicit.

Apart from the Armenian connection, this symphony's dedication to "Sir Francis Bacon" evokes a different, and somewhat more cryptic recurring theme in Hovhaness's worldview. Beginning in the 1930s, Hovhaness became a subscriber to the Francis Bacon-as-Shakespeare theory, and remained firm in this conviction for the rest of his life. On his 1942 setting of two Shakespeare sonnets, he insisted on hyphenating the author's name as "Shake-speare," an allusion to his belief that Shakespeare was Bacon's pen name, a reference to Pallas Athena "shaking her spear" at ignorance.[46] Hovhaness eventually became a member of the "Francis Bacon Society" in London, describing Bacon as his spiritual "master."[47] Apart from the first symphony, Bacon is also the dedicatee of the *Sonata Ananda*. Hovhaness even attributed to him the text of the famous Orlando Gibbons madrigal *The Silver Swan*, and of works by John Dowland.[48] Scholarly validity of these theories aside, the English statesman and philosopher was without question one of the most important personages in Hovhaness's evolving spiritual outlook.

Also dating from 1937 is Hovhaness's *Violoncello Concerto*, in some ways a sister-work to the first symphony. It apparently remained unperformed until much later on in Hovhaness's life. While less technically accomplished than the *Exile Symphony*, it is perhaps more representative of the composer's original voice and developing aesthetic sensibilities. More explicitly than the first symphony, this concerto also reveals Hovhaness grappling with classical

---

[46] Ibid.
[47] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, October 20, 1970.
[48] Hovhaness, Alan. "Letter to the Editor." *Baconiana, the Journal of the Francis Bacon Society*, 1970, 89–90.

forms that were at odds with these maturing aesthetic sensibilities. The concerto's outer movements are both recognizably cast in sonata form. Unlike the composer's subsequent more self-conscious uses of this form (such as in the *Symphony No. 3* and the Op. 145 *Piano Sonata*, both of which evoke the rhythmic drive typical of Classical-era sonata allegros), both the concerto's slow outer movements are essentially meditative and static in nature, in flat denial of the tonal dynamism that defined sonata form's historical development. Nevertheless, as detailed in Fig. 2.9, the general tonal and thematic layout of the first movement adheres to the "textbook" model of sonata form in every regard except for the fact that the second theme is still presented outside the tonic during the recapitulation; only the closing section is "corrected" by being transposed to the tonic.

Figure 2.9, *Violoncello Concerto* (1937), first movement sonata structure[49]

Exposition			**Development**	**Recapitulation**		
1st theme	2nd theme	closing section	fugal exposition/ cadenza	1st theme	2nd theme	closing section
D (Phrygian)	A (Dorian)	A	A→D	D	A	D

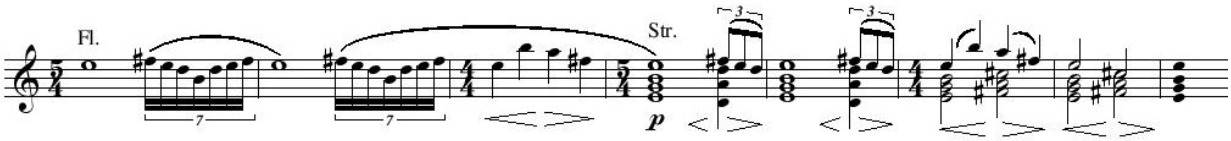
Much of the first movement's thematic material is drawn from *Foothills*, an unpublished setting for bass and piano of poetry by Elizabeth Haynes Sands that Hovhaness had written during the previous year. This movement's three primary themes are given below in Fig. 2.10. While the first and second themes are cast in two different pentatonic modes, and are dominated by retrograde rhythmic profiles (fast-slow versus slow-fast), there is very little contrast in character between them as would be the case in a "textbook" sonata form movement.

[49] Throughout this dissertation, I have used capital letters to indicate tonal areas, as they are almost exclusively modal rather than major/minor.

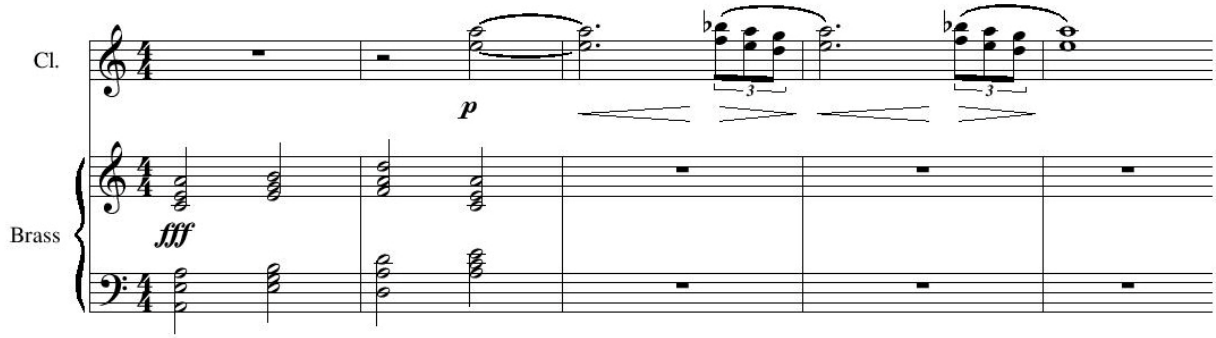
Figure 2.10, *Violoncello Concerto* (1937), first movement sonata form themes

First theme:

Second theme:



Closing section:

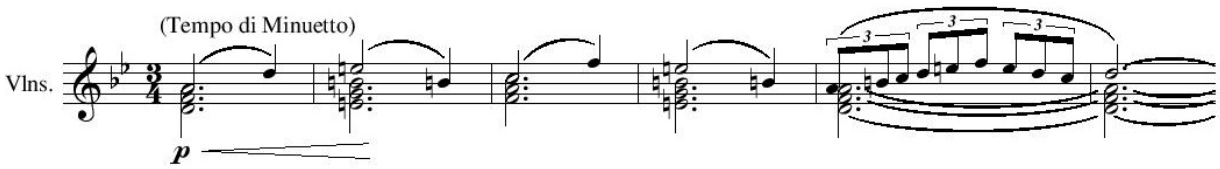


In another departure from sonata-form norms, a long, drawn out, and essentially tonally static fugal exposition serves as the movement's development section. The composition of extended sections of free thematic and tonal development was never really part of Hovhaness's musical aims. Henry Cowell once revealingly opined that Hovhaness's music seemed to "skip the 18th and 19th centuries."[50]

[50] Daniel, Oliver. "Alan Hovhaness," 3–7.

The concerto's second movement is composed in a ternary form with an extra repetition (ABABA), as can be found, for example, in the second movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7*. The music of its "trio" bears a definite thematic resemblance to the latter part of the first movement's second theme (Fig. 2.11).

Figure 2.11, *Violoncello Concerto* (1937), second movement "trio"



In the concerto's sonata form third movement, Hovhaness sidesteps the problem of the development section altogether (Fig. 2.12). Only a few bars separate the exposition and recapitulation, a short transition which moves deftly around the circle of fifths back to the tonic, leading to the restatement of the first theme. The developmental weight is instead shifted to the coda, which consists of yet another fugue.

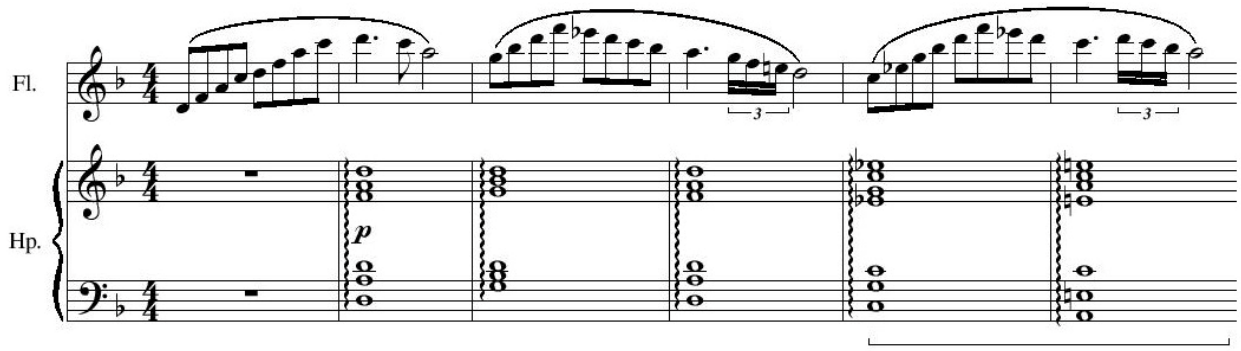
Figure 2.12, *Violoncello Concerto* (1937), third movement sonata structure

Exposition			**[…]**	**Recapitulation**			**Coda**
1st theme	2nd theme	closing section	[…]	1st theme	2nd theme	closing section	Fugue
D	B	B	→	D	D	D	D

The chromatic mediant relationship (c minor – a minor) that forms part of the harmonization of the third movement's first theme – a rare chromaticism that stands out from the harmony in the rest of the work which proceeds almost exclusively by diatonic relationships – also mirrors in microcosm the tonal relationship of the two main parts of the exposition (D

Phrygian – B Phrygian) (Fig. 2.13). This same harmonic relationship repeatedly recurs at a local level over the course of the movement.

Figure 2.13, *Violoncello Concerto* (1937), third movement, first theme



As in the first symphony and many of Hovhaness's other successful large-scale works, there is a network of subtle connections across the multiple movements of the *Violoncello Concert*o that knit it together without actually resorting to the cyclical restatement of thematic material from earlier movements. (This is, of course, a technique with ample precedent in the classical tradition.) In the *Violoncello Concerto* these recurring elements are textural, orchestrational, and motivic, including bare parallel fourths in the clarinets, massed fortissimo brass chorales whose cutoffs reveal softer melodic parts whose attacks had been covered up, as well as the $\hat{1}$-$\hat{2}$-$\hat{1}$ and $\hat{5}$-$\hat{6}$-$\hat{5}$ "lamentoso" half-step motifs.

In terms of the development of Hovhaness's musical language, the most salient feature of the *Violoncello Concerto* is the complete primacy of melody above all other musical elements. Hovhaness referred to the solo part as "poetical rather than virtuoso," and it is indeed almost completely free of opportunities for the soloist's technical display. (It is unfortunate that cellist Janos Starker sought halfheartedly to correct this "deficiency" in his otherwise excellent recording of the concerto, marring Hovhaness's placid melodic lines with the addition of myriad

incongruous repeated notes.) Hovhaness's interest in long melody which could "stand on its own," later nurtured by sources ranging from Armenian *Sharagan* to Indian classical music, is already in evidence in this early work.[51] Hovhaness held that "pure melody is really the test of a composer," and somewhat idealistically stressed the importance of Western listeners becoming accustomed to listening "truly" melodically, rather than experiencing a melody in terms of its harmonic implications.[52] For Hovhaness, even fugue, as is demonstrated by the development section of this concerto's first movement, was essentially another way of treating melody. The sparseness and heavy reliance on long drones throughout this work clearly presage Hovhaness's later explorations of non-Western musical styles, and it is perhaps no coincidence that his first exposure to Indian music had come the year prior to its composition. However, these stylistic characteristics were an outcome of musical proclivities already in evidence in the earliest compositions discussed in the preceding chapter. Extended, meditative, modal music may seem commonplace enough today, but within the Western classical tradition there was little precedent for it in 1937.

In April 1940, Hovhaness gave a recital with the Greek tenor Triante Kefalas, which included selections of Greek music as well as Hovhaness's own *Fantasy* for piano (dedicated to his teacher Heinrich Gebhard, and a completely different piece from the work later published under this name), *Dance Ghazal*, and *Lament*, a setting of a Shelley poem. During the same year he took up a post as organist and choir director at the St. James Armenian church in Watertown, Massachusetts, which his father also attended.[53] This employment was a major part of his livelihood during years in which money was scarce. It also strengthened his connection to

[51] Hovhaness, Alan. "Giant Melody in Nature and Art." Elmira College, February 14, 1967.
[52] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[53] Gregory, interview.
Johnston, Jack, interview.

Boston's Armenian community, which was to become an indispensable source of patronage for him over the ensuing years. Hovhaness also learned to improvise in Armenian modes on the organ, befriended the cantor Diran Dingian, and slowly began to familiarize himself with the Armenian liturgy, though the direct effect of this on his music would not be apparent for several years. It was also in 1940 that Hovhaness made his first (unsuccessful) application for a Guggenheim fellowship, for which he penned a populist, anti-establishment musical credo.[54]

Hovhaness's musical activities in 1941 included the composition of incidental music for a production of *Love's Old Sweet Song* by the noted Armenian-American writer William Saroyan. Saroyan was then at the height of his fame, having just been awarded a Pulitzer Prize the previous year. In November, Hovhaness gave a recital of his own music at the piano, joined by the singers Seran Dinjian and Victoria Samuelian. Included on the program were several Hovhaness songs which set poetry by Saroyan (at least one of which survives) as well as the music of Schubert, Chopin, and Liszt. (Public performances by Hovhaness as a pianist of music other than his own soon dwindled.) A *Boston Globe* critic reviewing the concert remarked that Hovhaness's music "…sounded unduly mournful to these Occidental ears which (to borrow a phrase) ached, thereafter, for a solid major triad."[55] This reaction is notable for predating by several years what has been generally thought of as Hovhaness's discovery of "authentic" non-Western musical styles.

On September 29, 1942, WNYC gave a live broadcast of the *Exile Symphony*, performed by the NBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leopold Stokowski, who had apparently also

[54] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[55] *The Boston Globe*, Nov. 13, 1941.

previously conducted the work in in Los Angeles.[56] Stokowski – one of the great unsung champions of contemporary music in his day – was first introduced to Hovhaness's work by William Saroyan, who wrote him an eloquent letter of introduction accompanied by several orchestral scores, the *Exile Symphony* presumably among them. After this performance, Stokowski seems to have more or less forgotten about Hovhaness's music until the 1950s, at which point he became one of the composer's most important champions.

The following month, Hovhaness published a short article entitled "Shostakovich and his Seventh Symphony." In it, he defended the *Leningrad Symphony*, then at the height of its wartime popularity, from critical attacks. Rather than stemming from any deep sympathy with Shostakovich's work (his analysis of the "invasion march" as the second theme of the first movement's sonata structure is questionable) it seems as though this article was provoked by Hovhaness's growing bitterness towards the critical establishment. His sense that he had been persecuted at the hands of music critics continued unabated well into old age. Much later, he recalled that "when I first was beginning to be performed, people always sent me reviews, and they were always terrible, very much against me."[57] In his Shostakovich article, Hovhaness complained that, "critics constantly fail to penetrate beneath the surface of the texture of the music they hear. They pass serious and pernicious misjudgments on great works of art. Too often interests are centered upon passing fads rather than in eternal truths."[58] Aside from accusing critics of musical incompetence, Hovhaness's article also reveals a frustration with one of the hallmarks of twentieth-century musical modernism: the great emphasis placed on keeping pace with what were considered to be the most up-to-date techniques ("fads" in Hovhaness's opinion).

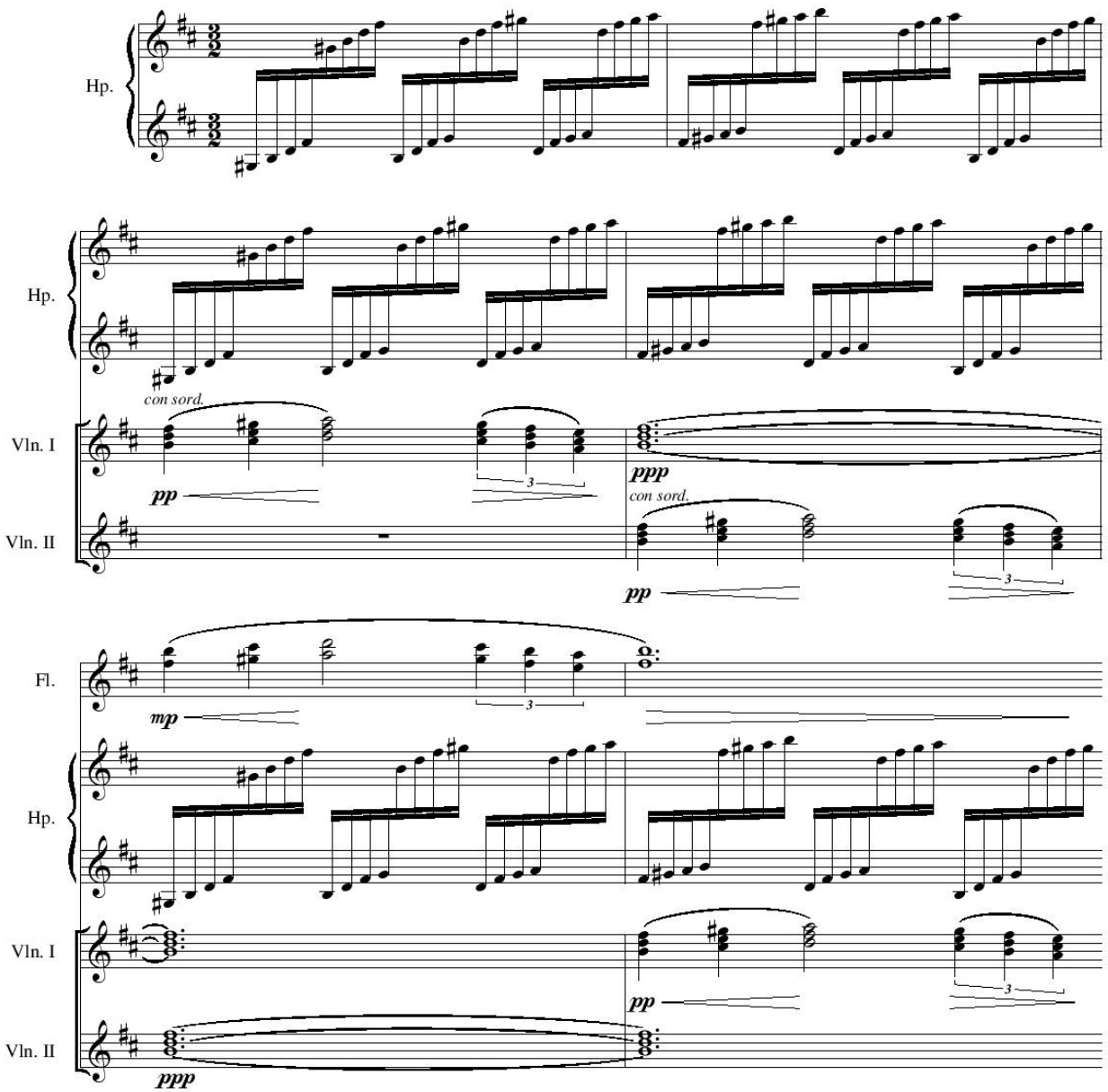
---

[56] Simmons, "Fanfare Reviews Alan Hovhaness: Exile Symphony."
[57] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.
[58] Hovhaness, Alan. "Shostakovich and His Seventh Symphony," October 1942. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

It is ironic that, in the case of the Shostakovich Seventh, one of the prime offenders was the composer-critic Virgil Thomson, who a few years later began to write a series of very positive critical assessments of Hovhaness's own music.

Hovhaness's official catalogue has an uncharacteristic gap during the first few years of the 1940s, the reason for which will be explained at length in the next chapter. However, some uncatalogued and presumably withdrawn works from these years do survive, including a string quartet in three movements, several piano works, songs, and two symphonies, including the *Symphony No. 2* of 1942 (which bears no relation to *Mysterious Mountain*, the official second symphony now in Hovhaness's catalogue). This symphony is in much the same vein as the works of the early period that do remain in the catalogue, and is just as resolutely modal. In some ways, it is even an improvement over the first symphony. It is certainly more formally involved, although perhaps also somewhat more convoluted as a result of adhering less closely to classical models. Significantly, much of the material in this symphony was eventually recycled by Hovhaness in later works, although with substantial revisions and in entirely different formal contexts. A lengthy section of the first movement was reused in the 1971 choral work *David Wept for Slain Absalom*, the second movement became part of the *Concerto No. 8*, and the fugal finale was, after significant alteration, adapted as the finale of the *Symphony No. 22*. One of the only significant portions of music to remain unused was a section in the third movement which had initially impeded the progress of its fugal development (Fig. 2.14). There is, once again, very little of Sibelius in it. If anything, its dogged modal parallelism recalls Vaughan Williams, a composer with whose music Hovhaness's occasionally draws comparisons.

Figure 2.14, *Symphony No. 2* [withdrawn] (1942), third movement



CHAPTER 3 – Turning Point (Summer 1942)

Hovhaness dryly recalled that his favorite part of his time at Tanglewood, the summer home of the Boston Symphony and a training center for young musicians, had been "the scenery."[59] As he never tired of recounting, the events that unfolded while he was a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center during the summer of 1942 were both painful and formative.[60] As such, this brief chapter does not deal with any of Hovhaness's works in particular. Rather, it focuses only on this consequential summer and its aftermath. This extended focus is necessary not only because of the great biographical significance of this episode and the existence of conflicting information regarding what occurred, but most importantly because of the discussion it provokes concerning Hovhaness's maturing artistic aims and his relationship with modernism. Because it deals with issues spanning Hovhaness's entire career, the second part of this chapter is chronologically somewhat free.

Hovhaness had initially planned to study at Tanglewood with the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů, at that time recently arrived in the United States having fled war-torn Europe. Martinů, who was like Hovhaness a rare example of an extremely prolific 20th-century composer, was "encouraging," but left Tanglewood early, having given Hovhaness only one lesson.[61] In the wake of his departure, Hovhaness was left to confront a musical scene dominated by Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland that he found insufferably cliquish. As Hovhaness later recounted many times, this contentious situation came to a head one day when he played a record of the

[59] Daniel, Oliver. "Hovhaness: In and Out of Our Time." *The Saturday Review*, February 22, 1958. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.
[60] Gregory, interview.
[61] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."

Leslie Heward performance of the *Exile Symphony* in a composition masterclass.[62] Copland and Bernstein talked loudly while the record played, preventing the music from getting a fair hearing. When the symphony was over, Bernstein walked over to the piano and played a scale full of augmented seconds, disparaging the symphony saying something along the lines of, "I can't stand this cheap ghetto music."[63] Deeply hurt, Hovhaness is said to have left Tanglewood immediately afterwards. The musicologist Walter Simmons has cast doubt on Hovhaness's retelling of these events, writing "why on earth would Leonard Bernstein, a proud Jew whose 'Jeremiah' Symphony, written about the same time, used that interval, be talking about 'cheap ghetto music?'"[64] It does seem extraordinary that a Jewish composer would have singled out that detail for criticism, using the word "ghetto" as a term of abuse, especially considering that the holocaust was in progress in Europe at the same time. Lisa Cook has dealt with this by surmising that "Bernstein himself was likely reacting from a defensive position, and his comment was likely intended to legitimize his own music safely within the boundaries of 'good music' by disparaging what he heard in Hovhaness's symphony."[65] Hovhaness himself interpreted Bernstein's actions as a jealous attempt to curry favor with Koussevitzky.[66]

Details of what was said during the masterclass aside, Simmons is incorrect in claiming that this anecdote "first appeared quite late in the composer's life."[67] In 1942, directly following the summer at Tanglewood, Hovhaness wrote to William Saroyan that, "This summer has been very difficult for me because of unpleasant dealings with unscrupulous, jealous and insincere composers who have done everything within their power to undermine and destroy my work.

---

[62] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[63] Rother, Larry. "A Composer Echoes in Unexpected Places." *The New York Times*, November 4, 2011.
[64] Simmons, "Fanfare Reviews Alan Hovhaness: Exile Symphony."
[65] Cook, Lisa. "Living in Northwest Asia: Transculturation and Postwar Art Music." University of Colorado, 2009, 199.
[66] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[67] Simmons, "Fanfare Reviews Alan Hovhaness: Exile Symphony."

Aron [sic] Copland and Bernstein have been especially despicable both by creating a scornful propaganda against my style and by creating a disturbance during the playing of my music which ruined the entire impression … This is a terrible letter but I am in the midst of composing several works and am struggling to remedy a summer of failures."[68] Another composition student who attended Tanglewood during the same summer confirmed Hovhaness's general impressions, remembering that, "The composers at Tanglewood didn't take anything Hovhaness submitted seriously … [and] Hovhaness didn't mix the way the others did … but instead [he] mainly hung back and off to one side."[69] Hovhaness later achieved a measure of restitution for the painful experiences of that summer: several of his works subsequently received successful performances at Tanglewood, including the *Magnificat* in 1959 and the *Prelude and Quadruple Fugue* in 1964. After a particularly well-received performance of his *Easter Cantata* at Tanglewood in the fall of 1955, Hovhaness wrote to his confidant the writer Judith Malina (made famous by her work with the "Living Theatre," for which Hovhaness composed incidental music) of his exhilaration over "the success that came from the hearts of these people, and that it could happen in the very place where loneliness, rejection, and slander had been my sole companies in the past."[70]

Nevertheless, in the direct aftermath of the events of the summer of 1942, Hovhaness took drastic action, apparently destroying or withdrawing many of the works he had written up to that point. The composer's own account of exactly how much music was destroyed, when, and why, vary. Hovhaness's longtime supporter Oliver Daniel wrote as early as 1952 that, in the wake of his experiences at Tanglewood, Hovhaness had destroyed around 1,000 works, and

---

[68] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to William Saroyan, 1942. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.
[69] Cowell, John, and David Badagnani, June 10, 2005. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive. These same sources were cited in Tyler Kinnear's dissertation as part of a similar attempt to unravel these events. There is very little else to go on other than Hovhaness's own recollections.
[70] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Judith Malina, October 2, 1955. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

numerous similar accounts appear in various biographical sketches written throughout the composer's career.[71] In conversation, Hovhaness usually gave a similar figure, for example telling one interviewer that after leaving Tanglewood he "destroyed about 1,000 works of all kinds … It took a couple of weeks in a huge fireplace to burn them all."[72] On a different occasion, Hovhaness explained that this conflagration was actually split into two periods: one in the 1930s actually *preceding* the Tanglewood incident, during which he destroyed around 500 pieces, and another following it. During this same conversation with Richard Howard, Hovhaness explained that the real impetus for this act of self-criticism had not been his persecution at Tanglewood, but rather Roger Sessions's opinion that his recent works had not lived up to the originality and potential he showed in his earliest compositions, a criticism he felt was justified and took to heart.[73]

Walter Simmons, yet again, has cast doubt on Hovhaness's own retelling of these events, writing that "there is no evidence to substantiate the enormous number of works claimed to have been destroyed."[74] It is of course impossible at this late juncture to ascertain just how many pieces Hovhaness discarded, but several of his acquaintances from the time do remember that he tried to collect extant scores of earlier works so that he could get rid of them.[75] In 1942 (just before he went to Tanglewood), Hovhaness wrote in a letter to the Armenian-American pianist Maro Ajemian that he had recently completed a seventh symphony.[76] It appears that of this earlier batch of numbered symphonies only numbers 1, 2, and 4 survive, the other four

---

[71] Daniel, "Alan Hovhaness."
[72] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Simmons, "Fanfare Reviews Alan Hovhaness: Exile Symphony."
[75] Johnston, Jack, interview.
Gregory, interview.
[76] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Maro Ajemian, Spring 1942. George Avakian and Anahid Ajemian Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

presumably having been destroyed around this time. Hovhaness later expressed his regret at having gotten rid of so much music, and even (although it is hard to know what to make of this) attributed it to not having enough space to store his manuscripts, telling one interviewer that "…I destroyed too many pieces. But since I was living in a tiny room, I didn't have the space for many things. I guess I just didn't want to see anything that I didn't feel was very good."[77] Arnold Rosner interpreted Hovhaness's actions as a "denial of the ego" in the Buddhist fashion, although it is unlikely he would have drawn this connection had it not been for the affinity for Eastern mysticism Hovhaness later developed.[78] There is also an interesting parallel to be drawn with Sibelius, who (although Hovhaness could not have known this in 1942) burned a large number of manuscripts, including whatever existed of his eighth symphony around this same time.

Ultimately, regardless of how much music was destroyed and when, two important points can be stated with certainty. First, a good deal of music from the period before 1942 *does* survive, and so it is not difficult to get a good picture of Hovhaness's musical evolution leading up to that time. Second, although much of it was eventually revised and reused in later compositions, Hovhaness did *withdraw* the majority of the surviving compositions he had written up to that time, evidence that he engaged in a major artistic reevaluation at this critical turning point in his career. In the end, it was this stylistic reevaluation and the way it changed the course of Hovhaness's artistic development that was the most important lasting effect of that summer's decisive events.

---

[77] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.
[78] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 9.

Also beyond doubt is that these events were a reflection of Hovhaness's developing relationship with "mainstream" contemporary American classical music, a relationship that was at this juncture an antagonistic one. Hovhaness's frequent retelling of the Tanglewood story was an expression of his own self-professed anti-establishment artistic identity. It became clear after Tanglewood that Hovhaness would not be following the kind of "mainstream" career path that might eventually land him a long-term academic post. He also felt that the Americanist "gang" led by Copland was set against him.[79] In one letter he bristled at what he saw as the hollowness of musical Americana, writing, "will not write ho downs [sic] because I never saw a ho down and I never want to see a ho down – so I will leave the ho down America to Copland …" (although decades later in the *Symphony No. 60*, Hovhaness did end up writing a "ho down" of sorts himself).[80] Part of this antipathy can be attributed to Hovhaness's general lack of interest in American culture, stretching back to his lack of sympathy as a child for the culture of his Protestant forebears on his mother's side. More importantly, though, the Americanist/neoclassical school of the 1940s more or less stood in for the modernist establishment as far as Hovhaness was concerned. Later on they were replaced by the serialists as the objects of his ire. He felt cold towards the "Boulangerie," ignoring Frederick Converse's advice to pursue further studies in Paris, saying that he thought it would "kill him," even though studying with Nadia Boulanger was practically de rigueur for aspiring young American composers at the time.[81]

Apart from Bernstein and Copland, Hovhaness's music generally received a mixed to chilly reception from other composers of the "academic establishment." Harold Shapero and

---

[79] Gregory, interview.
[80] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, June 27, 1958.
[81] Hovhaness and Davies, interview.
The Verdehr Trio, Making of a Medium Video Series Part I. WKAR TV, 1990.

Vincent Persichetti were dismissive. Irving Fine was somewhat more generous, but nonetheless skeptical. As mentioned previously, Virgil Thomson, who approved of the apparent "anti-Romanticism" of Hovhaness's music of the 1940s despite its composer's lack of sympathy for the Parisian modernist aesthetic that informed his own tastes, was an exception. Nevertheless, Hovhaness's music has thus far seemed to possess more staying power than many of the "Americanists" of his generation, likely because, as one critic has written "there are very few composers whose idiom is instantly recognizable but Hovhaness is one of them."[82] (Ironically, among the handful of other American composers of the twentieth century of whom the same might be said is Aaron Copland.) Hovhaness's alienation from what was in his eyes the establishment stronghold was ultimately more than just an issue of musical style or technique. As one perceptive musician observed, "the new-music world couldn't relate to him, because he just wasn't part of their world … Frankly Virgil Thomson and Henry Cowell were just as simple as Hovhaness, but they're respected in academic circles, and he's not."[83] Hovhaness's estrangement from composers like Bernstein and Copland cut to the very core of not only his artistic philosophy but also worldview as well: Alan Hovhaness was a profound anti-modernist.

Although he never named it as such, "anti-modernism" is an illuminating lens through which to view not only the Tanglewood incident, but many if not most of Hovhaness's compositional practices and ideas about art. It was the defining feature of his artistic outlook. It is also probably one reason for the continued neglect of his music by the scholarly community – although it could make him consequential, now that the academy is supposed to have broadened its outlook.

---

[82] Johnson, Brett. "Hovhaness: Symphony No.50, Mount St Helens, Op.360; Symphony No.22, City of Light, Op.236 by Seattle Symphony." *Tempo, New Series*, no. 188 (March 1994): 49–50.
[83] Randall, Marc. "A Composer Who Took as Many Knocks as Bows." *The New York Times*, May 20, 2001.

To think of Hovhaness as a "postmodernist" would be entirely anachronistic. Neither was he really a "conservative," given that he made no attempt to preserve the musical status quo in which he was trained. As Arnold Rosner explained, "unlike many composers, he has never felt the need to break from the past. Yet, his music is original and not at all reactionary, although the abused word 'conservative' may apply to some of the music of the earlier periods."[84] Accordingly, "anti-modernist" is a more appropriate label, especially given that the highpoint of Hovhaness's career collided squarely with the height of modernism's prestige among "serious" classical composers. The ways in which he resisted this ideology were legion. It was Hovhaness's dissatisfaction with what he saw as the modernist pursuit of innovation at the cost of beauty that caused him to characterize many of the composers of his time as being "bored with music," in other words, for their decadent failure to appreciate the unchanging value of its most fundamental elements.[85] He criticized atonality as "unnatural because it lacks a center," and was in private at times quite cutting in his condemnation of serial music.[86]

Hovhaness revealed the depth of his anti-modernist convictions most strikingly in a letter to Walter Simmons in which he wrote that, "all weak men think alike, go in mass cycles, feel weak and inferior to the past mass opinions, so cannot create a new opinion without destroying the old. The weak sons kill their fathers only to be killed by their sons."[87] For Hovhaness, the imperative to innovate and break with one's artistic forebears was not a sign of strength, individuality, or greatness, but rather consigned one to the herd of artists blinded to timeless values by petty historical competitiveness. Hovhaness's conception of history was cyclical rather than teleological. This manifested itself as early as his middle-school astronomy article, when he

[84] Rosner, Arnold. "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 344.
[85] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.
[86] Westbrook, "Hovhaness Interview: Angelic Cycles."
[87] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Walter Simmons, July 2, 1965. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

presented an (albeit scientifically inaccurate) cyclical vision of the history and future of the universe.[88] Later, Hovhaness philosophized more generally that he did "not believe that there [was] such a thing as time in the cosmos; there are only cycles which repeat."[89] It might go without saying, but this is also the most commonly encountered point on which the "Eastern" worldview is generally distinguished from the "Western" one. The connection between Hovhaness's interest in non-Western musical styles and his anti-modernism will be further elaborated on in chapter 6.

Stemming from this anti-modernism was also a degree of populism, about which Hovhaness was particularly vocal in his later years. One reviewer, clearly fed up with modern music's pretensions to teleological significance, picked up on these populist leanings quite early on. Rudolph Elie wrote in the *Boston Herald* that, "[Hovhaness] does not believe the world owes him a living, or that the composer has some God-given right to have his music played on the ground that the public is always behind the artist and must, therefore, give him the opportunity to be heard for the sake of generations yet unborn."[90] Hovhaness envisioned his role as a composer primarily as a communicator of states of spiritual elevation. In his unsuccessful application for a Guggenheim Grant in 1942 (the same year he went to Tanglewood) Hovhaness wrote, "I propose to create a heroic, monumental, style of composition simple enough to inspire all people, completely free from fads, artificial mannerisms and false sophistications … It is not my purpose to supply a few pseudo-intellectual musicians and critics with more food for brilliant argumentation, but rather to inspire all mankind with new heroism and spiritual nobility."[91] Although his rhetoric in later years was somewhat more low-key, Hovhaness continued to

[88] Hovhaness, Alan. "The Story of the Past and Future of Our Solar System." *The Menotomy Beacon*, 1926.
[89] Arzuni, Sahan. "Alan Hovhaness: The Wellspring of His Music." *Journal of Armenian Studies* 3, no. 1–2 (87 1986): 157–60.
[90] Elie, Rudolph. *The Boston Herald*, January 25, 1958.
[91] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."

complain of critical "snobbishness," and held that "the narrowness of very academic and so-called intellectual musicians is more an enemy to the composer than the public."[92]

Hovhaness's views on popular music brought out a certain contradiction between his anti-modernist and populist values. He once complained that, "there is so much violence in popular music now, with electronic devices…"[93] He also criticized popular musicians (he probably meant the Beatles) for their failure to adequately understand the non-Western musical styles which they had tried to absorb, telling an interviewer that "they were trying to imitate Oriental music, but they didn't study it enough, and they didn't really understand it. They were imitating it on the surface."[94] (Ironically, Hovhaness's own efforts in this arena later came under similar criticism.)

Probably the most convincingly "anti-modernist" aspect of Hovhaness's activity as a composer was the way in which he forged for himself a remarkably consistent musical language that allowed him to write with a prolificacy analogous to that of a composer of the common practice period. This distinguishing trait was described by one discerning critic as early as 1957. In his review of *Mysterious Mountain*, Burt Schorr wrote that "in a period that finds many contemporary composers groping for a syntax on which to hang their inspiration, Alan Hovhaness stands in refreshing solitude as the possessor not of syntax alone, but of an entire and unique language."[95] I will refer to this facet of Hovhaness's modus operandi with the deliberate oxymoron "personal common practice."

---

[92] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Cohen, June 16, 1976.
Hovhaness, interview, 1985.
[93] Hovhaness and Davies, interview.
[94] *Hovhaness Speaks on "Khaldis."*
[95] Schorr, Burt. "Hovhaness's 'Ad Lyram' Inspiring Work." *The Houston Press*, March 13, 1957.

Some commentators have also described some aspects of Hovhaness's artistic orientation as akin to Hindemith's notion of "*Gebrauchsmusik*." Although Hovhaness did not share Hindemith's aesthetic of emotional detachment (as, for example, did Milhuad, another rare twentieth century "*Gebrauchsmusiker*"), he did display a kind of "music for use" practicality in his approach to fulfilling commissions. Certainly Hovhaness had no problem producing music for all manner of seemingly uninspiring situations. He wrote his *Symphony No. 17* (for metallic instruments) on a commission from the "American Society for Metals," and his *Symphony No. 24*, with its desert theme, was commissioned by the "International Center for Arid and Semi-Arid Land Studies at Texas Tech University." He also accepted commissions which on the surface seemed to be at odds with his own artistic inclinations, for example for a "folk oratorio" with guitars (which became *The Way of Jesus*) and for a patriotic celebratory work for July 4th (which resulted in the *Ode to Freedom* for violin and orchestra). It was Hovhaness's "personal common practice" that allowed him to make all of these projects convincingly his own. It was also what allowed Hovhaness to maintain a continuity of musical and spiritual aims across disparate genres. As another reviewer in the 1950s observed, "So far as I know, Hovhaness is the only 'modern' composer who writes church music in the style of his most extended concert works."[96] Such music might be classified as a kind of "spiritual *Gebrauchsmusik*," the result not of jaded anti-Romanticism, but of a conviction Hovhaness shared with Bach that the spiritual might be a part of everyday experience.

Another feature of Hovhaness's compositional practice that is helpfully illuminated by viewing it as an aspect of his anti-modernism was his tendency to reuse pre-existing material in new compositions. Numerous examples have been cited so far in the preceding chapters, and

[96] Evett, Robert. "Review of: Music of Alan Hovhaness." *Notes, Second Series* 16, no. 2 (March 1959): 323–24.

many more will follow. In fact, instances of Hovhaness "recycling" musical material are so numerous that I have given up on an earlier attempt to catalog them. Suffice it to say there are hundreds. Occasionally, entire movements are reused with only slight revision, while in other cases a seemingly obscure melody written decades before is given prominent placement in a new large-scale composition. It was reported that "when inspiration is slow, [Hovhaness] scans earlier notebooks and even old manuscripts to get ideas for pieces."[97] Perhaps the example of Handel, one of Hovhaness's favorite composers, was instructive (although Hovhaness only ever borrowed from himself). Regardless, this practice flies in the face of the modernist conception of the work as a self-contained autonomous entity. It occasionally can seem as though Hovhaness's entire output was a collection of open musical containers through which thematic material could freely flow from one work to another.

Another way in which Hovhaness resisted the norms of musical modernism was through his sheer prolificacy. He was known to have written with extreme speed, apparently having completed the *Easter Cantata* in less than a week, and the opera *Etchmiadzin* in under a month.[98] At least one commentator has speculated that Hovhaness suffered from "hypergraphia," and the composer himself jestingly referred to this compulsion to create as a "disease."[99] Hovhaness's prolificacy is better thought of, however, as another aspect of his anti-modernist compositional practice. Critics, scholars (including Arnold Rosner), and the composer himself all made this connection at various times. One reviewer noted that, "Alan Hovhaness, it sometimes seems, wandered into our century by mistake. In a time when most composers of repute have been strenuously engaged in trying to write a few terse, immaculate pieces, Mr. Hovhaness has been

---

[97] Kostelanetz, Richard, *On Innovative Musicians*, 101.
[98] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[99] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
Hovhaness, interview, March 1984.

churning out music as if his name were Telemann or Boccherini."[100] Hovhaness explained that, "I wrote perhaps every day and I think that this is not unusual. Oh, maybe in this century, but actually the old masters wrote a great deal."[101] He tellingly contrasted this way of working with that of Beethoven, who "controlled himself to write … more or less only masterpieces," identifying him as the spiritual fount of musical modernism.[102]

Because of the volume of Hovhaness's output, his one-time student Dominick Argento assumed that "he was rarely bothered by second thoughts or spent much time revising or improving a piece. I intend nothing negative by that observation, for that most certainly must have been the way of Mozart, Bach, Vivaldi, and many others."[103] While his prolificacy did recall that of the common-practice composers Argento mentions, Hovhaness was in fact an inveterate reviser who was constantly revisiting material composed earlier. Aside from the recycling of musical material already discussed, this is also attested to by the many pieces that exist in multiple versions.

For the purposes of the dissemination of Hovhaness's best music and the continued survival of his music in the repertoire, some kind of sifting through of this voluminous body of work seems to be inevitable. In Hovhaness's best pieces, whether as a result of greater inspiration or invention on the part of the composer, the cohabitation of elements that otherwise occur in many of his less outstanding compositions is especially felicitous. Nonetheless, writing "too much" music was essential to Hovhaness's way of working, and a natural outcome of his

---

[100] Henahan, Donald. "Concert: Musica Sacra Presents Hovhaness 'St. Paul' Premiere." *The New York Times*, January 29, 1981.
[101] Hovhaness, Alan. Interview by Charles Amirkhanian, October 1975. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Amirkhanian_1.html.
[102] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[103] Argento, Dominick. *Catalogue Raisonné as Memoir*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004, 20.

anti-modernist convictions. As he told one interviewer, “It’s like practicing one’s instrument thoroughly, and composing needs a lot of practice, too.”[104]

[104] Michaelyan, “An Interview with Alan Hovhaness.”

CHAPTER 4 – The Armenian Period (1943-1950)

Following Hovhaness's departure from Tanglewood, he began to radically reassess his musical style. Reacting to a sense of isolation from the dominant stylistic currents in modern American music, he sought alternatives in Armenian liturgical and folk music, and simultaneously felt a strengthening sense of his own Armenian identity. (It was also during this time that "Hovaness" became "Hovhaness," the composer presumably having decided that this was a more appropriate Romanization of his Armenian name.) The music of the Armenian period is Hovhaness's most pared down, almost completely stripped of Romantic musical rhetoric. The music of this period was also strongly defined by Hovhaness's discovery of the musical possibilities of homophony (although the seeds for this were already present in some early works such as the *Violoncello Concerto*).

Hovhaness began this period of his career living in a basic single-room apartment in Boston on Huntington Avenue, scraping by teaching piano lessons, working his weekend job at the Armenian Church, and ghostwriting jazz arrangements.[105] Although he was unable to make a living primarily through composing until "halfway through his life," Hovhaness continued to produce music with his usual prolificacy.[106] For the most part, he managed to stay out of the academy. As such, he operated primarily outside of establishment musical circles, relying largely on the support of the Armenian-American community in Boston and New York.

Hovhaness's circle of intimates during these years included two painters, Hyman Bloom and Hermon di Giovanno, who were important influences on his musical and spiritual development. (Like Cage, another musical "outsider," Hovhaness received significant

[105] Gregory, interview.
[106] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.

encouragement and guidance from artists working in other fields. For the most part, he does not seem to have been particularly close with other composers.) Hyman Bloom was born to a Jewish family in what is now Latvia, and immigrated to the United States as a child. Bloom was interested in various Eastern cultures, and was instrumental in broadening Hovhaness's musical horizons. He increased Hovhaness's exposure to Indian music, introducing him to amateur Indian musicians in the Boston area (mostly North Indians in the United States pursuing technical degrees).[107] He is also said to have exposed Hovhaness to the cantorial music of the "unreformed Jewish church," as well as to the *Six Dances* for piano of Komitas Vartabed, which the composer later recorded.[108] It was Bloom, yet again, who introduced Hovhaness to Yenovk der Hagopian, the Armenian folk-singer from Van whose melodies provided the raw material for the *12 Armenian Folksongs* for piano and the three *Armenian Rhapsodies* for string orchestra.[109]

Hovhaness was sharing a meal with Bloom at Bickford's (a now long-defunct restaurant chain also frequented by the Beat poets in its time) when they first met Hermon di Giovanno, who was working there as a counterman.[110] Over the coming years, the trio often met to discuss spiritual and artistic matters. Di Giovanno, who was born on the Greek island of Lesbos, had adopted an Italian name as part of a failed attempt to pursue a career in opera.[111] It was Bloom who initially encouraged his artistic efforts, and eventually arranged for his work to be shown in several Boston galleries.[112] Hovhaness later referred to di Giovanno as a spiritual "teacher,"

---

[107] Gagne, 124.
[108] Ibid., 122.
Johnson, "A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness," 12-13.
[109] Gregory, interview.
Yenovk Der Hagopian." Accessed May 1, 2016. http://www.armenianmusicpreservation.org/artists/yenovk-der-hagopian.
Gagne, 122.
[110] Gregory, interview.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

claiming that he painted "automatically" (mediumistically) and possessed clairvoyant powers.[113] Bloom described di Giovanno's artistic achievement in similar terms, writing of his work that, "these pictures come to us directly from exotic regions of the mind … They radiate the glamour and the creative stimulus that visionaries bring back from their world of no division between self and object."[114] Di Giovanno also played a role in encouraging Hovhaness's interest in Armenian music, and it seems as though several of his visions and/or teachings gave rise to specific innovations in musical technique. Hovhaness's first experiments with a limited degree of aleatoricism were an attempt to recreate a visionary experience di Giovanno had described.[115] Similarly, his frequent employment of pointillistic "star-like" background sounds was inspired by di Giovanno's recommendation that he imagine himself surrounded by infinite space and a vast expanse of stars as he sat down to compose.[116] Several of di Giovanno's paintings hung in Hovhaness's home for the rest of his life.

Di Giovanno was probably the single most influential figure in the formation of Hovhaness's mysticism, spiritual beliefs, and interest in the occult, all which seemed to have solidified around this time. Hovhaness's letters refer frequently to various manifestations of clairvoyance, and records remain of his participation in séances which involved attempts to contact the spirits of famous composers and writers.[117] On various occasions, he consulted astrologers, fortune tellers, and psychic mediums. Hovhaness was also a firm believer in reincarnation, and mentioned in multiple interviews that he had been told he was a reincarnation of a Florentine composer (Atalanta Migliorotti, supposedly a contemporary of Leonardo da Vinci,

---

[113] Ibid.
Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."
[114] "Hermon Di Giovanno 1901-1969, Memorial Exhibition," 1971. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.
[115] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[116] Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."
[117] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, June 25, 1956.

although the unusual name seems to hint at some Atlantean significance.)[118] Hovhaness also voiced his conviction about the presence of various spiritual guides, including, in at least one instance, his cat, that assisted him in the composition of different works. (Hovhaness's favorite cat Rajah was also the dedicatee of *Sosi*, a concerto for piano and strings from the Armenian period.) Several of Hovhaness's most important compositions contain musical material that he claimed was the result of his own visionary experience. Perhaps most important of all was a kind of pantheism: Hovhaness once explained that his "feeling of religion [was] through nature perhaps more than anything else."[119]

Hovhaness also drew liberally on various established religious traditions, as well as new-age religions. As in his music, he was a unifier of disparate practices. While Hovhaness never became a follower of any one religion exclusively, in his life and work he made references to doctrines including but not limited to Judaism, mystical strains of Christianity (and Armenian Christianity in particular), Hinduism, Tibetan Buddhism, ancient Armenian pagan religion, the Indian guru Sai Baba, and Helena Blavatsky's Theosophy.

Hovhaness's accumulated mystical inclinations were at least as important a part of his musical production as was his "hypergraphic" prolificacy. Such beliefs provided him with an alternative framework through which to view the role of music, insulating him from the demands of modernism and freeing him to follow the whims of his inspiration. Judith Malina succinctly elucidated the relationship between Hovhaness's spiritual beliefs and his musical output when

[118] Hovhaness, Alan to Hovhaness, Serafina Ferrante, Oct. 20, 1970.
[119] Hovhaness, interview, March 1984.

she wrote in her diary that, "I don't however, insist on rationality because Alan is such a 'mad genius' as could produce unusual work under unusual circumstances."[120]

While such mysticism continued to be an important part of what underpinned Hovhaness's artistic production for the duration of his career, it was the compositions of this period in particular that reflected most strongly his growing familiarity with various styles of Armenian music. Most of Hovhaness's knowledge of this music came firsthand through direct contact with personnel at the Armenian Church in Watertown and with other Armenian musicians living in the United States, as well as through studying the works of Armenian composers.[121] Hovhaness eventually came to know the Armenian liturgical style well enough to improvise in it during church services at St. James.[122] Hovhaness was also exposed to various styles of Middle Eastern music (Turkish, Greek, and Arabic) through contact with other immigrant communities in Boston, but never made the same systematic study of these musics that he did of Armenian music (or Japanese and Indian music later on).

Because of the general lack of availability of English language scholarly material dealing with Armenian music, previous scholarship on Hovhaness's music has for the most part been content to take the composer at his word on the "Armenianness" of the music of this period. I have tried to go further in elucidating what exactly the Armenian elements in Hovhaness's music are. Other than the folksong settings for piano and rhapsodies for string orchestra mentioned in connection with the songs of Yenovk der Hagopian, none of the "Armenian" works in Hovhaness's catalog employ any preexisting melodic material. Hovhaness was annoyed by critics who assumed that he had relied on borrowed folk melodies (perhaps a symptom of the

---

[120] Malina, Judith. *The Diaries of Judith Malina, 1947-1957*. New York, NY: Grove Press, Inc., 1983, 431.
[121] Johnson, "A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness," 10.
[122] Amirkhanian, Charles. "Interview with Maro Ajemian." *Ode to Gravity*. KPFA Berkley, August 26, 1970.

modernist preoccupation with originality) and was careful to correct this assumption in his program notes.[123] There actually exists a substantial body of Armenian folksong transcriptions and liturgical arrangements dating from around 1943 and 1944, but they remained unpublished, perhaps because Hovhaness wanted to promote his original work. In this regard he was very different from Komitas, who had a preservationist musicological mission inspired by Armenian nationalism, and wrote that "new melodies should not be created" for the Armenian liturgical repertoire.[124]

Instead, Hovhaness adhered to the model of Bartók, distilling characteristic melodic patterns from Armenian folk and liturgical music and then employing them in his own original works. This allowed him to evoke a national style while still using wholly original melodic material. Anthony Sheppard has written that Bartók's efforts in establishing this new paradigm for cross-cultural musical influence were an effort to "differentiate Romantic exoticism from its modernist successors."[125] While Hovhaness did not share Bartók's modernist artistic goals, he was likely equally eager to avoid the Romantic period associations that the wholesale borrowing of folk tunes might evoke. In the case of Armenian folk music, the characteristic elements that Hovhaness distilled from his study of this repertoire include the gradual development of small melodic cells (described in the writings of Komitas), predominant melodic fourths, long-short rhythms (Rosner noted Hovhaness's fondness for these), and sequential melodic motion (which might otherwise be mistaken for an inadvertent holdover from functional tonal music).[126] All of

---

[123] Hovhaness, Alan. "Concert of Original Compositions," March 10, 1946. George Avakian and Anahid Ajemian Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
[124] Komitas. *Armenian Sacred and Folk Music*. Translated by Edward Gulbekian. Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1998, 127.
[125] Sheppard, Anthony. "Continuity in Composing the American Cross-Cultural: Eichheim, Cowell, and Japan." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 61, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 482.
[126] Komitas, *Armenian Sacred and Folk Music*, 47-58.

these elements can be found in a single melody from Hovhaness's *Symphony No. 9* (Fig. 4.1). Two Armenian folksongs transcribed by Komitas are given for comparison in Fig. 4.2.

Figure 4.1, *Symphony No. 9*, "St. Vartan" (1950), No. 19, Bar, main theme

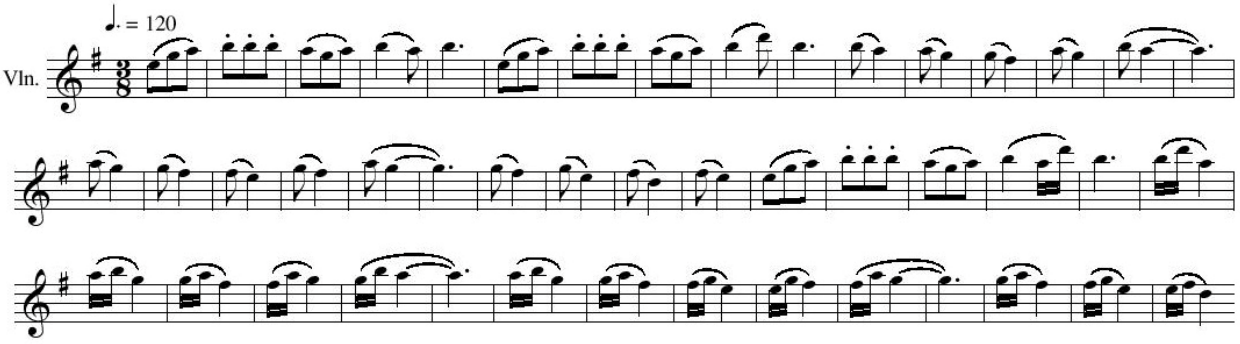
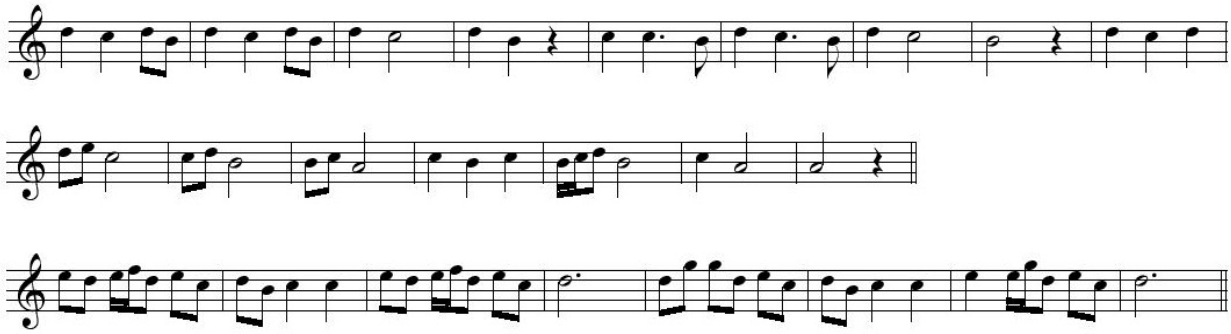


Figure 4.2, two Armenian folksongs transcribed by Komitas[127]

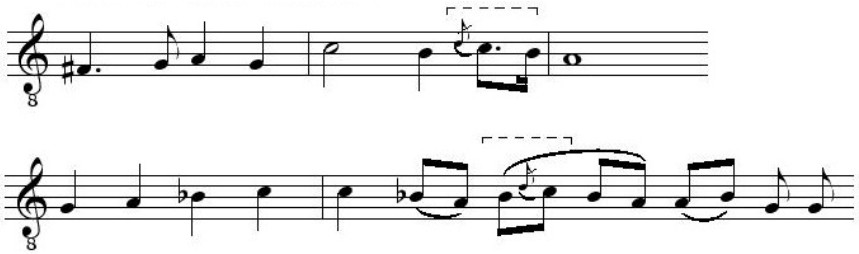


Related to this distillation of characteristic melodic elements was Hovhaness's study of *khazes*, the neumes used for the notation of Armenian chant. It was almost certainly to the *khazes* that he referred when he wrote in a program note from this period that "the connection with Armenia is a spiritual one of feeling and style, based on the vital principles of melodic motives, gliding melodic groups, rather than separate static notes."[128] Like other neume notation systems (Gregorian, Jewish, etc.), the *khaz* system was designed as a memory aid for a series of familiar

[127] Ibid., 40, 42.
[128] Hovhaness, "Concert of Original Compositions."

short melodic fragments, rather than a way of precisely notating each "separate static note." As such, it seems probable that Hovhaness might have employed some of these melodic figures in his compositions, analogous to the way in which he employed the melodic patterns he had absorbed from his study of Armenian folk music. Unfortunately, as attempts by Armenian scholars to decipher any standardized meaning for the *khazes* have been frustrated by the wide variety of ways in which they are interpreted, trying to find specific traces of their influence on Hovhaness's melodic language is difficult.[129] That said, at least two melodic patterns which are frequently encountered in the most famous settings of the *Badarak* (Armenian mass) also occur regularly in Hovhaness's own melodies from the period. Most notable is the grace-note incomplete upper-neighbor figure (Fig. 4.3), surely the most commonly encountered ornament in Hovhaness's Armenian period works. The descending figure found in both examples reproduced in Fig. 4.4 is also quite typical.

Figure 4.3, melodic examples from Komitas's *Badarak* and Hovhaness's opera *Etchmiadzin Komitas*:

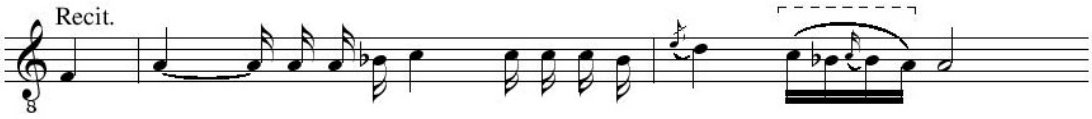


[129] Atayan, Robert. *The Armenian Neume System of Notation: Study and Analysis*. Translated by Vrej N. Nersessian. Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1999.

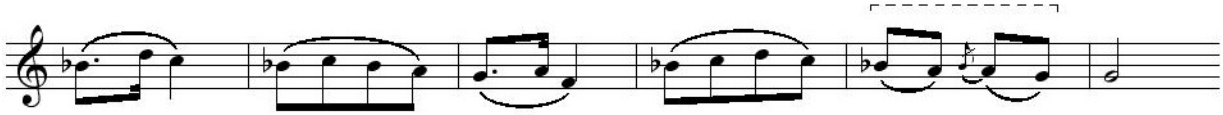
Hovhaness:

Figure 4.4, melodic examples from Ekmalian's *Badarak* and Hovhaness's opera *Etchmiadzin*

Ekmalian:



Hovhaness:



Hovhaness would have been familiar with both of these settings, as their composers were the most significant figures in the (relatively short) history of classical music in Armenia at that time. The first, Makar Ekmalian (1856-1905), was a Georgian-born ethnically Armenian composer who studied composition with Rimsky-Korsakov in St. Petersburg. His harmonized setting of the *Badarak* is still the most widely used version today, and would have also been in use at the St. James Armenian church in Watertown during the 1940s when Hovhaness worked there. In his setting, Ekmalian attempted to "work within the diatonic scale of the melody, and to arrange the harmony as simply as possible, because this is required by the spirit of Persian-

Arabic music, of which [Armenian music] forms a part."[130] He was criticized, however, by his successor Komitas Vartabed ("Father Komitas," born Soghomon Soghomonian) for his failure to achieve this goal.[131] Hovhaness would have likely agreed with Komitas that Ekmalian's harmonization was too "Westernized." Komitas's own example proved much more instructive.

While the influence of Komitas can be observed in several aspects of Hovhaness's music, including the sparseness of his own folksong settings, in certain piano textures, and in aspects of his choral style, Hovhaness learned the most from the way in which Komitas managed to supersede the work of Ekmalian in creating harmonizations that did not interfere with the modal "flavor" of the original Armenian melodies. Komitas prefigured Bartók in this regard, all the more impressive considering that his own background was much further removed from the traditions of Western classical music than was Bartók's. (He also anticipated Bartók in the employment of key signatures of mixed sharps and flats.) In the *New Grove Dictionary* Komitas's achievement in this area is described as follows:

> In technique Komitas followed a folk style but added original features; above all, he brought polyphonic development to a music which is essentially monophonic. He did this by subordinating conventional rules of harmony and polyphony to methods originating in the material. In polyphony he used Armenian intonations in melodically independent voices, freely allowing the occurrence of polymodality and polytonality.[132]

In practice, this involved finding solutions for the contrapuntal treatment of a variety of non-diatonic modes, some of which result in "misspelled" triads that form part of (in terms of

---

[130] Komitas, *Armenian Sacred and Folk Music*, 124.
[131] Ibid., 140-141.
[132] Atayan, Robert, and Aram Kerovpyan. "Vartaped, Komitas." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Accessed February 19, 2016. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51868.

diatonic harmony) distant harmonic relationships that are in fact native to the particular mode. However, the most important technical innovation which allowed Komitas to effectively harmonize the Armenian liturgy was a textural one: a contrapuntally activated version of the archaic "Byzantine" drone plus melody complex. Komitas's polyphonic style is laden with lengthy drones in alternating voices, and there are long stretches of his *Badarak* in which there is significant movement in only two or three of the four voices (Fig. 4.5). Hovhaness's Armenian period works utilize much polyphony of the same sort (Fig. 4.6).

Figure 4.5, Komitas, *Badarak*, polyphonic texture

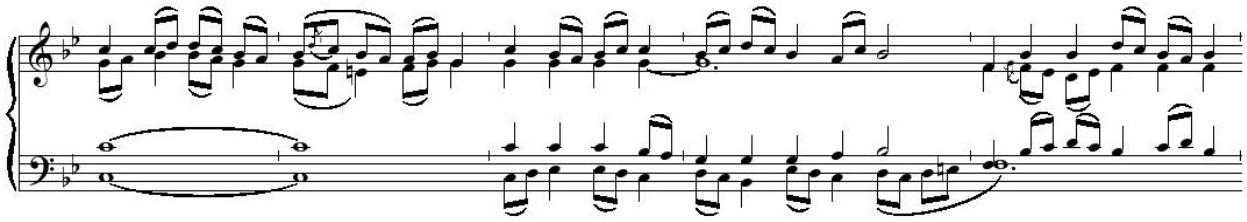
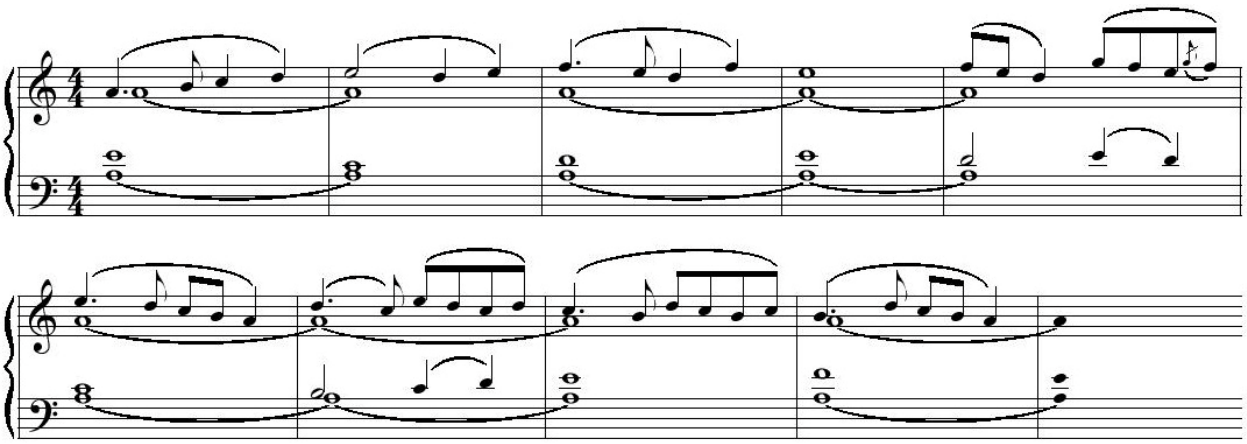


Figure 4.6, *30th Ode of Solomon* (1948), polyphonic texture



Although he practiced this technique with somewhat less subtlety than Komitas, Hovhaness was able to apply it to larger instrumental forms. Indeed, some of Hovhaness's Armenian period works can seem as though they are the result of a composer with the

wherewithal to create extended instrumental compositions who wanted to follow through on Komitas's ideas. Because of the preponderance of drones, polyphony of this sort also coexists very comfortably with extended passages of monophony and heterophony in Hovhaness's Armenian period compositions.

One rarely remarked upon aspect of Hovhaness's Armenian period style was the simultaneous influence of Indian music on the development of this new musical language. As Brian Silver later pointed out, "much of what seemed to listeners to be Armenian in flavor was at least partly Indian in inspiration."[133] Hovhaness began to describe *talas* (repeating rhythmic structures which provide temporal organization in much Indian music) in his compositions as early as 1945, and is reported to have taped the table of modes from A. H. Fox Strangways's 1914 book *Music of Hindostan* to his wall around this time so that he could refer to it when composing.[134]

This contemporaneous interest in Indian music casts Hovhaness's relationship with Armenian music in an interesting light. In her recent dissertation on the music of the Armenian diaspora, Sylvia Alajaji explains that "in 'correctly' defining, performing, or composing Armenian music, it seems remaining 'Armenian' depends – and has depended – on that fine, but continuously wavering line between being too European and too 'Turkish.'"[135] Komitas's balancing act between preserving Armenian music's modality and developing it polyphonically can be productively conceived of in these terms. Hovhaness's position was different. Coming out of a solidly Western musical background, it was precisely the "Eastward-looking" aspects of Armenian music that struck him as most "authentic" and worthy of development. Soviet-

[133] Silver, "Henry Cowell and Alan Hovhaness: Responses to the Music of India," 69.
[134] Ibid., 70.
[135] Alajaji, Sylvia, "Diasporic Communities and Negotiated Identities: Trauma, Recovery, and the Search for the Armenian Musical Voice," 47-48.

Armenian composers such as Khachaturian followed the example of the Russian-trained Ekmalian, continuing the process of "Westernizing" Armenian music (such composers were part of a trend of Armenian musicians Hovhaness felt tended to "Russianize their music and modernize it in a very banal way..."). [136] Hovhaness conversely sought to "Easternize" Armenian music through an infusion of Indian Elements, seeing this as a return to its ancient, uncorrupted origins. His attitudes in this regard seem likely to have been conditioned by the same "American experimentalist" environment that nurtured a similar interest in the uncorrupted "essence" of non-Western musical traditions in John Cage, Henry Cowell, and Lou Harrison.

Hovhaness's position as a first generation (half) Armenian-American also gave him a perspective on "authentic" Armenian identity necessarily different from that of a composer actually living in Soviet Armenia. As one astute early article on Hovhaness's Armenian period works pointed out:

> …one can distinguish in every American citizen, besides his American way of living, of feeling, of thinking, besides his religious or philosophical affiliation, the consciousness of national origin, which retains through generations its affective and emotional power. Such a consciousness is profoundly different from the European conception of patriotism. The aboriginal fatherland of an American citizen is no longer earthbound. It is not linked with landscapes and sights, customs and usages, language, poems, songs and dances, but rather with the image of these forlorn treasures, the image reflected and distorted through remoteness and estrangement in space and time.[137]

[136] Michaelyan, "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness."
[137] Stephan, R. "The Three Magi of Contemporary Music: The Second Magician." *The Tiger's Eye* III (1949 1947): 64.

Hovhaness's "Easternization" of Armenian music was facilitated by his perception that there were many commonalities between Armenian and Indian music. Certainly the drones, monophony, and melismatic melodic development that are common to both traditions were also staples of Hovhaness's Armenian period music. As Hovhaness later remarked, "I thought Armenian music – ancient Armenian music, which is very rich in modes and melodies – and Indian music seem to have melody which could stand by itself. It doesn't need harmony. In fact, it's better as a single line with perhaps a drone to give it foundation."[138] Hovhaness was later quoted in an article about his subsequent travels in India theorizing that, "Ancient Armenian modes are really closely related to South Indian scale systems," and describing the stylistic similarity between the Kashmiri folksongs he had encountered and Armenian music.[139] There is undoubtedly significant overlap between the modes found in Armenian music and those of the Carnatic (South Indian) *Melakarta* ragas. Whether or not this is merely the result of the sheer breadth of the *Melakarta* system (in fact a good deal of modal material common to both musical traditions is roughly equivalent to the white-key "church modes" which Hovhaness had employed since he was a child) or indicative of some deeper relationship between Indian and Armenian music is beyond the scope of this dissertation to determine. Nevertheless, some similarities are indeed intriguing. For example, the first of the eight Armenian church modes, *ayp tza* (Hovhaness used it frequently in his original compositions), is the rough equivalent of *gangeyabhushani*, the 33rd *Melakarta* raga.[140]

---

[138] Westbrook, "Hovhaness Interview: Angelic Cycles."
[139] Dikijian, Armine. "Alan Hovhaness: Passage to India." *Ararat Magazine*, Fall 1960, 23.
[140] The Armenian church modes have been helpfully deciphered in: McCollum, Jonathan. "Analysis of Notation in Music Historiography: Armenian Neumatic Khaz from the Ninth through Early Twentieth Centuries." In *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology*, edited by Jonathan McCollum and David Hebert, 197–256. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman Littlefield/Lexington Books, 2014.

Perhaps largely because of these perceived similarities between Armenian and Indian music, Hovhaness was comfortable with a certain degree of slippage in regards to the extra-musical subject matter of the works of this period. One large-scale Armenian-themed work for piano and orchestra was, on the occasion of its performance in India in 1960, renamed *Symphony No. 8* and given the subtitle "Arjuna," for the warrior-hero of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Hovhaness later posited his studies of Armenian music as a gateway into the larger world of non-Western musical styles (although his initial contact with Indian music was at least as early as 1936).[141] In any event, the preponderance of monophony and heterophony in the music of this period made the transition to subsequent styles more overtly influenced by Indian and Japanese music seamless both in terms of its musical techniques and its reception.

Sylvia Alajaji has also written that, "A culture's unique, indigenous music can often be the glue that binds after massive losses and deportations."[142] Issues of what constitutes "authentic" Armenian music aside, Hovhaness's Armenian period works certainly fulfilled this role for the tightly-knit diaspora communities in Boston and New York in the 1940s, and occasionally afterwards as well. Alajaji contends that the musical traits which characterize "traditional" Armenian music (as Komitas sought to define it) were actually only becoming known to many educated, urban Armenians in the period directly leading up to the Armenian genocide, and were thus inextricably connected with that event and its aftermath in the minds of diaspora audiences.[143] As such, Hovhaness's use of the musical signifiers of Armenian identity described in this chapter would have made his works even more potent as emblems of national solidarity around which the diaspora community could coalesce. This is attested to by the crucial backing

[141] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.
[142] Alajaji, Sylvia. "Diasporic Communities and Negotiated Identities: Alan Hovhaness's Recovery of the Armenian Folk Music Idiom," n.d., 1.
[143] Ibid., 7-8.

Hovhaness received from the Armenian-American community during these years, beginning with the support he received from William Saroyan and the St. James Armenian Church.

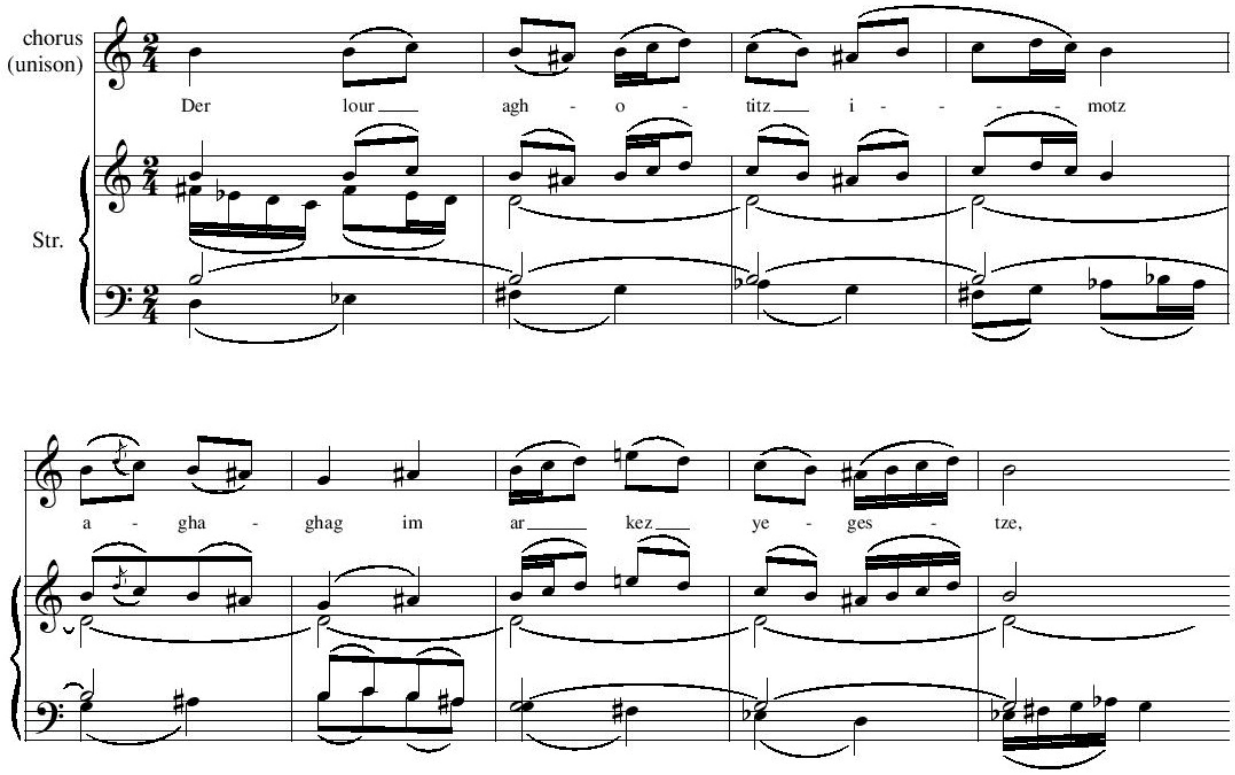
In the early 1940s, Hovhaness was befriended by the Armenian-American Ajemian sisters, Maro (pianist) and Anahid (violinist). Maro is today perhaps best remembered as an early champion of the prepared piano music of John Cage, but she was a staunch supporter of the music of many contemporary composers. Hovhaness's friend Elizabeth Gregory (an Armenian-American pediatrician with an Anglicized last name who began studying piano with Hovhaness in 1945, and another one of the most important members of his circle during this time) later recalled that Maro had probably been his most important champion.[144] Together with Hovhaness, the Ajemian sisters formed the Friends of Armenian Music based in New York, which raised money from relatively well-to-do members of the Armenian-American community essentially for the sole purpose of putting on concerts of Hovhaness's music.[145] The sponsors acknowledged in the programs of these concerts attest to their success in garnering the support of all manner of Armenian-American small business owners. All of Hovhaness's most important high-profile concerts during these years were given under the auspices of this organization. The Ajemians were also able to get Olin Downes and Virgil Thomson interested in reviewing these performances, ensuring Hovhaness valuable critical support over the coming years.

A glance at Hovhaness's catalog of published works makes it seem as though his "Armenian style" sprang into being fully formed. In fact, the aforementioned body of unpublished Armenian folksong transcriptions and liturgical arrangements dating from 1943 and 1944 were one of the most important products of this period of stylistic incubation. An excerpt

[144] Gregory, interview.
[145] Hovhaness, "Concert of Original Compositions."

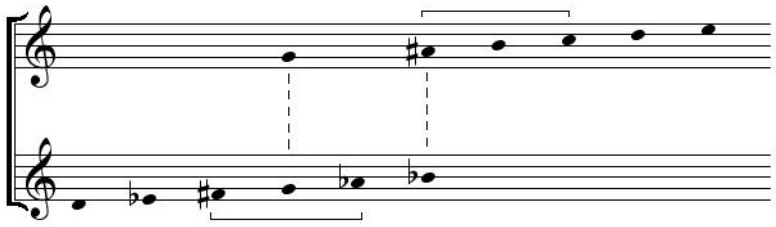
from one of these liturgical works, *Der Lour* – a setting of the "Armenian Requiem" – is reproduced in Fig. 4.7. Note the appearance in the fifth bar of the passage of the grace-note figure discussed previously.

Figure 4.7, *Der Lour* (1944)



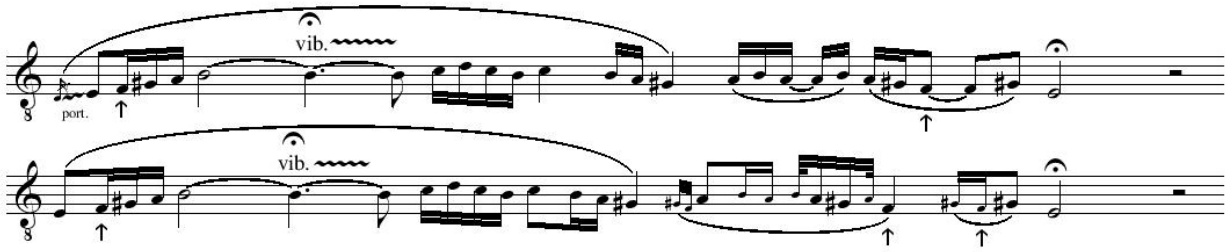
The drone-laden polyphonic texture gleaned from the example of Komitas is fully in evidence. Also present is a kind of polymodality between the outer voices, again owing much to Komitas's example. This polymodality is achieved through the employment of two interlocking hexachords displaced by an octave (Fig. 4.8). Both hexachords contain two consecutive semitones, a common feature of the "non-diatonic" modes preferred by Hovhaness during this period.

Figure 4.8, *Der Lour*, interlocking hexachords



The most remarkable feature of Hovhaness's Armenian folksong transcriptions is their great attention to detail in the notation of inflection, tuning, and ornamentation (Fig. 4.9). Such details were rarely a feature of Hovhaness's own original compositions. It seems as though these "analyses" were made for the composer's own study, and were not intended to be used to reproduce the original performance.

Figure 4.9, *Armenian Melodic Analyses* (1943/44?) No. 2: *Voghchoin Douvek*, opening



The first "Armenian" work in Hovhaness's catalog of published compositions is a small piano piece, *Lousnag Kisher*, from 1943. Some of its piano textures were clearly modeled on those found in Komitas's *Six Dances* for piano, to which Hovhaness had been introduced by Hyman Bloom (Fig. 4.10, 4.11).

Figure 4.10, Komitas, *Six Dances*, No. 1, opening

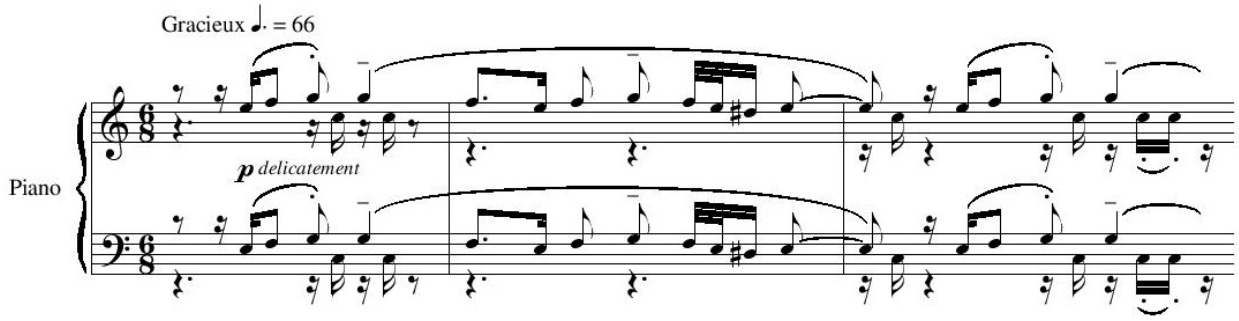
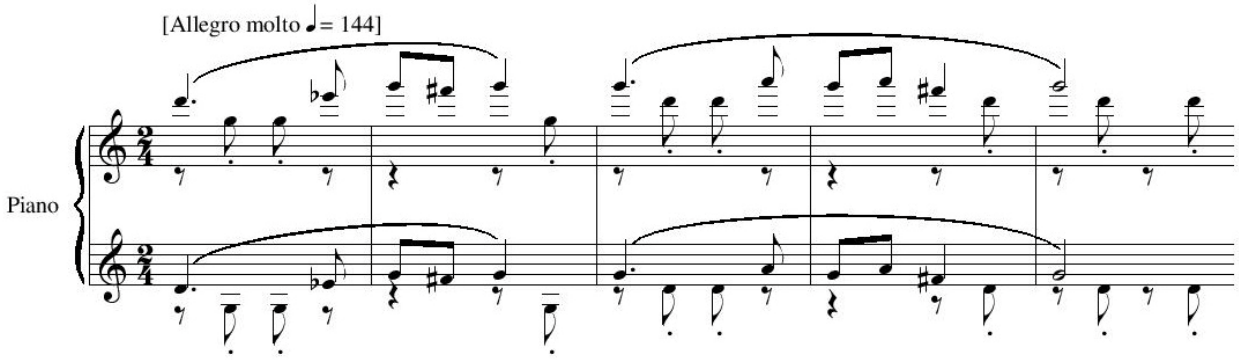
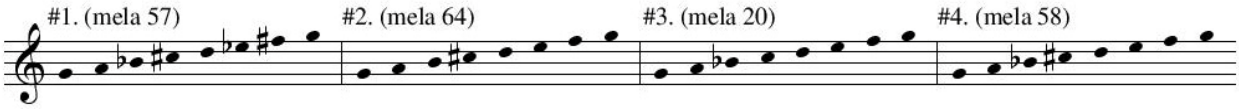


Figure 4.11, *Lousnag Kisher* (1943)



Lousnag Kisher was published with its four "interchangeable" modes listed at the top of the first page of the score (Fig. 4.12, the *Melakarta* raga designations are my own addition). As Hovhaness rarely placed such information on subsequent published scores, its inclusion here was likely an indication of the novelty of the approach to modality that he was developing at the outset of the Armenian period.

Figure 4.12, *Lousnag Kisher* (1943), modes



For writers on Hovhaness's music, parsing the modal language of his mature compositions has been one of the most problematic aspects of analyzing his work. This difficulty is understandable, given that Hovhaness employed a tremendous variety of modes with great subtlety and changeability. Because of the lack of a preexisting theoretical framework for describing them in more specific terms, most writers (Wayne Johnson, for example) have usually resorted to such generalities as "Eastern-inflected," "augmented second-dominated," or "freely invented" to describe the modes Hovhaness employs. Rosner tried to discuss non-diatonic modes with respect to their "characteristic" intervals. The raised second and lowered fourth degrees with their origins in the Armenian church modes (both of which create an augmented second in the resulting scale) do seem to be particularly characteristic of the music of the Armenian period. However, such observations lack specificity, and also reflect the same quick judgement of Western ears unconditioned to modal variety that Bernstein is supposed to have displayed with his "ghetto music" retort to Hovhaness's first symphony.

In lieu of this, I will use the Carnatic *Melakarta* raga system, encompassing 72 different ragas, to classify Hovhaness's modes wherever it is practical, allowing for all possible transpositions (as I have done above with the modes employed in *Lousnag Kisher*). This is not only because Hovhaness himself studied this system, or because his most important influence from Indian music was its making him aware of the great possibilities of modal variety, but also because it is the most comprehensive system for classifying modes that is widely in use anywhere, encompassing many of the modes also found in the music of other cultures (including all of the scales commonly employed in Western classical music). Indian modal practice is by no means limited to these 72 ragas, and it is constantly being enriched by the efforts of individual musicians. Hovhaness said that he recorded hundreds of different ragas during his studies in

India.[146] His sketchbooks, in addition to containing a record of the 72 *Melakarta* ragas, also contain a sequential series of 460 different seven-note scales, only two short of the 462 possible seven-note scales bounded by an octave (which, of course, also include the *Melakarta* ragas).

In addition to the sheer variety of modes with which Hovhaness composed, the freedom and changeability with which they were employed further complicates the issue from an analytical standpoint. In fact, the flexibility with which Hovhaness employed various scales is a testament to the extent to which he absorbed the modal practice of various non-Western traditions, and distinguishes him from earlier "Orientalist dabblers." Of the concept of raga, Hovhaness explained that "it is not a scale, and it is not quite a melody either – it's the raw material out of which a melody can be made."[147] There is, for example, plenty of precedent in Indian practice for making use of pentatonic or hexatonic subsets of the "parent" ragas (the resulting smaller ragas are known as *janya* ragas), a technique Hovhaness often employed, and which can actually be found in his music as early as the first symphony. In addition, some ragas in Indian music have different ascending and descending versions (as with melodic minor), while others (mixed, or *mishra* ragas) combine two different versions of a single scale degree. John Cage assumed both of these techniques were Hovhaness's own inventions in his otherwise accurate, if characteristically dry account of modality in Hovhaness's Armenian period music:

> Freely invented ragas are used which may change in the upper octaves and which may ascend in one way and descend in another. For purposes of expressivity, he allows a change of one or more tones (generally only one) after the raga has been established. Further-more, he allows a change of raga altogether, with or without a return to the

[146] Kostelanetz, Richard, *On Innovative Musicians*, 99.
Hovhaness, "Giant Melody in Nature and Art."
[147] Ibid.

> original one, if the expression so demands. He also combines different ragas by letting them appear simultaneously between voices.[148]

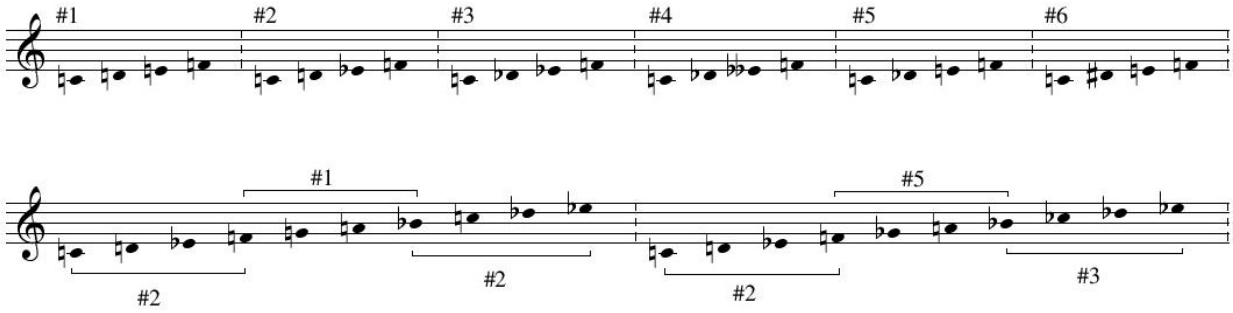
Apart from switching modes altogether, Hovhaness's methods for introducing some degree of chromatic variety into his modal music can be summarized as follows:

1. "*Mishra* ragas": one scale degree exists in two different forms which are presented in alternation but never in direct succession (for example, Dorian mode alternating with natural minor).
2. Modes have different ascending and descending versions.
3. Polymodality: different modes appear simultaneously, confined to different voices.
4. Non-octave modes: modes expand past the compass of an octave (for example, a two-octave mode equivalent to Dorian in its lower octave, and natural minor in its upper octave).

An alternative analytical framework through which some modes of this fourth type can be classified is the system of interlocking tetrachords devised by Komitas. Komitas posited that Armenian folk and liturgical music does not adhere to modes bounded by an octave. Rather, it is based on various interlocking combinations of six different tetrachords (Fig. 4.13). These six tetrachords in fact exhaust all the different possibilities for four-note cells bounded by a perfect fourth.

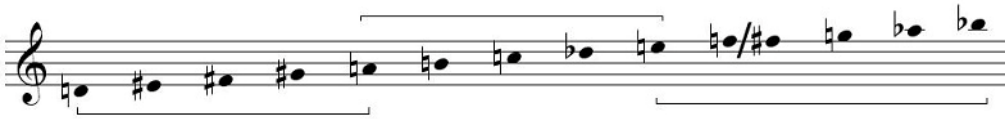
[148] Cage, John. "The East in the West." *Asian Music* 1, no. 1 (1968 - 1969): 16.

Figure 4.13, Komitas's six tetrachords, and two given examples of scales derived from them[149]



I have found this system (with a few notable exceptions) to be of limited usefulness in analyzing Hovhaness's modes. However, one notable aspect of the example scales given by Komitas does resemble many of Hovhaness's own non-octave modes: "flattened" versions of the scale degrees which exist in multiple forms are found in the upper part of the mode, "pulling it downwards," and vice versa. The opposite is rarely the case. This same tendency can be observed in a peculiar flute melody from Hovhaness's *Symphony No. 6*, whose non-octave mode is best parsed into interlocking pentachords (Fig. 4.14).

Figure 4.14, *Symphony No. 6* (1959), flute melody, interlocking pentachords



As the preceding examples from Komitas demonstrate, Armenian music also provided Hovhaness with ample precedent for a modal language not easily reducible to clearly defined scales bounded within the compass of an octave. The eight Armenian church modes are, like some Indian ragas, not easily explained away as "scales" as the concept is understood in the West. In addition, the introduction of *khazes* belonging to other modes can also result in

[149] Komitas, *Armenian Sacred and Folk Music*, 143, 147.

"modulations" of a sort.[150] When reduced to their scalar basis, several of the church modes seem to be the approximate equivalent of natural minor. They are distinguished by differing tunings, melodic tendencies, reciting tones, etc.[151] Two of the church modes, however, *do* differ significantly from the Western "white-key" diatonic scales, and their scalar approximations were both favorites of Hovhaness, even after the Armenian period was over.[152] The first Armenian church mode *ayp tza*, mentioned earlier in this chapter as being a rough equivalent of the 33rd *Melakarta* raga, can be approximated as: [C, D#, E, F, G, Ab, B, C]. The sixth church mode, *keem ganz*, has no *Melakarta* equivalent, but can be conceived of as a natural minor scale with a lowered fourth degree: [C, D, Eb, Fb, G, Ab, Bb, C].

The first major work to come out of Hovhaness's post-Tanglewood stylistic reevaluation was *Lousadzak*, a concerto for piano and strings. *Lousadzak* was premiered in Jordan Hall at the New England Conservatory on February 4, 1945, on a concert which also included *Elibris* and the *Armenian Rhapsody No. 2*. The concerto received more attention on the occasion of its New York premiere in Town Hall on June 17, 1945, with Maro Ajemian as the soloist (another one of the Friends of Armenian Music concerts).[153] The title of the work is a composite Armenian word of Hovhaness's own invention meaning "coming of light," and it accordingly represented for the composer the dawning of a new artistic period.[154] Hovhaness later remembered that di Giovanno had prophesied he would be "given" a new piano concerto as a reward for his struggle to find spiritual truth and a new artistic direction, but that the work was nonetheless "very difficult" in

[150] Atayan, *The Armenian Neume System of Notation: Study and Analysis*.
[151] McCollum, "Analysis of Notation in Music Historiography: Armenian Neumatic Khaz from the Ninth through Early Twentieth Centuries."
[152] Ibid.
[153] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[154] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.

composition.[155] This is unsurprising, not because *Lousadzak* is particularly complex, but because more than any other Hovhaness composition, it constituted a stylistic leap forward on multiple fronts.

Hovhaness compared the form of *Lousadzak* to an "ascending spiral."[156] Cast in a single movement, the work begins with a self-contained introductory section in A, after which a piano cadenza makes a deft modulation to a modally ambiguous F#. After a tutti passage confirming this new key center, each consecutive section of the concerto "spirals" back around the circle of fifths, finally returning to the work's initial key of A at the outset of the final section (Fig. 4.15). The similarity between this structure and the tonal plan of many of Hovhaness's fugues is perhaps surprising, considering that the work is largely monophonic.

Figure 4.15, *Lousadzak* (1944) tonal layout/form

Section:	Intro.	cadenza	♩= 108	cadenza	delicato	♪. = 120	delicato	♪. = 120	♩= 100	cadenza	♩= 132
Tonality:	A	A→F#	F#	F#→B	B	B	B→E	E	E	A	A→ [D,G]

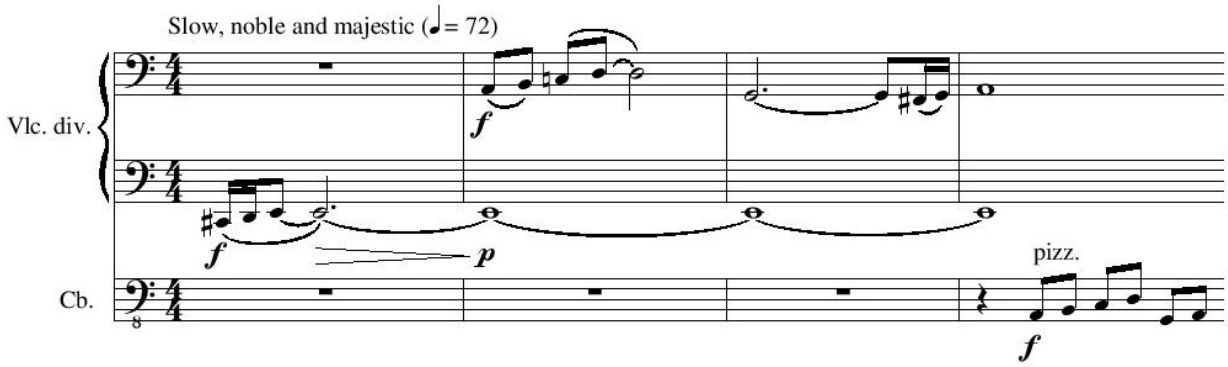
Interspersed between the concerto's tutti sections are piano cadenzas that are for the most part unmetered, evoking the improvisatory *taqsim* common to various styles of Middle Eastern music (or perhaps the Indian *alap*). The alternation between measured and unmeasured music is a formal device which often recurs in Hovhaness's compositions beginning with the music of this period.

---

[155] Ibid.
[156] Ajemian, Maro, Anahid Ajemian, Carlos Surinach, and MGM Studio Orchestra. *Alan Hovhaness, Lousadzak*. MGM Records, 1958.

The concerto's opening section is essentially monophonic: a broad, stately cello melody is accompanied by a drone, and shadowed by a loose outline of the cello melody an octave below in the double basses' pizzicato (Fig. 4.16). This passage is written in a *mishra* raga of sorts, alternating between Mixolydian and Dorian, and thereby exhibiting the "coloring play of major and minor thirds which is characteristic of [Armenian] folk songs," a device also encountered in other parts of the concerto.[157]

Figure 4.16, *Lousadzak* (1944), opening

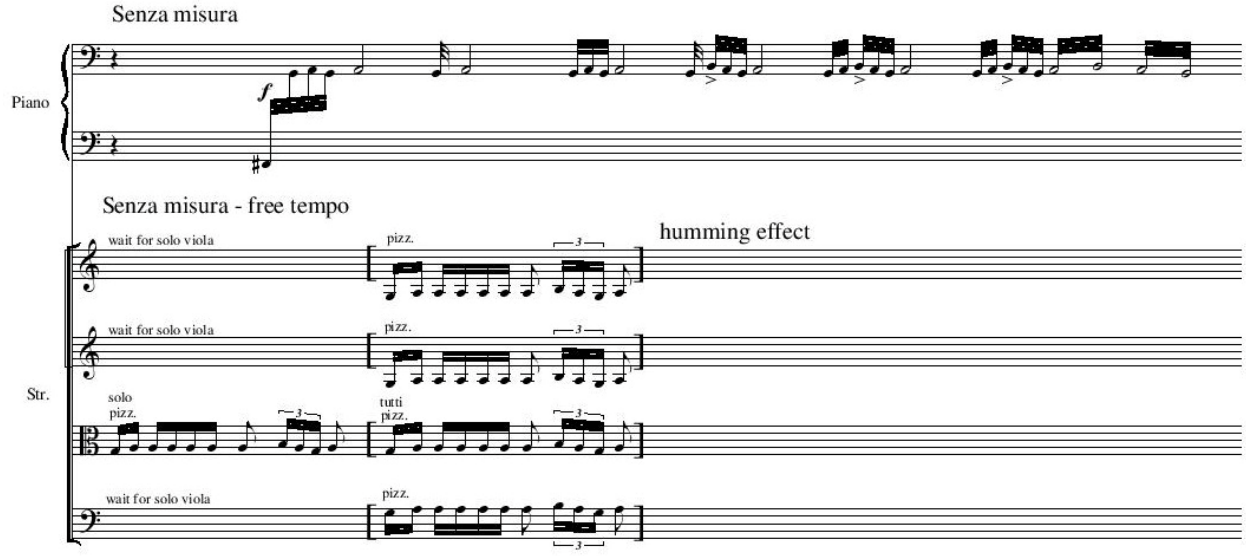


Following this introduction is the first instance of Hovhaness's employment of a kind of limited aleatoric technique, although he certainly did not use that word for it at the time. Rather, seeing as this technique had been inspired by one of di Giovanno's visionary experiences, he named it "spirit murmur." In *Lousadzak*, passages composed using this new technique serve a background role, creating a "carpet of sounds" over which more important melodic material then unfolds.[158] Almost symbolically, spirit murmur's first appearance begins tentatively, with a single viola playing a nondescript pizzicato fragment, testing the waters. Afterward, the rest of the string section (minus double basses) follows suit with the same fragment (Fig. 4.17). The players, however, are instructed to play in "free tempo," creating a "humming effect" through the

[157] Atayan, *The Armenian Neume System of Notation: Study and Analysis*, 235.
[158] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.

unsynchronized repetition of the same short melodic fragment. In an early program note for *Lousadzak*, Hovhaness compellingly described this and similar passages as "[suggesting] the potential sounds out of which melodies are born."[159] A brief examination of the composition of the viola's initial melodic fragment makes the intended effect of its unsynchronized repetition clear. It consists mainly of sixteenth notes, with only two eighth notes and a triplet creating rhythmic variety. At whatever tempo the player chooses, this assures the avoidance of any kind of well-defined rhythmic profile that might intrude on the texture. In addition, the pitch content of the melodic fragment is limited to one B, two G's, and eight A's. Therefore, the cumulative effect of the pizzicato "spirit murmur" is essentially a gently murmuring tonic drone with hints of the neighboring scale degrees. It is also worth noting the clear melodic resemblance between the pizzicato figure and the opening of the piano cadenza that it accompanies (movement from $\hat{7}$ to $\hat{1}$ or from $\hat{6}$, to $\hat{7}$, to $\hat{1}$ is in fact another recurring Armenian period melodic signature).

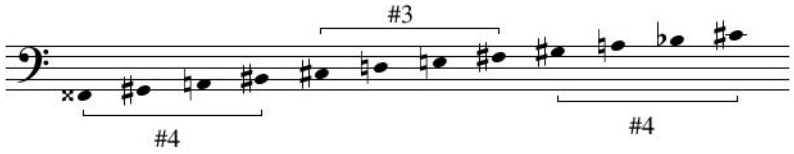
Figure 4.17, *Lousadzak* (1944), the first "spirit murmur"



[159] Hovhaness, "Concert of Original Compositions."

The cadenza which unfolds over the following pages affects the structurally important modulation from A to F#. It does this through the use of a complex non-octave mode which allows for a temporary tonal ambiguity between the two surrounding strong modal centers (Fig.4.18). This non-octave mode can be analyzed as an assemblage of tetrachords, although they are juxtaposed rather than interlocking as in Komitas's formulation.

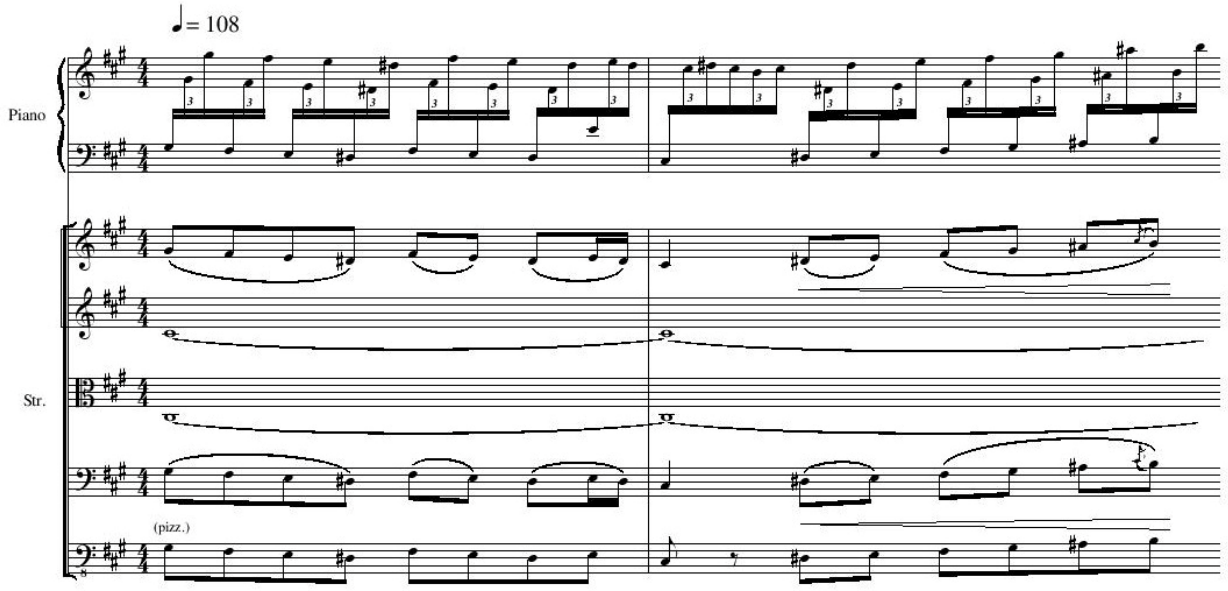
Figure 4.18, *Lousadzak* (1944), tetrachordal construction of a non-octave mode



Lousadzak was also the first major work in which Hovhaness made extensive use of heterophony, as is in evidence throughout the following tutti section. In the excerpt reproduced in Fig. 4.19 the main melodic line is doubled in octaves in the first violins and cellos, while the double basses play a slightly simplified version pizzicato. The piano, on the other hand, simultaneously plays a rapid, highly ornamented version of this same melody. Thus, in addition to a C# drone, this passage is made up of what the Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-chung succinctly described as an "admixture of a number of melodic, rhythmic, registral and timbral variants of a single linear movement."[160]

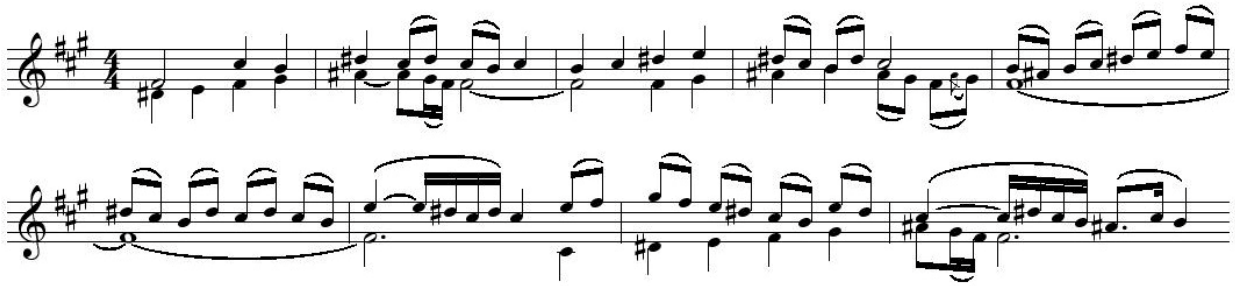
[160] Chou, Wen-chung. "Asian Concepts and Twentieth-Century Western Composers." *The Musical Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (April 1971): 212.

Figure 4.19, *Lousadzak* (1944), heterophony



As this section develops, Hovhaness begins to introduce some two-part counterpoint (Fig. 4.20). The style of each individual voice (one of which continues to be doubled heterophonically in the piano) closely matches that of the preceding melody, and open intervals and sustained tones predominate (once again demonstrating what Hovhaness learned from Komitas). As such, the effect is a refreshing respite from the overwhelmingly monophonic texture of the work, but does not feel out of place.

Figure 4.20, *Lousadzak* (1944), two-part counterpoint



The final section of *Lousadzak* features the first appearance in Hovhaness's output of *jhala*, a textural device which over the next several decades became a stock element of his musical language (Fig. 4.21). *Jhala*, Sanskrit for "waves of water," is named for the *jal tarang*, a percussion instrument consisting of a set of bowls tuned through the addition of various quantities of water.[161] On this instrument, melodies are often played in rapid alteration with a single drone note (Fig. 4.22). In Indian music, this drone-plus-melody technique is not limited to the *jal tarang*, but is also employed by the players of various string instruments, notably the sitar.[162] Although Hovhaness composed *jhalas* in many different musical contexts, he found the texture especially suitable for the piano, where it is often doubled two octaves apart for added brilliance as is the case here.

Figure 4.21, *Lousadzak* (1944), *jhala* texture

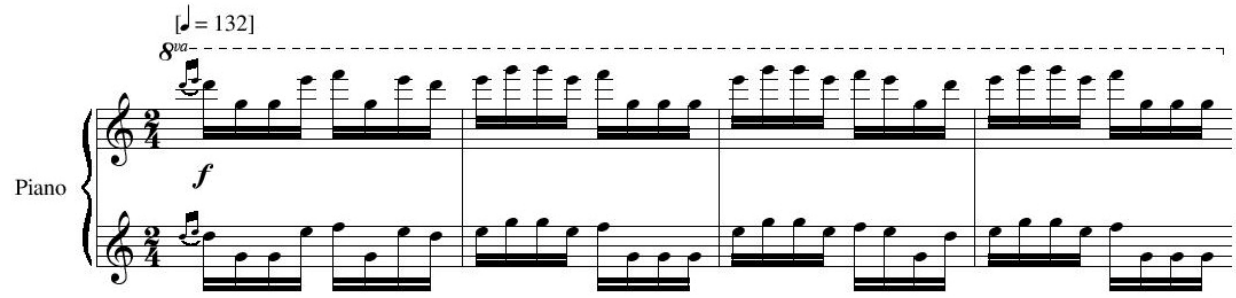
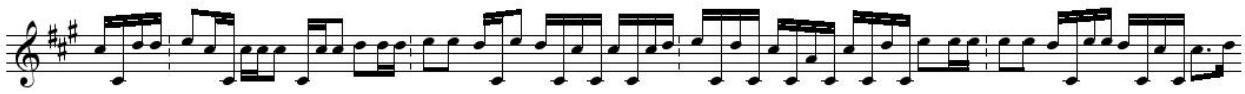


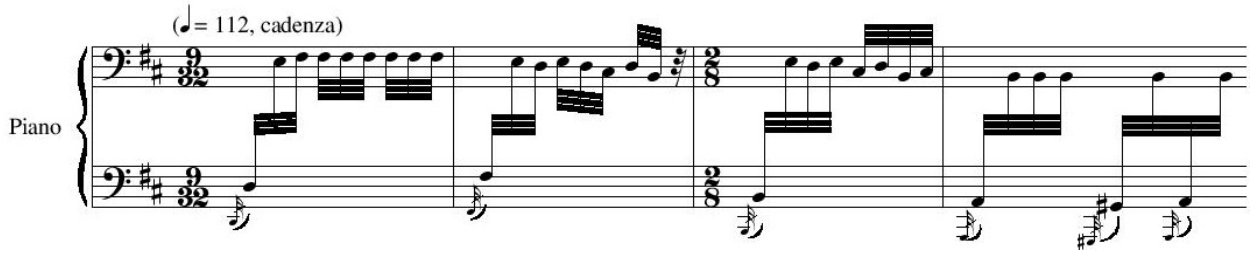
Figure 4.22, *Raga Buhpal Todi* (1998), excerpt demonstrating characteristic figuration on the *jal tarang* (transcription by the author)[163]



[161] *Hovhaness Speaks on "Khaldis."*
[162] Clayton, Martin. *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
[163] Roy, Dulal, and Sandip Bhattacharya. *Jaltarang & Santur*. Papyros, 1998.

Another important aspect of the piano writing in *Lousadzak* is the prominence of textures modeled on the playing styles of various Middle Eastern plucked string instruments. Most of the solo piano works from the Armenian period are written exclusively in such textures, and they occasionally recur in works from later periods as well. Hovhaness described the influence of the *oud*, *tar*, and *kanun* on this piano style, and the imitation of non-Western instruments was clearly the path by which he sought to develop a distinctive voice for his own instrument. The translation of the playing styles of these instruments onto the piano essentially boils down to the same set of characteristics: the use of repeating tones (as with the mandolin or marimba) and ornate passagework (as in the keyboard music of the Renaissance) to simulate the effect of sostenuto on an instrument that cannot really produce it (Fig.4.23). Quick repeated notes and ornamentation also serve to provide musical interest in a monophonic context. The use of repeated notes to simulate sostenuto is most reminiscent of the music of the *kanun* (an instrument similar to a hammer dulcimer but played with the fingers), while the broken octave figuration found in the excerpt below is especially characteristic of the *oud*.

Figure 4.23, *Lousadzak* (1944), the piano imitating Middle Eastern plucked string instruments



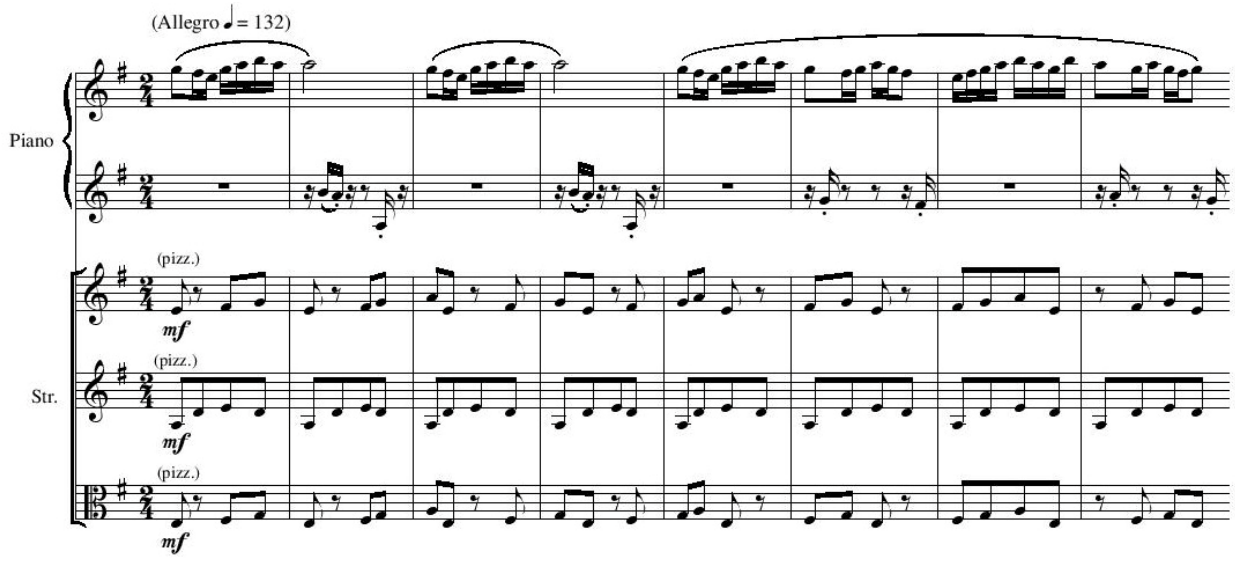
Perhaps the most significant innovation originating in *Lousadzak* was Hovhaness's use of "complex textures." Brian Israel coined the term specifically to describe this crucial aspect of Hovhaness's music, one of its least remarked-upon features, but also one of the most important:

> In the so called "new music" of the present-day avant-garde, we can distinguish between a "closed" and an "open" texture. The "closed" texture is one in which all the component parts are related to each other and are all subordinate to the whole. The parts or strands are not autonomous, and have been written with an obvious concern for the resultant verticalities. The "open" texture, be the notation system determinate or otherwise, implies the autonomy of the individual strands. But between these two extremes lies a possible situation in which there is a hierarchy of the polyphonic strands involved … even though some voices are "automatically" conceived … This type of texture we will refer to as "complex" … In most forms of complex texture there is a tendency towards a stratification between the "open" and "closed" portions of the texture, the latter being perceived as primary material (being more distinctive), the former tending toward merging together as a single set of subordinate and static materials.[164]

Such textures are not to be found in Hovhaness's earlier music. The piano cadenza accompanied by a bed of "spirit murmur" *senza misura* pizzicato described above is one type of complex texture. Another can be found in the last section of the work, where pizzicato "strands" in the violins and violas underpin the main melodic line in the solo piano, but are deliberately contrapuntally uncoordinated with it (Fig. 4.24). In a largely monophonic work, this was one way of adding quasi-contrapuntal interest without creating too much harmonic clutter.

[164] Israel, Brian. "Form, Texture, and Process in the Symphonies for Wind Ensembles by Alan Hovhaness." Cornell University, 1975, 110.

Figure 4.24, *Lousadzak* (1944), complex texture



These pizzicato string lines actually consist of two ostinati, one of four eighth notes in the second violins, and the other of nine eighth notes (and so not aligned with the bar lines) doubled in octaves in the first violins and violas. Because these ostinati unfold without regard for the piano's developing melodic line, they certainly qualify as "automatically" composed, and also appear to "[merge] together as a single set of subordinate and static materials." Although in this case the resulting pandiatonicism is rather subtle (particularly compared with the complex textures in Hovhaness's music of the next decade which concerned Brian Israel), the employment of this type of texture gradually became one of the defining features of Hovhaness's musical language.

The orchestration of complex textures is crucial to their effect. Arnold Rosner wrote that in Hovhaness's orchestral music, "usually there is a clear identity to any orchestral part; it is either melodic, coloristic, or part of a static accompaniment. The players can easily determine

when they are meant to sound prominent, and when not."[165] In other words, "open" and "closed" portions of the musical texture are almost always marked off by a clear timbral distinction. Most importantly, the orchestration of the "open" elements of the texture is almost always calculated to *lessen* their dissonant impact. The string parts in the preceding excerpt, for example, would have cluttered the piano's leading melodic line had they been scored arco instead of pizzicato.

In attendance at the New York premiere of *Lousadzak* were John Cage and Lou Harrison. Given their contemporaneous exploration of non-Western musical styles, they took an immediate interest in Hovhaness's work. Harrison later recalled of his experience attending the concert that, "the cello came up with this absolutely lovely melody, and I turned to John and said, 'It's going to go oompah any minute.' But it didn't. It was ravishing."[166] Harrison also recounted that the intermission of the concert saw somewhat of a brouhaha, the result of neither the twelve-tone nor neoclassical "camps" knowing quite what to make of the music. Following the performance, Harrison went home to write a review that Hovhaness later remembered was one of the first positive reactions to his music in the press. Harrison wrote that, "there is almost nothing occurring most of the time but unison melodies and very lengthy drone basses, which is all very Armenian. It is also very modern indeed in its elegant simplicity and adamant modal integrity, being in effect, as tight and strong in its way as a twelve-tone work of the Austrian type. There is no harmony either, and the brilliance and excitement of parts of the piano concerto were due entirely to the vigor of idea. It really takes a sound musicality to invent a succession of stimulating ideas within the bounds of an unaltered mode and without shifting the home-tone."[167]

---

[165] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 178.
[166] Randall, "A Composer Who Took as Many Knocks as Bows."
[167] Harrison, Lou. "Alan Hovhaness Offers Original Compositions." *New York Herald Tribune*, June 18, 1945.

It should be obvious to the reader after making it through the preceding analysis that not much of what Harrison wrote holds up to scrutiny. He was wrong about the mode and the home-tone not changing, and also not strictly correct about the complete absence of harmony. Harrison heard the work through his idealized perception of what he thought non-Western music should be, and reacted accordingly. The comparison with twelve-tone music is of little bearing other than as a symptom of its time, while the "Armenianness" of the musical material was merely asserted. Nevertheless, Harrison was responding meaningfully to the concerto's essentially monophonic nature and the vastly diminished role of harmony in the work, as well as to the genuine freedom of its melodic content from the shackles of harmonic implication. It was this that lent the music its freshness (although these characteristics could hardly be called "modern indeed" except in the context of Western classical music).

The New York premiere of *Lousadzak* also marked the beginning of Hovhaness's relationship with John Cage, fascinating for what it reveals about the two composers' converging and diverging artistic values. Aside from their shared interest in the "authentic" expressions of Eastern culture, there was a kinship of sorts between their experiments in rhythm in the 1940s. Maro Ajemian (who first met Cage at the same Town Hall concert) was a staunch supporter of both Cage and Hovhaness.[168] A 1947 LP featured her performances of music by both composers, including Hovhaness's *Invocations to Vahaken* with the composer himself playing percussion, an album in praise of which Woody Guthrie wrote a fan letter to the record company.[169]

However, as Cage evolved artistically, the two men drifted apart. Hovhaness later criticized him, saying "in a way, composers got a little far from the reality of life. They got too intellectual. We were rebelling against all emotion for a while. Like the John Cage ticket. He was

[168] Amirkhanian, "Interview with Maro Ajemian."
[169] Guthrie, Woody. "Letter to the Disc Company of America, Re: Cage and Hovhaness Record," July 10, 1947.

a very good composer when he was young. But then he went and saw Boulez …"[170] In private correspondence, his criticism of Cage could be even more biting. Cage's public pronouncements on Hovhaness were more circumspect. He once described Hovhaness as "a music tree who, as an orange or lemon tree produces fruit, produces music," a simultaneous recognition of Hovhaness's creative spontaneity and a criticism of what he saw as an uncritical approach to musical creation.[171] Nevertheless, the two men did have a personal reconciliation in old age, near the end of Cage's life. After his death, the elderly Hovhaness wrote a short piano piece in memoriam, utterly incongruous with the music of its dedicatee in its artless lyrical simplicity.

Over the coming years, Hovhaness's "Armenian style" gradually diversified, primarily in its rhythmic component. The Indian concept of *tala*, mentioned briefly earlier in the chapter, became an important element in the rhythmic organization of his music. *Talas*, or repeating rhythmic patterns, are somewhat akin in their function to meter in Western music, but are employed with much greater consistency and have the potential to organize larger spans of musical time. *Tala* also exhibit a considerably greater variety than the conventional meters found in Western classical music.

Hovhaness made the concept of *tala* very much his own, employing *talas* of his own devising in all kinds of different musical contexts.[172] In Hovhaness's music, the concept essentially translates into long, complex meters. However, they do not remain unchanged throughout an entire composition as would be the case in Indian music. For example, a short piano work from 1946, *Farewell to the Mountains*, employs in its final section only a [4+3+3+2+4+3+2+2/4+3+3+2+4+2+6] *tala* which Hovhaness dedicated to his favorite cat

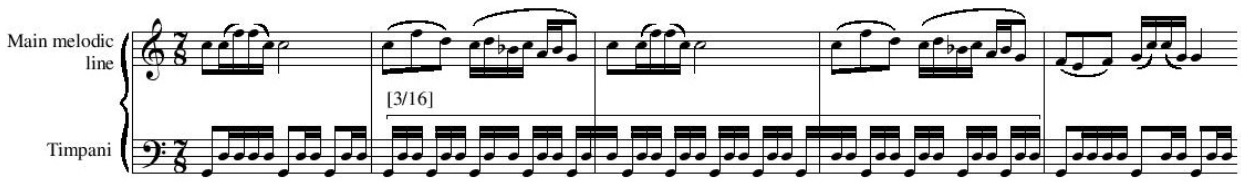
[170] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.
[171] Kostelanetz, Richard, *On Innovative Musicians*, 103.
[172] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."

Rajah . Another work from around the same time, *Mihr* for two pianos (premiered at the same Town Hall concert by Maro Ajemian together with the composer playing second piano) opens in a [2+2+2+3+3+3+3] *tala*. Aside from its usefulness in organizing large rhythmic spans, Hovhaness was also inspired by the way in which *tala* provided a framework off which Indian musicians could play. He later described this in the liner notes he wrote for one of Ravi Shankar's earliest recordings released in the West: "the main melody is introduced by the Sitar, while the Tabla, or drums, sound the Tala or rhythmic scheme. Against this rhythm, the Sitar improvises imaginative melodic patterns or introduces complex counter-rhythms. These rhythms, which go against the Tala or main rhythm, must resolve on the 'one' or the first beat of the Tala, called the Sum."[173]

These "counter-rhythms" resolving onto the first beat of the *tala* were almost certainly Hovhaness's model for a lengthy passage in the 1945 work for small orchestra *Anahid*, in which the timpani continually breaks away from the rest of the orchestra, continuing on in its own new rhythmic pattern until the beginning of that pattern coincides with the downbeat of the main 7/8 meter. At such moments the timpani is then temporarily realigned with the rest of the ensemble (Fig. 4.25). This device is also somewhat reminiscent of the *tihai* performed by Indian percussionists which consist of a threefold repetition of an independent rhythmic pattern placed so that its conclusion will fall precisely on the first beat of the next *tala* cycle (the *sum*). Hovhaness, however, always begins these "breakaway" rhythmic strains from the downbeat, allowing them to repeat as many times as is required to realign with the main pulse, rather than calculating their starting points so that this realignment will occur after exactly three repetitions.

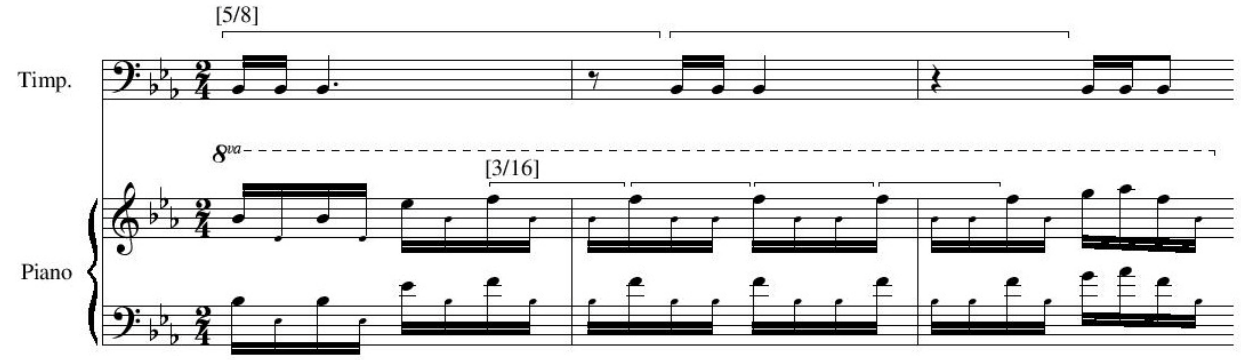
[173] Shankar, Ravi, Chatur Lal, and N. C. Mullick. *The Sounds of India*. Columbia, 1958.

Figure 4.25, *Anahid* (1945) counter-rhythms against the main *tala*



On the only available recording of *Anahid*, the effect of this passage is not particularly successful. Hovhaness remembered that this section also caused significant difficulties during first rehearsals of the piece.[174] This is partly because the timpani lack the agility of the *tabla*, which would normally perform such figures in Hindustani music. More importantly, Hovhaness's attempt to simulate this element of Indian practice is fully notated and quite difficult to execute, thus lacking the spontaneity of Hovhaness's Indian model. A more effective realization of this same technique can be found in *Khaldis*, a slightly later work scored for piano, percussion, and four trumpets (Fig.4.26). In this passage, which Hovhaness referred to as a "war of rhythm," the main melodic line contains local counter-rhythms of its own which must also be resolved. These rhythmic complexities are a good deal more successful than those in the previous passage, largely because the simpler base meter makes them easier to realize.

Figure 4.26, *Khaldis* (1951) counter-rhythms



[174] "Discussion of 'Saturn' with Alan Hovhaness." WQXR, November 5, 1971.

In 1946 Henry Cowell arranged for the publication of *Mihr* in the *New Music Quarterly*, which he had himself founded. During the same year, Hovhaness attempted to move to New York to further his career, but was forced to return to Boston for financial reasons. The Friends of Armenian Music arranged another Hovhaness concert on March 10, this time in Symphony Hall in Boston. The Ajemian sisters again served as soloists, and the program included *Tzaikerk*, *Avak the Healer* (inspired by the exploits of the Armenian faith healer Avak Hagopian), and *Anahid*. In May and June, Hovhaness was put up by an Armenian family while he composed the opera *Etchmiadzin* on a commission from the Armenian Church.[175] He finished the work in a matter of weeks. *Etchmiadzin* had its premiere (and only performance) on October 20, at the Manhattan Center "before an audience of some 2,000 persons in celebration of the month of Armenian culture."[176]

The opera, named for the oldest church in Armenia, is loosely based on Catholicos Komitas's "Hymn to Hrip'sime, [depicting] the moving legend taken from the History of the Armenians by Agathangelos, which tells us of the selfless valor of Hrip'sime and her maiden companions when Christianity first spread over Armenia."[177] As with the Jewish people, Armenia's history of oppression by outsiders is so long that persecution itself has become an ingrained part of the identity of the Armenian people, one that was often expressed in their works of art long before the horrors of the twentieth century could ever be imagined.[178]

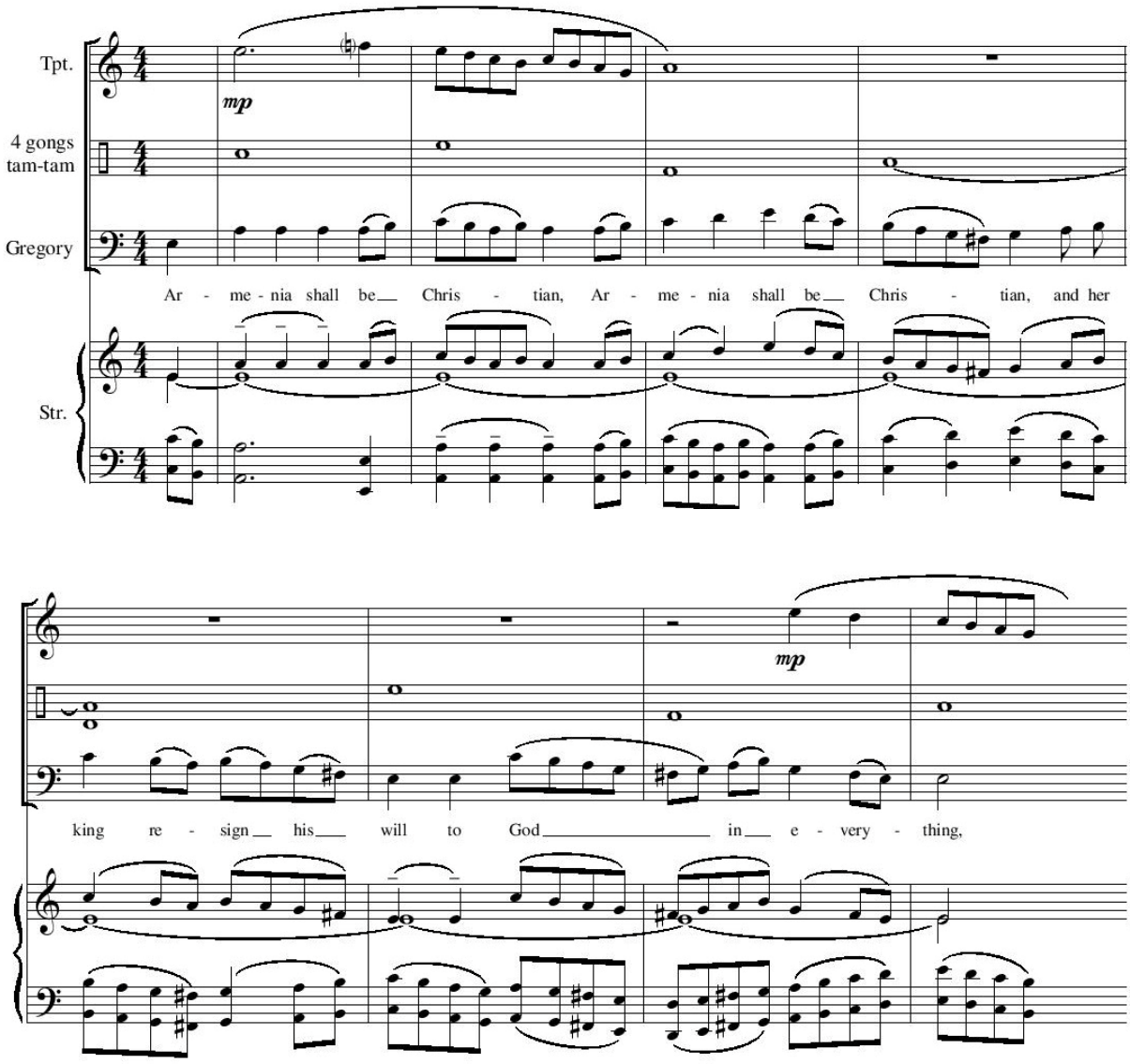
The libretto of *Etchmiadzin* was clearly written to be set as a "number opera," and Hovhaness for the most part obliged. However, certain adjacent numbers share identical musical

---

[175] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[176] "Armenian Play to Be Given." *The New York Times*, October 18, 1946.
[177] Atayan, *The Armenian Neume System of Notation: Study and Analysis*, 234.
[178] Alajaji, Sylvia, "Diasporic Communities and Negotiated Identities: Alan Hovhaness's Recovery of the Armenian Folk Music Idiom," 6.

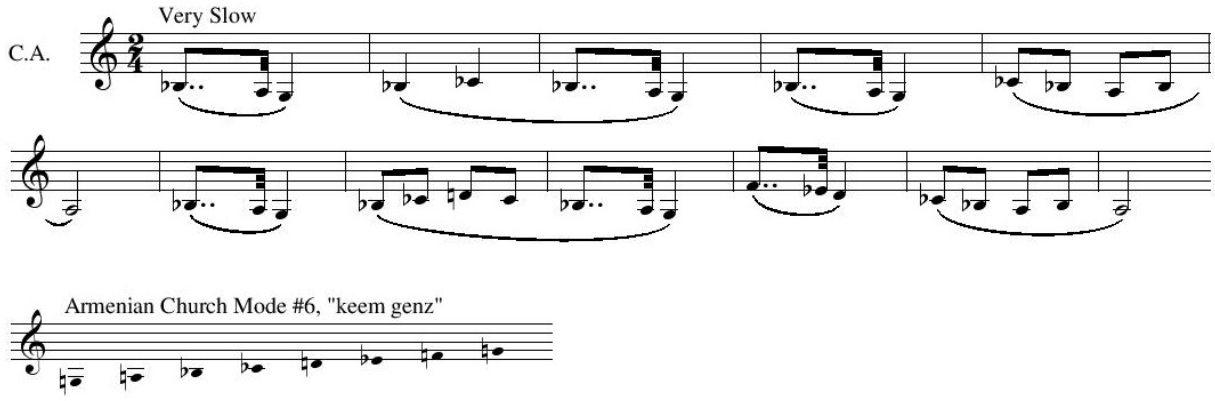
material and are connected without break, in effect combined into larger movements. As is typical of the music of the Armenian period, much of the opera is either monophonic, canonic, or poly-modal "open-textured" polyphony facilitated by clear timbral stratification. Especially frequent are two-part canons at the octave accompanied by a drone (Fig. 4.27).

Figure 4.27, *Etchmiadzin* (1946) "Armenia shall be Christian"



The opera's religious theme is reinforced by a profusion of references to Armenian sacred music, including its modes (Fig. 4.28) and the characteristic melodic turns discussed earlier in the chapter.

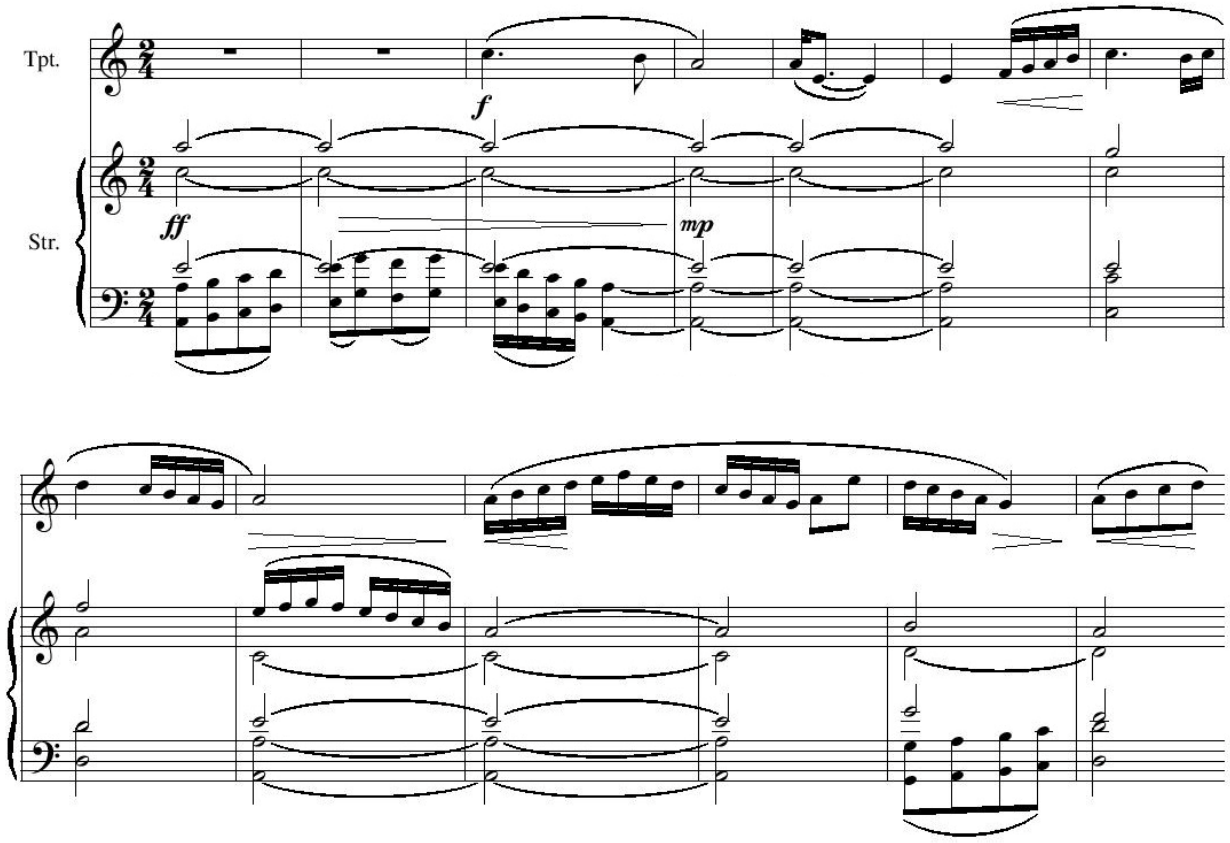
Figure 4.28, *Etchmiadzin* (1946) Prelude to Scene 5



Interestingly, in this most overtly Armenian of all of Hovhaness's works, the composer reverts to a modal harmonic style that closely resembles that of his early period at moments in the opera requiring the expression of spiritual ecstasy. Although it became less common, such unabashedly harmonic music continued to coexist with Hovhaness's new monophonic modal style (notably in *Avak the Healer*), and reemerged in full force in the 1950s. One example of this kind of music to be found in *Etchmiadzin* is Hrip'sime's rapt "There can be no earthly love," actually a recomposed version of another one of Hovhaness's childhood works (material that was reused again in the next decade in *Meditation on Orpheus*). The effect of the aria is powerful given the complete absence of harmony in the opera up to that point. Another example of the employment of richer harmony than is found in most of the opera to evoke prayerful intensity can be found in the relatively famous *Prayer of Saint Gregory*, a depiction of the saint's serenity in the face of religious persecution. As a stand-alone work it has become part of the standard repertoire of music for solo trumpet (Fig. 4.29). Beginning around this time, Hovhaness often

used the trumpet to evoke "the voice of a priest" or the "voice of God" in his orchestral music, although not necessarily as a response to this kind of overt programmatic requirement. It is this approach to orchestration to which Hovhaness likely referred when he spoke of going "back to the origin of an instrument … even in mythology and ancient times."[179]

Figure 4.29, *Etchmiadzin* (1946), "Prayer of Saint Gregory"



In 1947, Hovhaness joined the faculty of the Boston Conservatory, where he taught until 1951.[180] This was the only time during his career when he held anything resembling a long-term academic post, although his teaching was anything but conventional. Hovhaness's one-time student the jazz musician Sam Rivers remembered that he emphasized "world music" in

[179] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.
[180] "Alan Hovhaness." Broadcast Music, Inc., n.d. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

particular.[181] On February 7, 1947, the Friends of Armenian Music gave yet another all-Hovhaness concert, this time in Carnegie Hall, featuring members of the New York Philharmonic with the Ajemian sisters once again appearing as soloists. On the program were the *Prayer of Saint Gregory* (from *Etchmiadzin*), *Tzaikerk*, *Lousadzak*, *Anahid*, and the *Vahakn Symphony* (later revised and retitled *Symphony No. 10*).[182] Virgil Thomson published a glowing review in the *New York Herald Tribune* the next day.[183] In October, the Ajemians gave another concert of Hovhaness's music, this time back in Boston at Jordan Hall. Included on this program was *Ardos* (later retitled *Symphony No. 8*). Another concert of Armenian period works followed in March of next year at Town Hall in New York and included the premiere of one of Hovhaness's few choral works of the period, the *30th Ode of Solomon*.

The last of the Friends of Armenian Music concerts was given in March of 1951, roughly coinciding with the end of Hovhaness's Armenian period. It was held once again in Carnegie Hall, and Hovhaness himself conducted. Edgard Varèse was reported to have attended and praised the effectiveness of Hovhaness's instrumentation.[184] In addition, the entire program was recorded by the U.S. State Department for broadcast to the Middle East.[185] The first half of the concert consisted of the premiere of *Janabar*, a concerto grosso of sorts for solo violin, piano, trumpet, and strings, written particularly for the Ajemian sisters in memory of their parents, who had been killed in an airplane crash. The second half of the concert consisted of the premiere of the *Saint Vartan Symphony* (later catalogued as *Symphony No. 9*).

---

[181] Rivers, Sam. Interview by David Badagnani, March 9, 2005. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.
[182] Hovhaness, Alan. "Concert of Orchestral Compositions," February 7, 1947. George Avakian and Anahid Ajemian Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.
[183] Daniel, "Alan Hovhaness."
[184] *Hovhaness Speaks on "Khaldis*."
[185] Ibid.

Considering its Armenian subject matter and ambitious scope, the *Saint Vartan Symphony* might appear to be the "crowning achievement" of Hovhaness's Armenian period. However, it is in many ways a transitional work. In a newspaper write-up of the premiere, Hovhaness was quoted as saying, "'St. Vartan' and 'Janabar' represent a union of two forces in my style – the East and the West … before, they were like two separate streams, I couldn't unite them."[186] In the *St. Vartan Symphony* in particular, Hovhaness was able to achieve some degree of synthesis between the homophonic style that he had begun to develop in 1943 and the modal, contrapuntal, and harmonic style of his early period. This same project of synthesis came to characterize the next phase of his output.

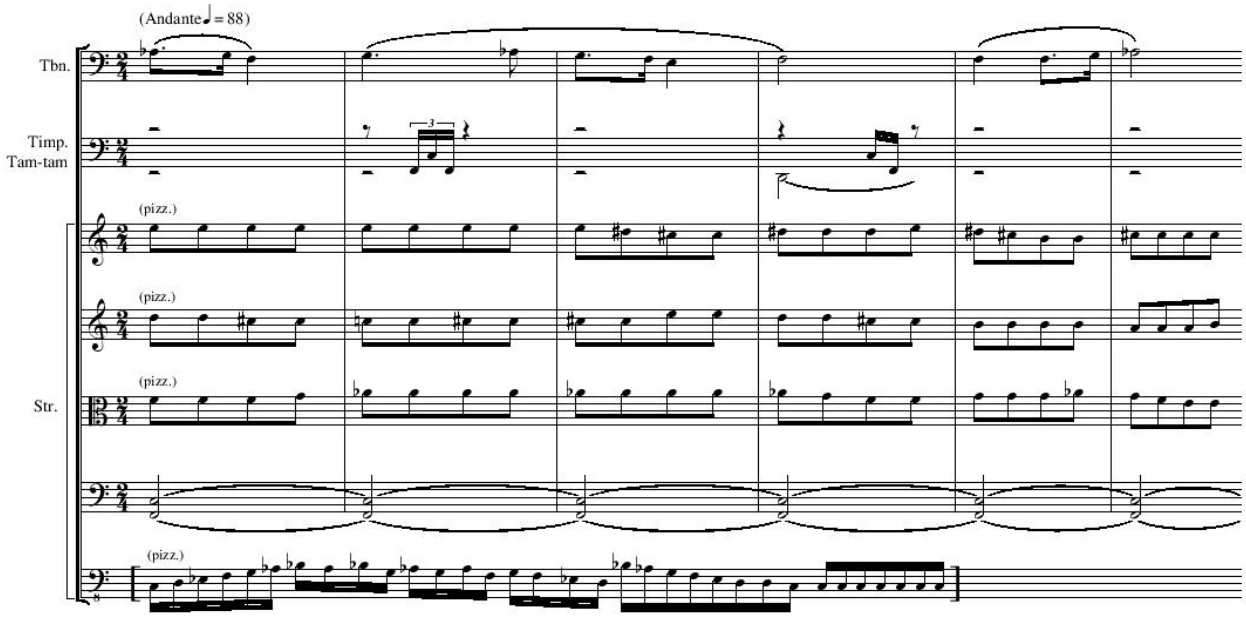
Unlike Hovhaness's earlier symphonies (including those that were withdrawn) the form of the *Saint Vartan Symphony* bears no resemblance whatsoever to that of a traditional work in the genre. Instead, it is composed of twenty-four short movements divided into two large "parts," utilizing various instrumental combinations (never tutti). The symphony's short movements make use of a set of recurring "genre types" which Hovhaness devised especially for the work, making reference to Armenian music (*yerk, tapor*), Baroque music, (aria), and most unusually, medieval music (bar, estampie). Although the *Saint Vartan Symphony* is named for the Armenian saint who was martyred at the hands of the Persians while fighting to secure Armenia's status as a Christian nation, and contains a "Lament, Death of Vartan" near the end of its first part, the arrangement of these various genre types does not suggest much in the way of dramatic structure or implied narrative. Indeed, the movements of the symphony seem to have been arranged with an almost ritualistic indifference (for example, following the opening movement are three arias for solo brass in a row). In addition, other than the fact that both of the symphony's two parts

[186] "Armenia to America." *Newsweek*, March 19, 1951.

begin in F and end in G, and that the effect is generally cohesive, there is no discernable logic to the tonal organization of the work's twenty-four movements. Large-scale tonal contrasts (with a few exceptions) ceased to be an important organizing principle in Hovhaness's music around this time, and were replaced with contrasts in other domains.

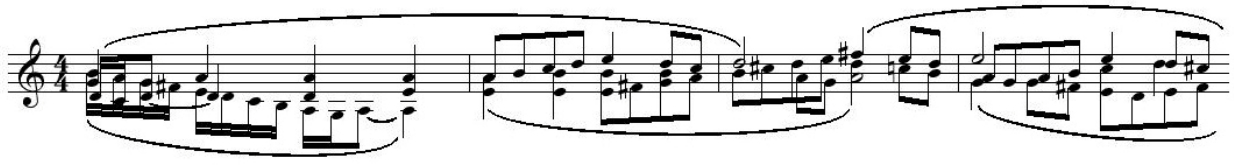
Perhaps the most striking aspect of this symphony is its composer's fixation on canons. Already quite common in Hovhaness's music up to this point, canons play a truly outsize role in this work: thirteen of its twenty-four movements are in large part canonic. Hovhaness employs canonic procedures of great variety, particularly in regard to what extent their harmonic result is regulated ("closed" versus "open" canons). While most of the symphony's canonic material occupies the musical foreground, other canons serve as a subsidiary element in a "complex" texture. This is the case in the opening movement, where the main melody in the trombone is accompanied by a three-part polytonal canon in the violins and violas pizzicato (Fig. 4.30). The canon's lengthy subject is in fact a simplified variant of the trombone's melody. The three canonic voices enter at eight-bar intervals, and are arranged in ascending major thirds [A, C#, F], dividing the octave evenly into three parts.

Figure 4.30, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 1.*Yerk*



The second movement, *tapor*, consists in large part of another canon, this time scored for three trumpets and serving as foreground melodic material, accompanied only by a background of unpitched percussion. This canon at the unison (really a round) has a lengthy melodic subject which hardly makes it through a single iteration during the course of the movement. While the resulting counterpoint is somewhat liberal in regards to its treatment of dissonance compared with the contrapuntal style of Hovhaness's fugues, the harmonic outcome of this melody's canonic treatment is nonetheless carefully worked out (Fig. 4.31).

Figure 4.31, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 2.*Tapor*, harmonic result



At the other end of the spectrum is the eleventh movement, a "bar" featuring a five-part canon in the strings. Its six measure subject is repeated relentlessly, creating a hypnotic effect that the English critic Antony Hopkins described as sounding "as if Gypsy fiddlers had taken a crash-course in Bach counterpoint."[187] The five voices enter at intervals of nine beats, and are arranged in fifths (Fig. 4.32). While the theme's diatonicism and limited ambitus, along with the arrangement of the different voices by fifths, assure that no particularly harsh dissonances occur between adjacent parts, a glance at the harmonic result shows that Hovhaness let the canon "play itself out" without regard for the resulting verticalities (Fig. 4.33).

Figure 4.32, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 11. Bar, arrangement of the five voices in fifths

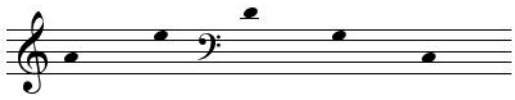
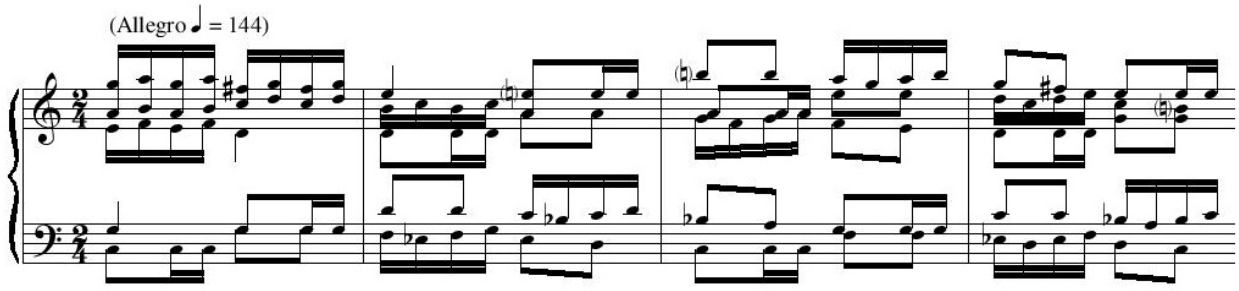


Figure 4.33, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 11. Bar, harmonic result



The canon in movement twenty-two occupies a kind of middle ground in regards to dissonance treatment. Its twelve-bar subject is confined to D Aeolian, and only the notes D, F, A, and C land on strong beats (Fig. 4.34). Because of this, the close canon at the unison in four

[187] Hopkins.

voices entering only one beat apart results in what is essentially a static blur of D minor and F major, not strictly regulated harmonically, but essentially consonant in effect (Fig. 4.35). The internal melodic repetition within the canonic subject also contributes to the sense of stasis.

Figure 4.34, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 22.Bar, theme

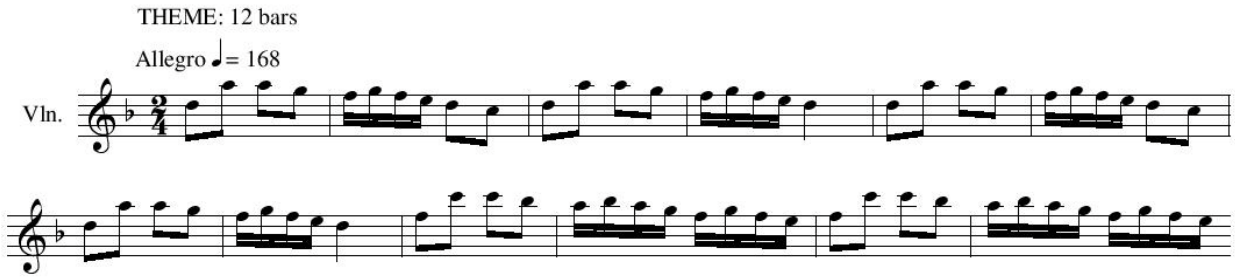
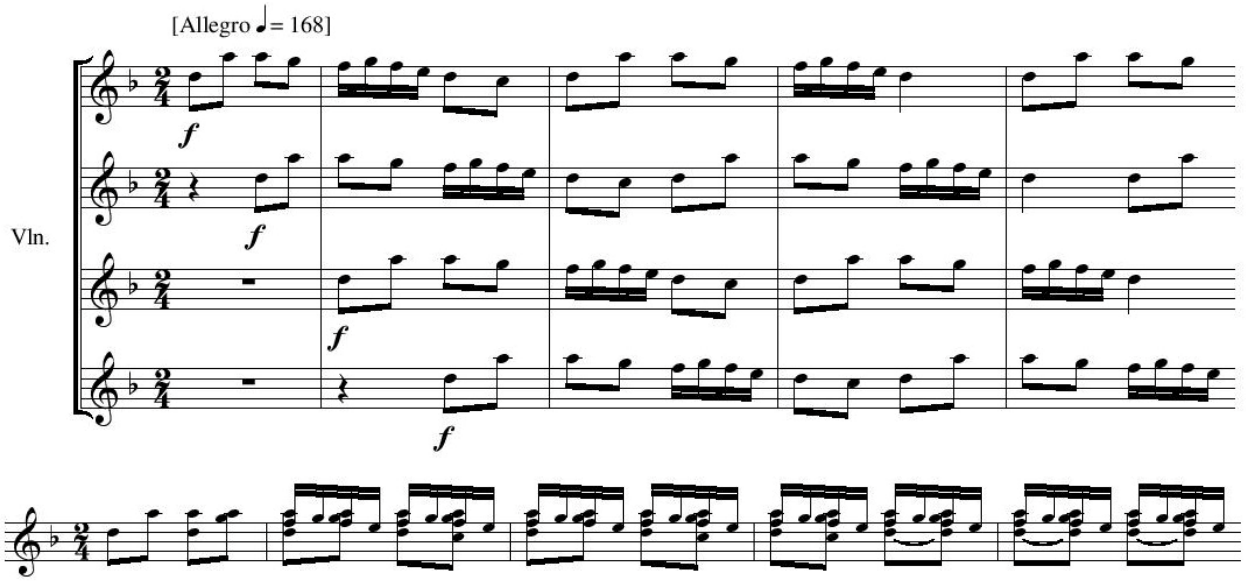


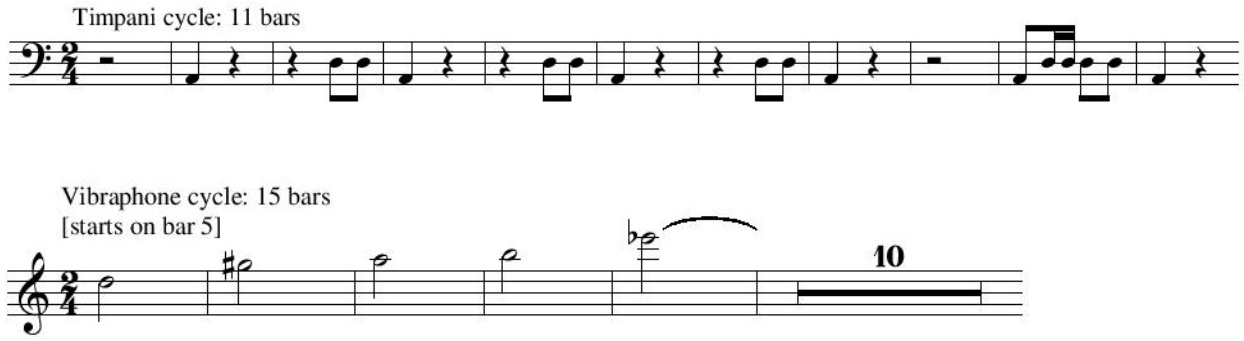
Figure 4.35, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 22.Bar, four-part canon and harmonic result



Unfolding behind this canon are two "cyclical" elements scored for timpani and vibraphone, which together constitute the subsidiary "automatic" elements of the movement's complex texture (Fig. 4.36). Similar figures accompany most of the canonic movements found throughout the symphony. The timpani repeats an eleven-bar phrase, while the vibraphone repeats an unrelated fifteen-bar phrase (ten bars of which are filled with rests). Because their

durations consist of odd numbers of measures (elsewhere, prime numbers in particular are preferred), the cyclical elements in the background continuously shift in the way that they align with the foreground canonic material, which is felt as keeping the main pulse. In one regard, this technique might be thought of as an extension of the counter-rhythms found in works from earlier in the Armenian period such as *Anahid*, although without the imperative to resolve back into the main pulse. However, the effect of a passive background which colors the foreground material without impinging upon it is quite different. As with the complex texture described in *Lousadzak*, clear timbral differentiation is crucial. Odd-numbered rhythmic cycles of this kind became one of the most important elements in Hovhaness's musical language as it continued to develop into the 1950s. In such cases where such cycles are scored for metallic percussion or celesta (as with the vibraphone figure here) Hovhaness frequently described the effect as "star-like."

Figure 4.36, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 22.Bar, cyclic background figures

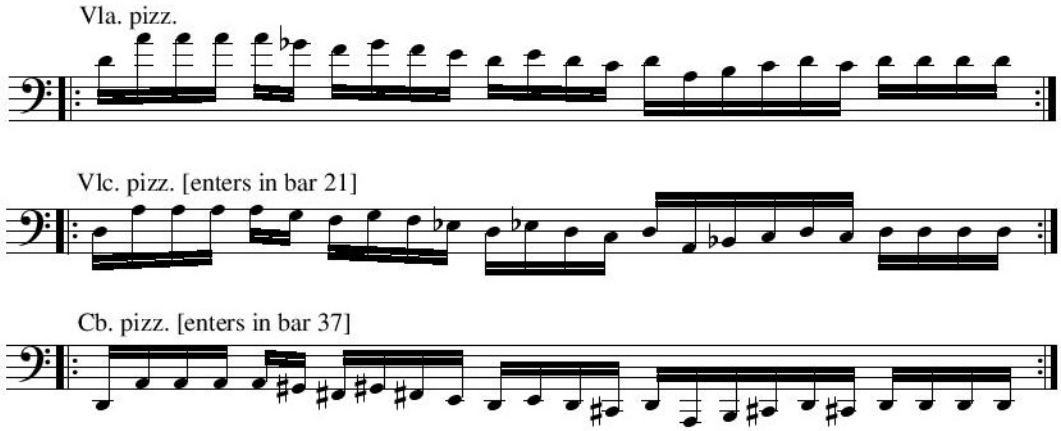


The final elements of this movement's complex texture are three layers of pizzicato "spirit murmur" which enter one by one, beginning with the violas in the first bar. The cellos and the double basses later take up the same figure, *senza misura*, in lower octaves and with adjusted modal content, resulting in an indistinct polymodality (the violas' figure is in the sixth Armenian church mode, the cellos' in Phrygian, and the double basses' in Lydian) (Fig. 4.37). There is a

surprising melodic resemblance between the first half of these "spirit murmur" pizzicato figures and the subject of the canon that constitutes the movement's primary melodic material. Perhaps Hovhaness conceived of these pizzicato murmurs as a kind of infinite extension or cosmic echo of the canon unfolding in the foreground. This connection is, of course, inaudible in the sounding result. The effect is rather one of a dissonant, murmuring drone. Together with the canon in the foreground and the cyclic figures in the timpani and vibraphone, they form a kind of three-part complex texture which became standard in the music of Hovhaness's next period. The composition of this texture can be generalized as follows:

1. Main melodic line
2. Sostenuto accompaniment (drone, chordal harmonic support, or murmuring *senza misura* figure)
3. Cyclical background figures

Figure 4.37, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 22.Bar, "spirit murmur" background



The *Saint Vartan Symphony* also contains an early example of a harmonic technique that Hovhaness was to employ frequently over the next decade. Rosner christened the harmonies

resulting from the application of this technique "constructed chords."[188] He described them as follows:

A. A basic consonant chord or interval is selected. It may be any consonant sound.

B. Additional notes are considered admissible to the final sonority only if each is a half-step either above or below one note of the basic chord.

C. The notes of the basic chord are sounded together with any of the admissible notes. No other notes may occur.[189]

One example cited by Rosner of an early appearance of this technique are the harmonies of the fourteenth movement of the *Saint Vartan Symphony*, the "Lament, Death of Vartan." The aptness of Rosner's description of the process by which the harmony in this movement was derived is attested to by a comparsion with the early song on which it was in fact based (Fig. 4.38, 4.39). In my analysis of the "constructed chord" harmony found in the passage (Fig. 4.40) the "basic" harmony notes (which also formed the basis of the harmony in the original song) are indicated with empty noteheads, followed by the added notes which "dissonate" them, indicated with filled in noteheads. Rosner's assertion that some of Hovhaness's modes were derived by this same process is perhaps questionable, although many of the modes the composer uses can certainly be constructed along these lines. Rosner's contention that these harmonies "represent, in a metaphysical way, a quasi-Buddhist coexistence of extreme opposites" is simlarly a stretch, symptomatic of his tendency to look for connections with a kind of idealized Eastern mysticism in every aspect of Hovhaness's musical language.[190]

---

[188] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 71.
[189] Ibid, 71.
[190] Ibid., 78

Figure 4.38, *Lament* (1936)

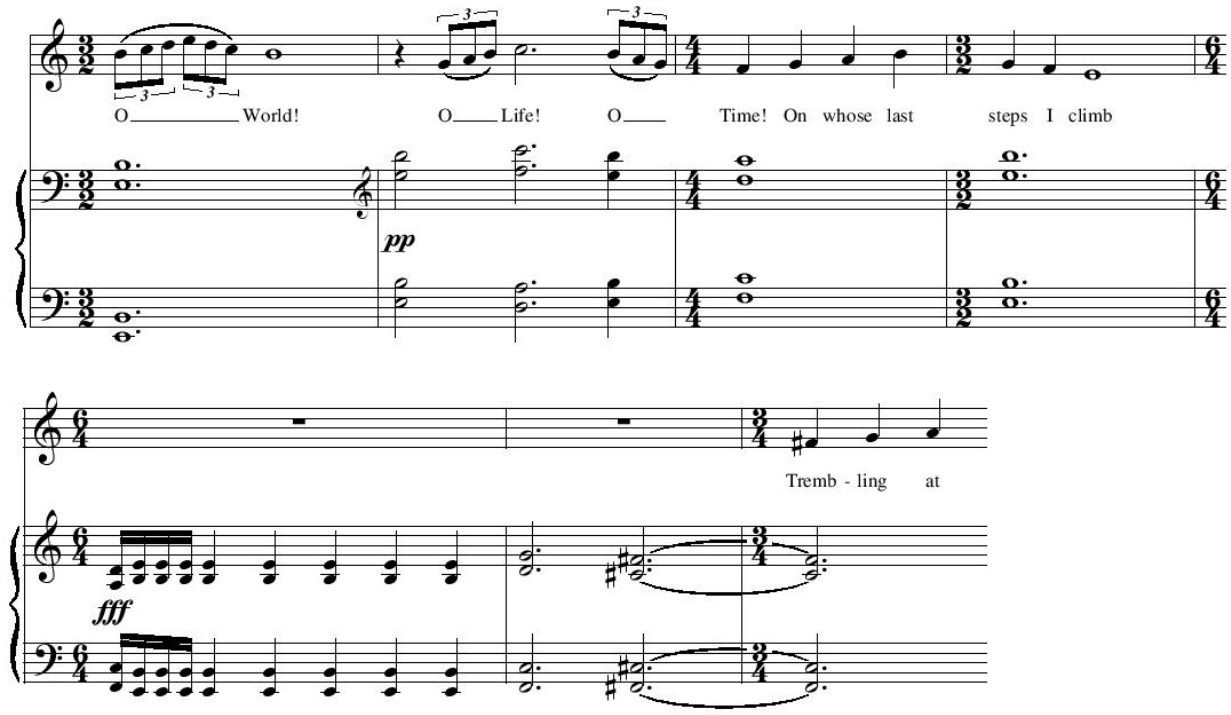


Figure 4.39, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 14. Lament, "Death of Vartan"

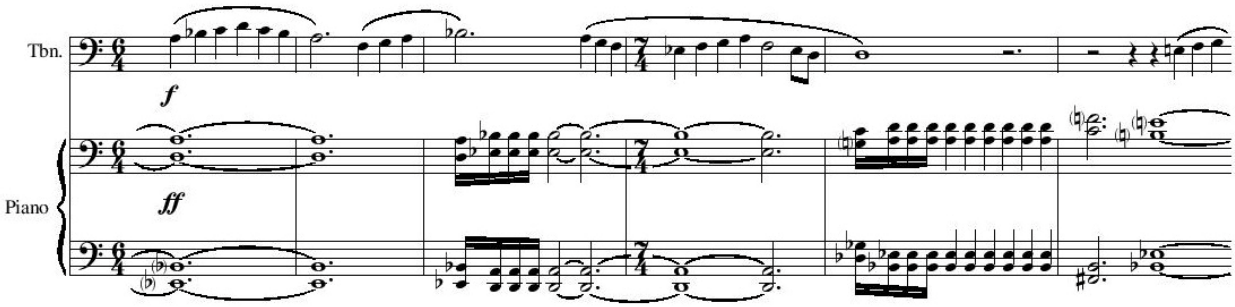
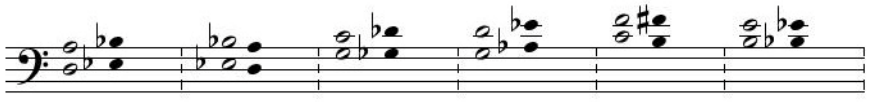


Figure 4.40, *Symphony No. 9 'St. Vartan'* (1950), 14. Lament, "Death of Vartan," "constructed chords" analysis



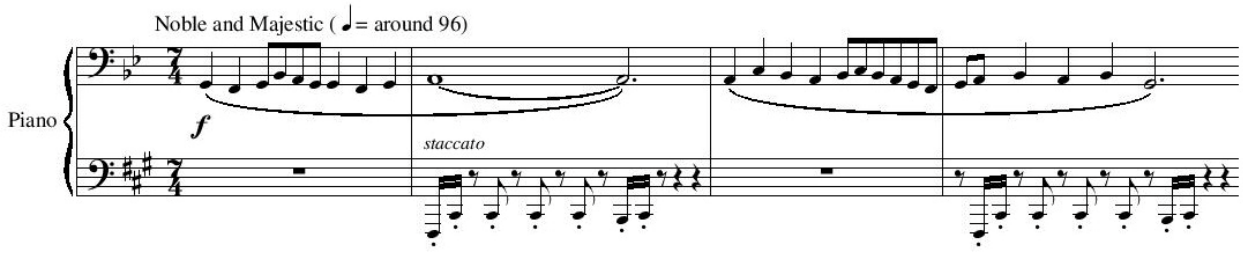
Clangorous piano chords such as those found in the preceding example are part of the rugged, heroic style which Hovhaness imagined to be "Byzantine," although this seems to have more to do with the evocation of fantastical ancient splendor rather than any connection with the actual music of the Eastern Roman Empire.[191] Following Hovhaness's lead, Rosner too describes the characteristic scoring for brass and piano found in this movement as "Byzantine."[192] It was likely such orchestration that impressed Varèse at the premiere, given that it allows for the conjuring of powerful sonorities using only modest orchestral forces. An important contributor to this "Byzantine" effect is the employment of a "consort" of four trumpets that plays a leading role in the final estampie movements of both halves of the *Saint Vartan Symphony.* In both cases, the four trumpets play a relentlessly hypnotic, circular canon, simultaneously both static and brimming with rhythmic energy.

The "consort" of four trumpets is an even more important element in *Khaldis*, a "concerto" for four trumpets, piano, and percussion from 1951 that is a kind of sister-work to the *Saint Vartan Symphony*, and one of Hovhaness's most striking scores. This work contains many melodic canons at the unison scored for trumpets resembling that found in the second movement of the *Saint Vartan Symphony*. The work opens, however, with a long passage for piano alone employing a sort of polymodality which can be found in several piano works from the later part of the Armenian period (Fig. 4.41). The right hand plays an unharmonized melody in G Aeolian (later an "Armenian" lowered fourth degree is introduced), while the left hand plays a cyclically repeating 18½-beat pattern centered on F#, essentially functioning as a rhythmically activated dissonant drone. Hovhaness described his thinking behind the use of such dissonances as follows: "In the application of ancient principles to modern instruments such as the tempered piano, the

[191] *Hovhaness Speaks on "Khaldis."*
[192] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 24.

instrument is handled monophonically (one note at a time), or in dissonant organum or with dissonant drone – dissonance used to effect an approach to the notes between notes – clashing vibration aiding the ear to imagine or pick up true intonations or ragas and thereby creating coexistent sounds."[193] In other words, Hovhaness's employment of such dissonances was part of an intuitive approach to trying to overcome the limits of the equally-tempered piano, rather than an acoustic/scientific calculation. More will be said about Hovhaness's approach to microtonality in the next chapter.

Figure 4.41, *Khaldis*, opening piano solo, polytonality used for the simulation of microtones



For the critic Olin Downes, Hovhaness's Armenian period works were a testimony to the "potency of racial inheritance in art."[194] Such problematic essentialist claims aside, Hovhaness's musical evolution during this period cannot be explained as the inevitable product of his cultural environment, especially considering that his early contact with Armenian culture was supposedly somewhat limited. Paralleling his position vis-à-vis the modernist mainstream, Hovhaness deliberately embraced the "otherness" that his paternal heritage offered him, rejecting assimilation into the "bland" American Protestantism of his mother's side (or what he saw as the similarly "bland" world of musical Americana). Hovhaness's physical isolation from the fount of Armenian culture merely increased its symbolic potency for him, tinging it with the diasporic

[193]Cited in: Ingraham, James Leslie. "An Analytic Investigation of Four Works by Alan Hovhaness with Emphasis on His Mysterious Mountain (Symphony No. 2)." The Ohio State University, 1973, 60.
[194] Daniel, "Alan Hovhaness."

bittersweetness of an exile's memories of lost homeland. Because of this, Hovhaness's status as a first generation Armenian-American may have ultimately played an even greater role in distinguishing him from his Soviet-Armenian contemporaries than did the greater artistic freedom afforded him by the American environment. The critic Bernard Holland made a perceptive comparison with Ernest Bloch's creation of an imaginary "Israeli" style, writing that "Mr. Hovhaness seems to have used liturgical roots to create his imaginary Armenia, a music that may exist only in one American's imagination."[195] Another critic similarly contended that, "the composer himself, if he ever visits the land of his forefathers, will discover a reality very different from his vision. All this matters very little. Because in his American dreams, in the ever present consciousness of his Eastern ancestry, Hovhaness has created an Armenia that is more Armenian than Armenia ever was, or shall be."[196]

Hovhaness did in fact end up visiting Armenia, only once, during the 1960s. Soviet officialdom did not appreciate that Hovhaness (never fluent in Armenian himself) openly acknowledged his mixed ancestry.[197] It seems as though Hovhaness's sense of his Armenian identity was mainly bound up in culture and art rather than in nationalism. He once took a commission to write a score for a documentary about Atatürk (the music survives), angering some members of the Armenian-American community.[198]

Works with explicit Armenian themes became much less common after the 1940s, but did continue to crop up from time to time, especially in the early 1970s. Much later, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenia's independence, and the ensuing war with Azerbaijan, the

---

[195] Holland, Bernard. "Classical Music in Review." *The New York Times*, October 8, 1991.
[196] Stephan, "The Three Magi of Contemporary Music: The Second Magician."
[197] Hovhaness, interview, March 1984.
Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 10.
[198] Sobol, Lawrence. Interview by Berkofsky, Martin, June 20, 2007. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.

elderly Hovhaness took a commission from the Armenian Apostolic Church for one of his last symphonies (the 65th). The work bears the subtitle "Artsakh," the Armenian name for Nagorno-Karabakh, the region whose disputed status (unresolved to this day) had led to war with the Azeris.[199] The work was originally meant to include a part for narrator related to this subject matter, but Hovhaness instead opted for a purely instrumental work. In recent years, post-Soviet Armenia has perhaps begun to claim Hovhaness as one of their own. A Hovhaness research center has been established in the capital city of Yerevan, and several of his larger works have been performed there, indicating that there has been at least some interest in making him into a significant artistic figure for the young nation.

[199] Kohanov, Linda. "The Muse on the Mountain." *Outreach*, September 1991, 4.

CHAPTER 5 – Establishment Recognition (1951-1959)

The music of Hovhaness's "middle period," roughly coinciding with the decade of the 1950s, has been frequently described as "more Western" than that of the two surrounding style periods. It certainly marked a return to strict counterpoint and triadic harmony, already in evidence in some parts of the *Saint Vartan Symphony*. Hovhaness's remarks from 1955 on the extent of the "Oriental" influence in his music are a good barometer of his attitude around this time: "While I have long been interested in the Orient and will continue to be, it is a mistake to think that my music is a product of the Orient or that my primary concern is with Oriental idioms. Much of my music is based on classical forms..."[200] Several years after making this pronouncement, Hovhaness took a series of trips to study non-Western music in situ, rekindling his interest in finding ways of incorporating the techniques of such music into his own compositions. This process will be described in detail in the next chapter. During this period, however, while many of the "Eastern" (Indian and Armenian) musical elements of Hovhaness's Armenian period style are still present, they appear in a less concentrated form.

In 1951, Hovhaness received an award from the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and began to work at the Voice of America as "director of music, composer, and musical consultant for the Near East and Trans-Caucasian section."[201] Several short pieces making use of pre-existing folksong material (rare in Hovhaness's published output) were the result of this radio work, including *Toccata and Fugue on a Kabardin Tune*, *Fantasy on an Ossetin Tune*, and *Allegro on a Pakistan Lute Tune*.[202] By this point, Hovhaness had finally left Boston for New

---

[200] Kelly, John Jerome, "The Musical Style of Alan Hovhaness," 6.
[201] "Alan Hovhaness." Broadcast Music, Inc., n.d. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive. Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[202] Johnson, "A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness," 34.

York, where he was living full time. In October 1952, Hovhaness appeared on the cover of the newsletter of the "American Composer's Alliance" (the president of which was Henry Cowell), which included an enthusiastic article on his music by BMI president Oliver Daniel, as well as a partial list of works.[203] It was also in 1952 that Leopold Stokowski resumed conducting Hovhaness's works, performing the *30th Ode of Solomon* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.[204] Over the next few years Stokowski's advocacy proved to be a major boon to Hovhaness's career. It seems that the conductor had a particular fondness for composers whose work had been influenced by contact with various Eastern musics.

In March and April of 1953, Hovhaness wrote his *Easter Cantata* on a commission from CBS. He completed the work in less than a week, in time for its premiere television broadcast on Easter Sunday. That same year, the forty-two-year-old composer finally succeeded in obtaining a Guggenheim Grant.[205] He also traveled to Greece, apparently his first trip abroad since visiting Sibelius in Finland.[206] There is, however, little musical trace of this visit. It could have been inspired by Hovhaness's relationship with Hermon di Giovanno, as he spent time on his home island of Lesbos.[207]

The 1950s marked a resurgence in the composition of works for large orchestras, the result both of Hovhaness's growing prestige and his developing musical style. (Works for chamber orchestra had dominated during the Armenian period.) One of the most impressive scores from the early part of the middle period is the *Concerto No. 7* for orchestra of 1953.

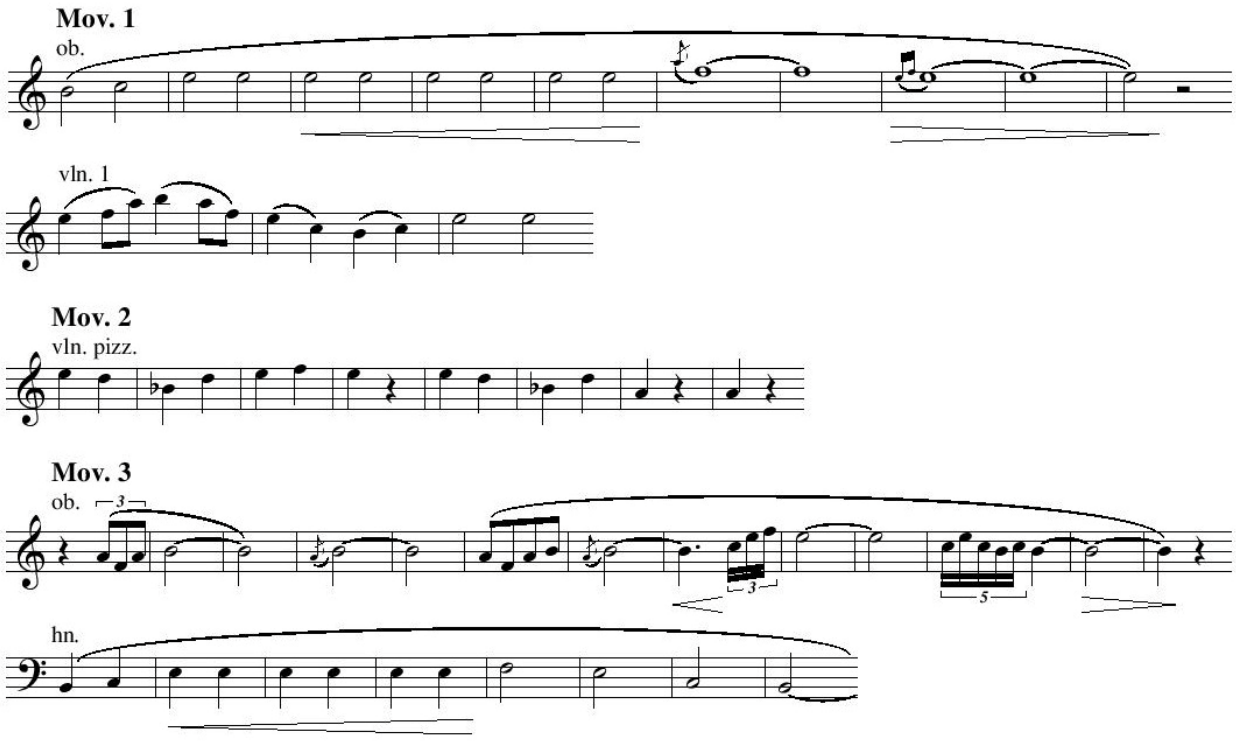
---

[203] Daniel, "Alan Hovhaness."
[204] Hovhaness, Alan. Interview by Oliver Daniel, September 28, 1977. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.
[205] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[206] Ingraham, "An Analytic Investigation of Four Works by Alan Hovhaness with Emphasis on His Mysterious Mountain (Symphony No. 2)," 11.
[207] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Judith Malina, August 31, 1953. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Despite the modest title, it is one of Hovhaness's most formally ambitious, involved, and "symphonic" works. It was commissioned by the Louisville Orchestra, as part of a notable new music commissioning program, and premiered on Feb. 20, 1954.

As with the *Exile Symphony*, much of this work's important thematic material is modally linked, giving a sense of unity across its three movements. The themes excerpted in Fig. 5.1 are all cast in the same pentatonic mode, often referred to in the West as the Japanese *Hirajōshi* scale, but also found in Indian music. In addition, there is a strong thematic resemblance between the first movement's oboe solo and the fugue subject in the last movement first heard in the horns.

Figure 5.1, *Concerto No. 7* (1953), modally-linked thematic material



The *Concerto No. 7* is an ideal work in which to observe the continuing development of the cyclical rhythmic techniques described near the end of the previous chapter, as well as the

application of various canonic procedures to large scale musical forms. An analysis of the entire first movement is given in Fig. 5.2, and will give the reader a good idea of the extent to which the musical fabric of the concerto is made up of such devices. This formal outline tracks only the *beginnings* of the various cyclic components. They almost always overlap with subsequent cycles (just as contrapuntal lines in the Armenian period almost invariably come to rest only *after* a new voice has been set in motion). This first movement is essentially in ternary form, although its second "A" is a recapitulation of the texture (two-voice woodwind fugato with cyclic accompaniment), mode, and character of the first, rather than of its actual melodic content, and so the movement might also be described as through-composed. Such "textural recapitulations" are a common feature of Hovhaness's middle period style, sometimes occurring on a much larger scale.

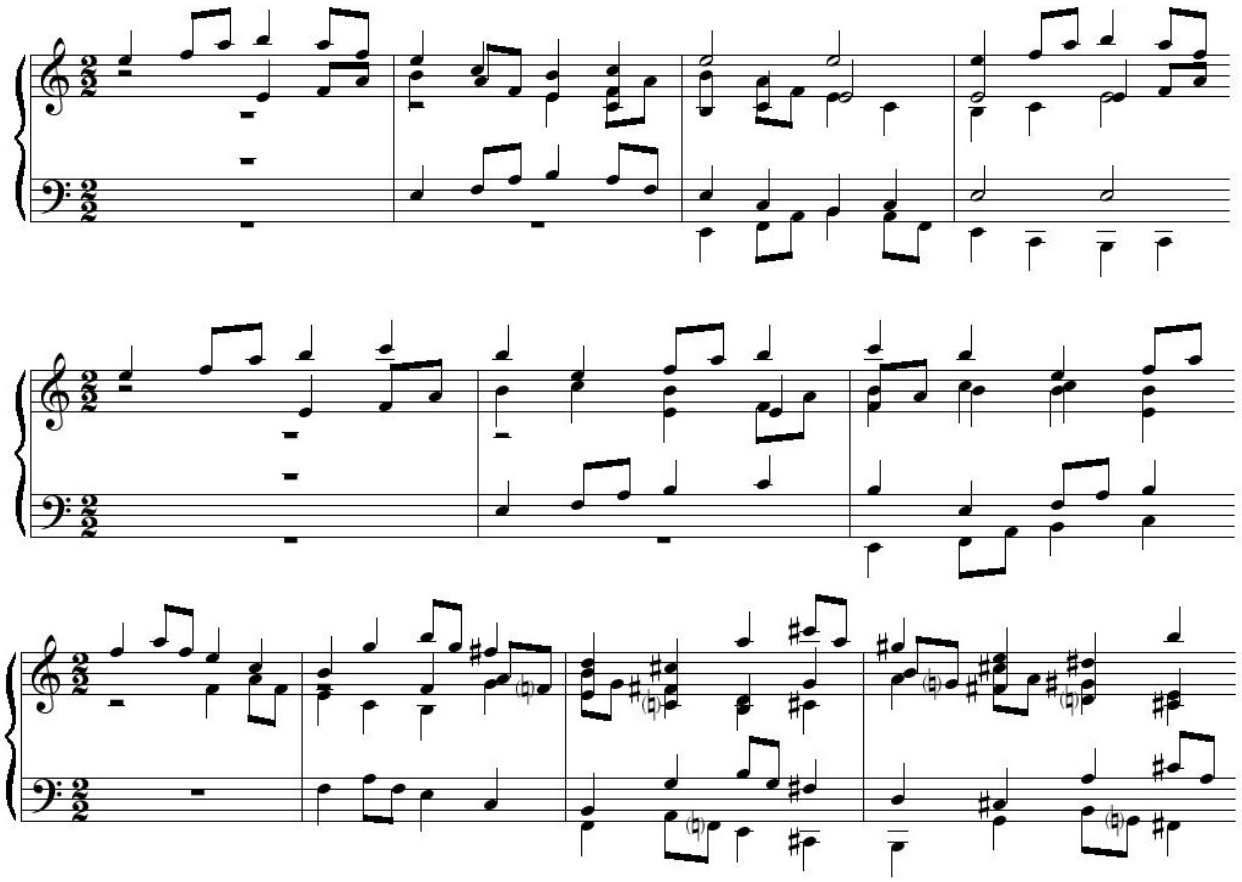
Figure 5.2, *Concerto No. 7* (1953), first movement analysis

	Section/Rehearsal Number:	Foreground:	Background:
A	[beginning]	fugato for 2 flutes	celesta: 7-bar cycle glockenspiel: 49 𝅗𝅥 cycle
	4	oboe solo	harp: 1-bar ostinato glockenspiel: 14 bar cycle vlc./cb. pizz. gliss.: 75 ♩ cycle celesta LH: 3-beat ostinato celesta LH: 5-beat ostinato
B	9	strings: canon at the unison in, 5 parts, ½ bar interval	timpani: 41 ♩ cycle
	8	oboes/horns: canon at the unison, 6 parts, 1 bar interval	
	10	winds/brass: canon at the unison, 9 parts, 1 bar interval	
	11	strings: canon at the unison on a 5-beat fragment, up a M2 on each iteration, 5 parts, ½ beat interval	
	9-before 12	winds/brass: chorale in 3/4 [against main pulse]	
	13	[chorale continues in winds and brass]	strings (various articulations): canon at the unison in, 5 parts, ½ bar interval
	14	[chorale continues]	harp: 34 𝅗𝅥 cycle celesta: 37 ♩ cycle glockenspiel: 45 ♩ cycle
A	15	clarinet/bassoon: 2-part fugato doubled in octaves (clarinets later continue alone)	[other cycles continue] vlc./cb. pizz. gliss.: 183 ♩ cycle (only completes 1 iteration, articulated at 37 ♩ intervals)

The bulk of the first movement's middle section is concerned with varying "open" canonic treatments of short melodic fragments, all confined to the *Hirajōshi* mode. Unlike the canons observed in the *Saint Vartan Symphony*, these are used as a developmental device over

the course of a single unbroken musical span, moving from a simple five-part canon at the unison, to a metrically shifting canon on a shortened five-beat fragment, and finally to a canon whose subject is both metrically shifting and transposed up a whole tone on each iteration, eventually rising up through an entire octave outlining a whole tone scale (Fig. 5.3).

Figure 5.3, *Concerto No. 7* (1953), first movement canons



The cyclic elements analyzed in the *Saint Vartan Symphony* remained unchanged over the course of a single short movement, while in this work cyclical background elements continuously evolve and are integrated into a more expansive musical structure. Together with the canons, they are examples of what Brian Israel referred to as “process” elements in Hovhaness’s music. The extensive use of such techniques is strongly characteristic of the works

of this period, although Hovhaness continued to use them more sparingly later on. Brian Israel described Hovhaness's use of rhythmic cycles in the music of the 1950s' as follows:

> It involves a part of a given set of pulses (usually the number is a prime number: 5, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, etc., and it is almost never a simple multiple of 2 or 3). This pattern is repeated throughout an entire section or movement of a work. In some cases, Hovhaness uses a cycle of progressively contracting and expanding pulses (thus 14…13…12…11, etc. 1…2…3…etc.). In many works Hovhaness uses several cycles, all of different lengths and usually never coinciding. These cycles can be likened to the non-coinciding orbits of the planets of the solar systems around the sun and to the repetitive nature of the rhythmic organization of Indian music in talas … The patterns are written out fully, with all their repetitions, in traditional notation, with standard meter and bar lines (to which the patterns almost never correspond – the bar lines serve merely as a notational convenience).[208]

The dynamic use of cycles (expansion and contraction) which Israel describes is in fact limited to a handful of works from the middle period, including the *Symphony No. 7* and *Symphony No. 14*. The comparison with celestial mechanics is compelling (and originated with the composer himself). Such an interpretation recalls the concept of talea in medieval music, with its connotations of an unknowable divine order, present but imperceptible. Such an understanding of the significance of this technique also recalls Hovhaness's cyclical conception of cosmic time. The comparison with Indian *tala*, whose influence on Hovhaness's music was discussed at length in the previous chapter, is more puzzling. The only thing these prime-numbered rhythmic cycles really have in common with *tala* is the general concept of a cyclically repeating rhythmic pattern of fixed length. Their layering and combination with other, different,

[208] Israel, "Form, Texture, and Process in the Symphonies for Wind Ensembles by Alan Hovhaness," 115.

rhythmic patterns (relying as it does entirely on Western notation for its realization) is entirely of Hovhaness's own invention and unrelated to Indian practice.

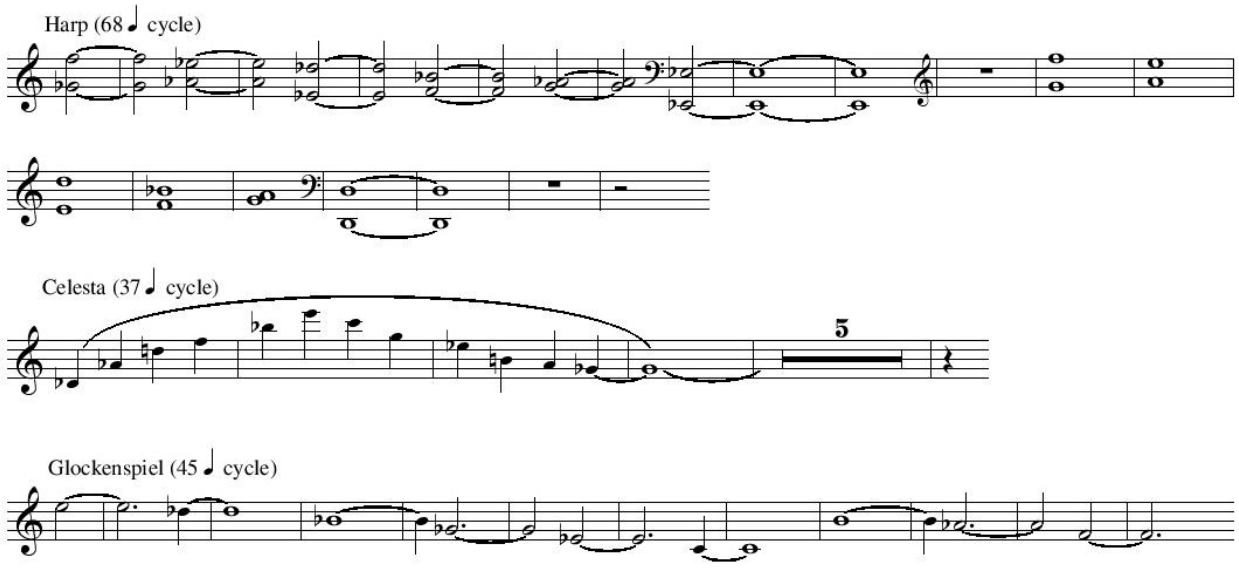
Hovhaness's use of rhythmic cycles has also been compared with the colotomic rhythmic structure of gamelan music.[209] The two are fundamentally different, however: Hovhaness's cycles float free of the rhythmic structure of the leading melodic elements in the texture rather than articulating them (as does for example, the lowest gong part in a gamelan ensemble). As Brian Israel pointed out, Hovhaness's rhythmic cycles resemble similar techniques in the music of Messiaen more strongly than any non-Western models. Messiaen, who was similarly interested in the cyclically conceived rhythms of Indian music, also wrote music in which multiple cyclical rhythmic layers unfold independently and experimented with expanding and contracting rhythms, for example in the *Turangalîla-Symphonie* of 1948.

The three elements that make up the final complex of rhythmic cycles which underpins the first movement's "recapitulation" are reproduced in Fig. 5.4. Rosner contended that such figures can add meaningful harmonic content to the materials of the foreground layer.[210] This is perhaps true in a few rare cases, but more often the pitch material of these background cycles is completely unrelated to that of the foreground layer. In this particular case, other than the fact that the celesta cycle consists of a twelve-tone row (more on this later in the chapter), the pitch content of these cyclical elements can only be described as freely chromatic. This suspension of strict contrapuntal alignment with the woodwind fugato unfolding at the same time is permissible because of the way that these cyclical elements are scored. As is the case here, such figures are usually separated from the rest of the texture in timbre, and expressed through non-sustained

[209] Johnson, "A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness," 69.
[210] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 159.

sonorities designed to minimize the impact of the dissonance resulting from their simultaneous sounding with the foreground material. This technique has already been observed in its nascent stage in the pizzicato elements of the complex texture found in *Lousadzak*. In the middle period, a similar effect was often achieved through the employment of pitched percussion, celesta, and harp, in addition to pizzicato strings. This willingness to suspend the requirement for strict contrapuntal alignment between various layers *only* if they are separated by timbre is one of the most important and underappreciated aspects of Hovhaness's musical language. This same concept also applies to the various ostinato figures found in conjunction with the cyclic ones, blending together with them to form a single shimmering background texture. Hovhaness described all of this in poetic terms, writing: "inventions in wrong notes can be very beautiful if they are separated in timbre, intensity, nearness and distance, as different dimensions or planes of sounds, so that they not be harsh, hard and barbarous, savoring of dull automatic motions of machinery, but soft, mysterious, like a strange wind blowing through the trees."[211]

Figure 5.4, *Concerto No. 7* (1953), final complex of background cycles

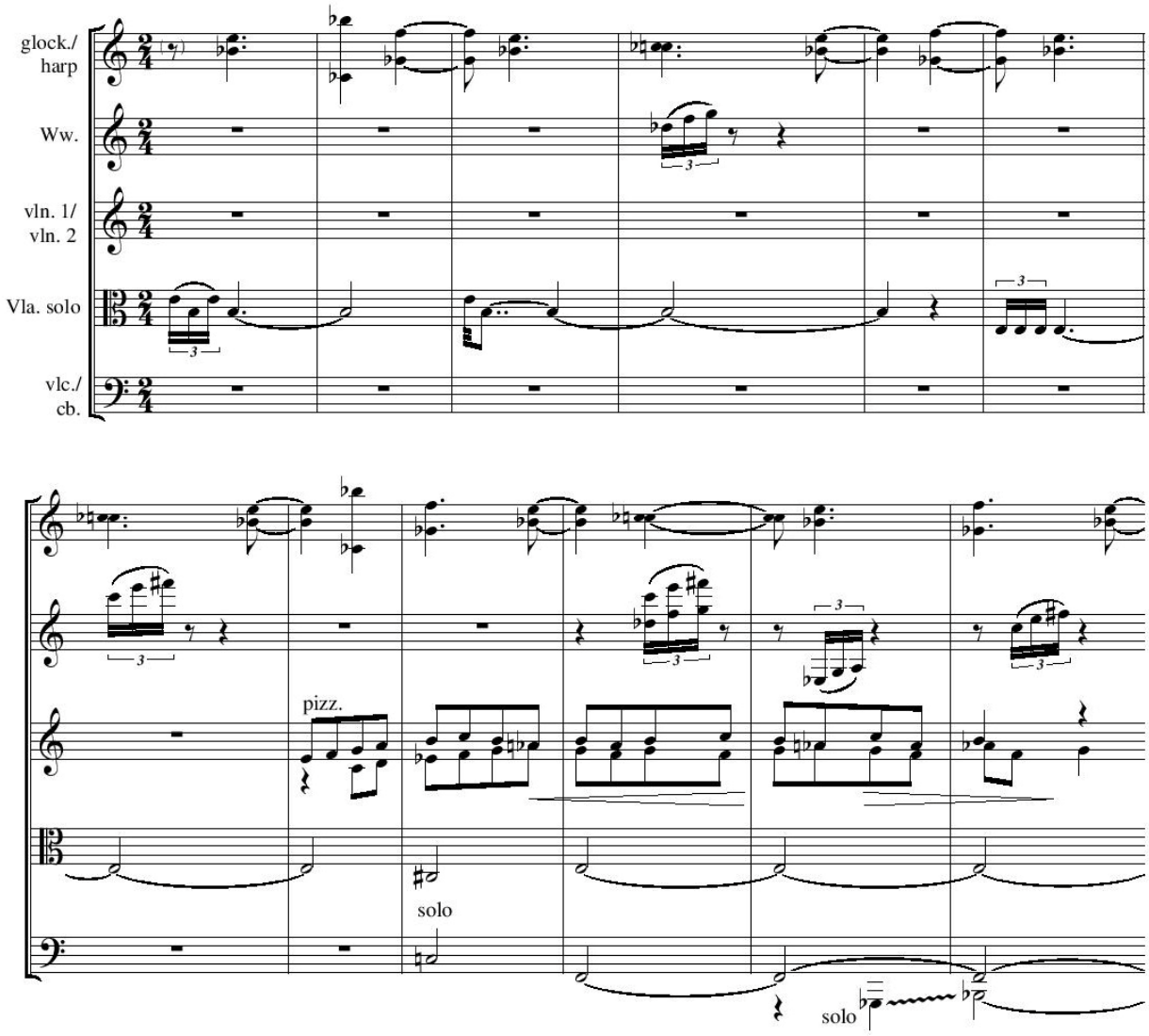


[211] Kelly, John Jerome. "The Musical Style of Alan Hovhaness." University of Iowa, 1965, 5.

Also dating from 1953 is Hovhaness's *Symphony No. 13*. The symphony was based on the ballet *Ardent Song,* the first of a series of scores Hovhaness created for the noted American dancer and choreographer Martha Graham. The work is completely through-composed, featuring a series of different instruments in soloistic roles that, "like characters in a play," wander through a series of constantly shifting sonic landscapes, constructed mostly of layered cyclical elements and ostinatos.[212] This symphony is an outlier in Hovhaness's output, one of only a handful of works whose effect might be described as verging on "modernistic." This is not because there is anything about the compositional techniques employed in the work that is unusual for Hovhaness's middle period music. Rather, this modernistic effect arises because the "background" rhythmic cycles dominate to such an extent that they in effect cease to be background at all, becoming a prominent element in the musical foreground. (Other works from this period about which the same might be said are the *Concerto No. 9* and *Mountain of Prophecy.*) As such, extended sections of the work seem to verge on atonality (Fig. 5.5). Further, the timbral stratification discussed in regards to cyclical elements in the *Concerto No. 7*, and which characterizes most of Hovhaness's complex textures, seems to break down at some points in this work. As a result, the modal quality of the leading melodic line, which in most cases suffices to ensure that a passage written in a dissonant complex texture is still perceived as having a clear tonal center, is obscured.

[212] Hovhaness, Alan. *Symphony No. 13*. New York: C. F. Peters, 1960.

Figure 5.5, *Symphony No. 13* (1953), dissonant background elements dominate the texture



Also contributing to this symphony's "modernistic" effect is a surprising adventurousness in orchestration found in very few Hovhaness scores. The work employs flute whistle tones, Bartók pizzicato, flutter tonguing, and a wide variety of percussion instruments with their various playing techniques specified in detail. The pointillistic effect of many of the cyclic figures found in the symphony evokes the unlikely kindred spirit of Webern, although of course in their construction, they do not resemble the music of Webern in the slightest. Hovhaness once said that he admired Webern's music for "the sparseness in the use of a single note," and that he

felt there was "a sort of Oriental spirit, an almost Japanese spirit in the best of Webern's works."[213] Chou Wen-chung made a similar observation about the "Eastern" sensibility in Webern's music.[214] Despite this resemblance, the *Symphony No. 13* is nevertheless threaded through with long, incantational melodic lines that lie at a distant remove from Webern's style, even if they are at times seemingly relegated to a subsidiary role in the musical texture.

Over the summer of 1954, Hovhaness worked on *In Gautama's House*, an opera dealing with the life of the Buddha, with Judith Malina serving as librettist. The project was never completed, perhaps because no commission could be secured.[215] Malina's correspondence concerning the opera's composition reveals that Hovhaness was already interested in the model of Japanese *Noh* Theater, which became critically important for his stage works during the next decade.[216] Hovhaness's career continued to improve throughout the year. He received a Fromm Foundation commission which resulted in *The Stars*, a setting of the poetry of Emerson for chorus and orchestra, and wrote music for Clifford Odets's play *The Flowering Peach*, which began a run on Broadway.[217] Martha Graham's dance company toured in Europe performing *Ardent Song*, and Hovhaness was commissioned to score a documentary, *Assignment India*, for NBC.[218]

Hovhaness's "big break," however, finally came in the next year, when Leopold Stokowski premiered his *Symphony No. 2, "Mysterious Mountain"* with the Houston Symphony on October 31st. Hovhaness was 45. The work had probably not, as is often claimed, been commissioned by Stokowski. Hovhaness had previously unsuccessfully tried to interest Fritz

---

[213] Michaelyan, "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness."
[214] Chou, "Asian Concepts and Twentieth-Century Western Composers," 214.
[215] Bomhard, Moritz. Letter to Alan Hovhaness, September 16, 1954. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.
[216] Malina, Judith. Letter to Moritz Bomhard, July 30, 1954. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.
[217] "Alan Hovhaness." Broadcast Music, Inc., n.d. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.
[218] Ibid.

Reiner in the piece (he later recorded it with the Chicago Symphony).[219] The *Symphony No. 2*, which remains the most frequently performed of Hovhaness's larger works, was a critical triumph, and within a few years Hovhaness was one of the most successful living American composers.

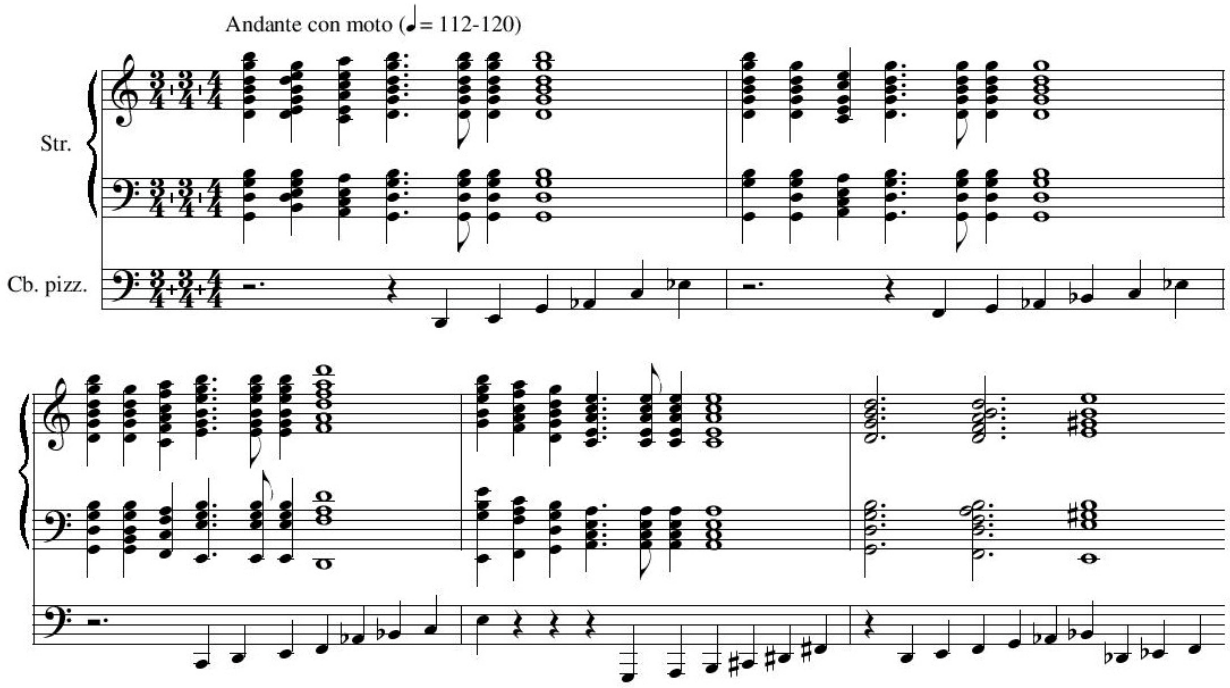
While the addition of a subtitle to the second symphony was apparently made on the recommendation of Stokowski, mountains in general are probably the most important recurring quasi-programmatic motif in Hovhaness's work. At least 30 of his compositions (mostly dating from the "late" period) have mountain-related subject matter. For Hovhaness, mountains had a definite spiritual significance, occupying the space "between two worlds, the land of the gods and the human land."[220] They could also be symbols of Armenian identity (particularly Mount Ararat), and for music: Hovhaness once remarked that, "the Himalayan Mountains are the greatest melody in the world."[221] He employed a regularly recurring set of literalistic musical symbols for mountains, including long, arching melodies and large dynamic swells.

The extent to which *Mysterious Mountain*, often referred to as one of Hovhaness's more "Western" works, actually retains significant traces of the influence of non-Western music is attested to by the original subtitles attached to each movement at the premiere. They are a combination of Indian, "Bhayana (Adoration)," Western, "Ricercata (Double Fugue)," and Armenian, "Sharagan (Religious Song)." Despite their triadic lushness, the influence of *tala* can be observed in the symphony's opening phrases, written as they are in a repeating [3+3+4] rhythmic pattern (Fig. 5.6).

---

[219] Gregory, interview.
[220] Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."
[221] Hovhaness, "Giant Melody in Nature and Art."

Figure 5.6, *Symphony No. 2* (1955), first movement, opening



The bass pizzicato line in this excerpt colors the tertian purity of the string chorale unfolding above with a mysterious dissonant rumbling. The result is a peculiar kind of complex texture unique to the music of this period, and a rare example of a dissonant background element occupying a lower register than the foreground material. Although jazz was never a musical style with which Hovhaness expressed any sympathy in interviews, the resemblance of these linear pizzicato bass lines (excepting their comparative lack of rhythmic drive) to those found in jazz is worth remarking upon, particularly considering Hovhaness's history of working as a jazz arranger.[222]

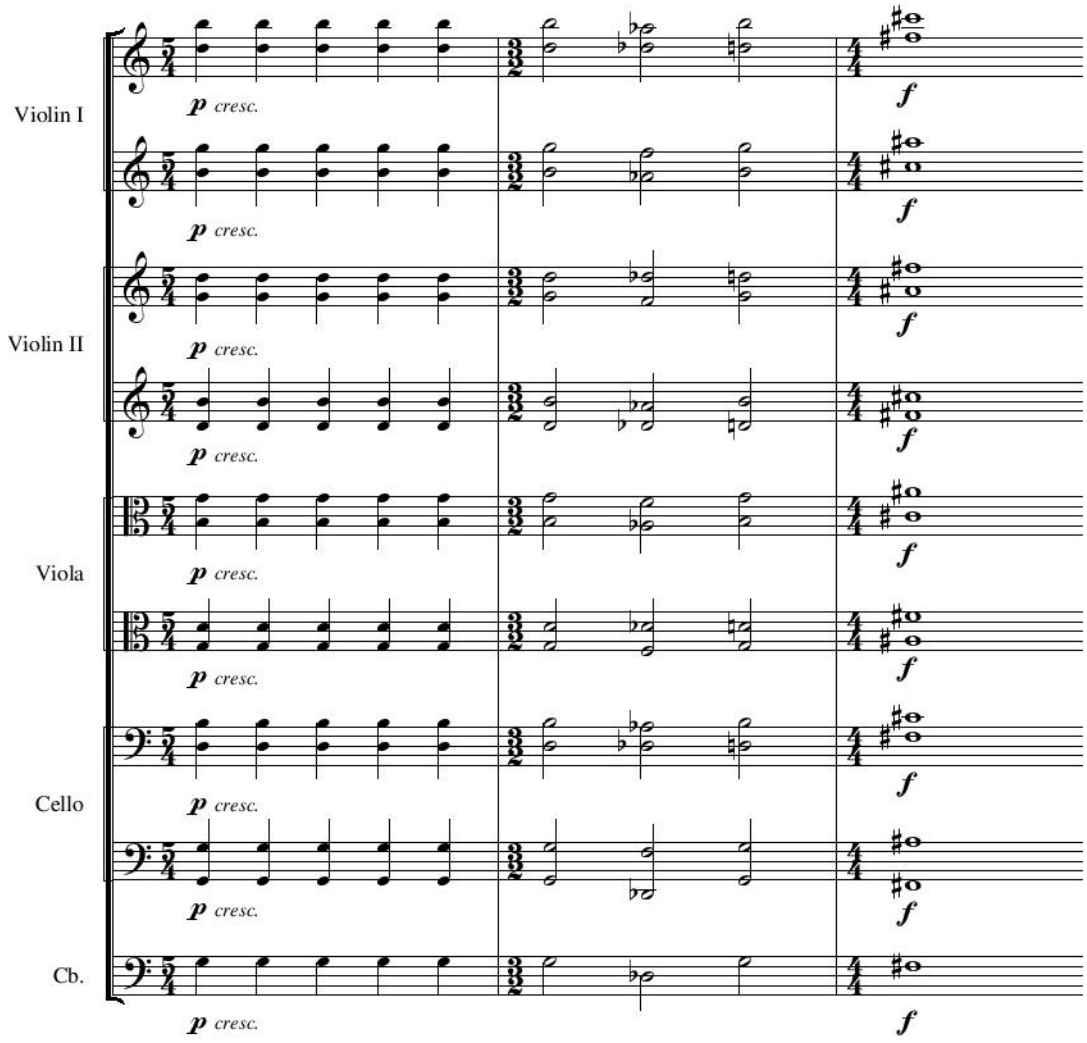
The imperative that the dissonance occurring between different musical layers be offset by their scoring is symptomatic of Hovhaness's general approach to orchestration, which seems to have emphasized clarity above all else. He felt that too many composers' writing for the

[222] Johnson, "A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness," 4.

orchestra was "thick and muddy."[223] Another hallmark of Hovhaness's orchestration is the scoring of triadic harmonies for richly divided strings. Generally, every string section other than the basses is divided into three or four parts, each of which plays complete versions of the chord in question in close spacing (Fig. 5.7). This method of scoring often extends to the rest of the orchestra as well, with other instrument families arranged in groups of three or four that also play a complete version of a given triad. Hovhaness described the special resonance produced by such scoring as resembling a "heavenly cooperation of mysterious forces," and it is one of the most recognizable elements of the "Hovhaness sound."[224] This is also likely what has caused some (mostly English) commentators to notice a similarity with the music of Vaughan Williams.[225] Such passages do unmistakably recall the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, a work also characterized by staunchly triadic harmonic content scored in a similar fashion.

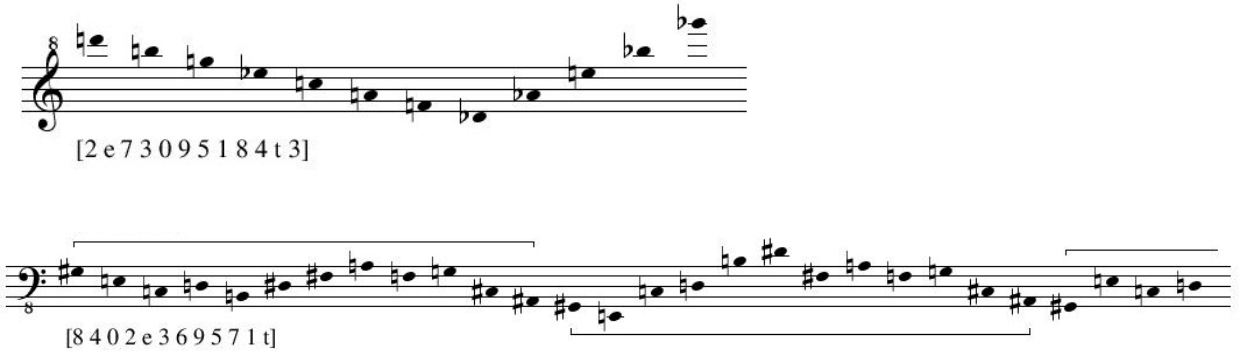
[223] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.
[224] Hovhaness, Alan. "Letter to the Editor."
[225] Hopkins.

Figure 5.6, *Symphony No. 2* (1955), first movement, scoring for divisi strings



Such richly divided string chorales are also found in the third movement of *Mysterious Mountain* and, together with shimmering cyclical background figures in the harp and celesta, are one of the textural elements that tie the outer movements of the symphony together without the aid of motivic relationships. The celesta flourishes and "wrong note" pizzicato bass line that tick along like clockwork behind the central section of the first movement are both written using twelve-tone rows (Fig. 5.8). These two rows are unrelated through any of the standard twelve-tone operations, although they do share a preponderance of thirds.

Figure 5.8, *Symphony No. 2* (1955), first movement, celesta and double bass twelve-tone rows



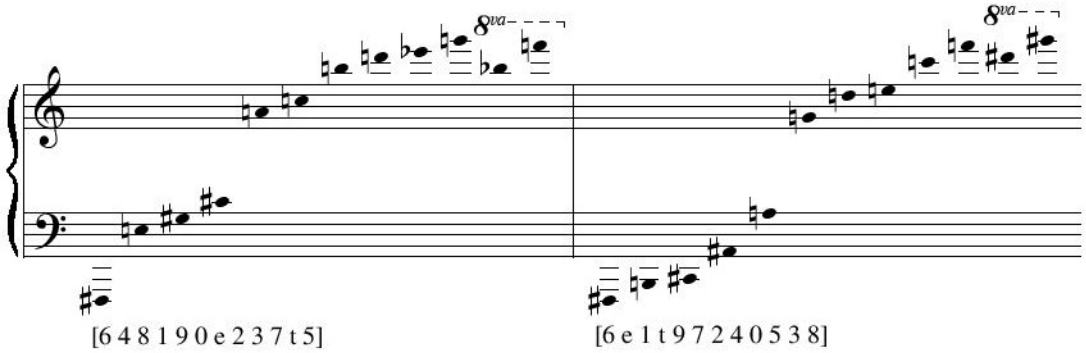
The occasional use of twelve-tone rows in Hovhaness's music was remarked on by one critic as early as 1962. Cecil Isaac described Hovhaness's relationship to the twelve-tone technique as a "mere flirtation," while noting that "the music certainly retains [Hovhaness's] own unique stamp throughout."[226] As with other subsidiary dissonant elements in a complex texture, the importance is in how these tone rows are scored rather than how their pitch content interacts with the foreground material. Hovhaness occasionally acknowledged his use of twelve-tone rows to get "unrelated sounds like distant stars," but except for a few very unusual examples such as those pointed out by Brian Israel in the *Symphony No. 4*, he never employed any of the usual twelve-tone procedures for row transformation (retrograde, inversion, retrograde inversion).[227] Even in those rare cases when such procedures are in evidence, Hovhaness's twelve-tone rows continued to serve a background role akin to the other freely chromatic dissonant elements found in his complex textures, which achieve a similar effect. As such, Hovhaness's employment of twelve-tone rows had nothing in common with the aims of Schoenberg or his latter-day followers. As with Britten and Shostakovich, his engagement with twelve-tone was essentially an experimentation with a novelty on the terms of his own already

[226] Isaac, Cecil. "Symphony No. 4 for Wind Orchestra, Op. 165 by Alan Hovhaness; Symphony No. 7 (Nanga Parvat) for Wind Orchestra, Op. 178 by Alan Hovhaness; Symphony of Winds for Narrator and Wind Orchestra by George Kleinsinger." *Notes, Second Series* 19, no. 2 (March 1962): 329–30.
[227] Westbrook, "Hovhaness Interview: Angelic Cycles."

formed musical language, not a radical transformation of that musical language undertaken out of any sort of modernist conviction about historical necessity. Hovhaness never made any attempt to use a twelve-tone row to generate any of the harmonic or melodic content of a foreground musical layer.

Two of Hovhaness's boldest uses of twelve-tone and related techniques can be found in the *Concerto No. 10* for two pianos and orchestra (later retitled *Symphony No. 45*) and the *String Quartet No. 2*, both of which date from the "middle period." In the second movement of the *Concerto No. 10*, the main melodic material is for the most part entrusted to the orchestra, while the two piano soloists play a series of "arpeggiated" twelve-tone rows cascading across the instrument's entire compass and continuing throughout most of the movement.

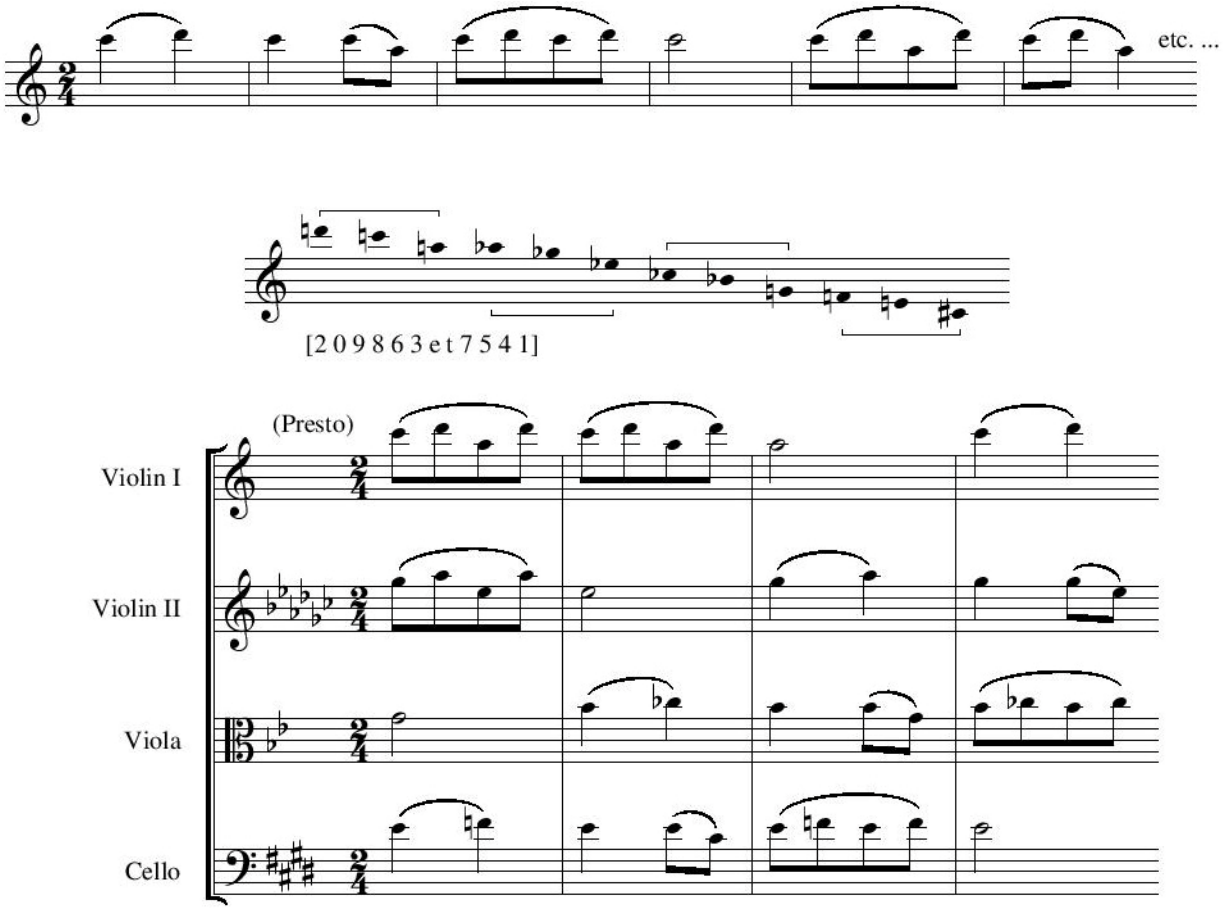
Figure 5.9, *Concerto No. 10/Symphony No. 45* (1954), second movement twelve-tone rows



The third movement of the *String Quartet No. 2* is labeled "canon on 3 notes, in 2 modes, 4 keys." The three-note theme, its four different transpositions (in two "modes"), and an excerpt of the resulting four-part canon are shown in Fig. 5.10. The fact that that there is no overlap between the three-note pitch collections of any of the four parts is significant. They combine to complete a twelve-note "aggregate," in which all twelve pitch classes are exhausted. The spelling

of the viola and cello parts is significant, hinting at the lowered fourth scale degree of the sixth Armenian church mode even in this fully-chromatic context.

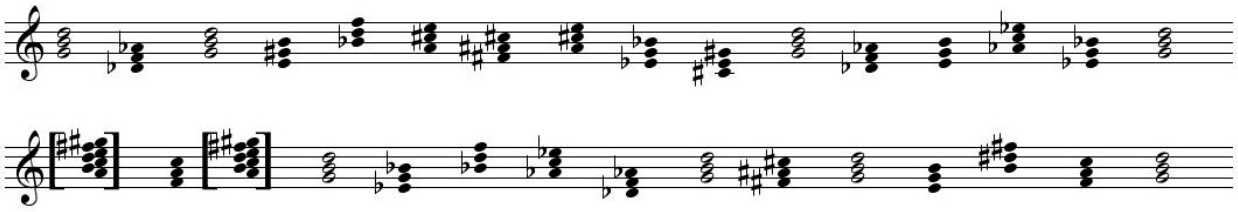
Figure 5.10, *String Quartet No. 2* (1950), third movement canon



In addition to twelve-tone background elements, the increasing range of chordal relationships embraced by Hovhaness's harmonic language in works of the middle period is also in evidence in the first movement of *Mysterious Mountain*. Harmonic motion in the music of the early period (and in what harmony was to be found in the works of the Armenian period) was largely confined to movement between diatonically related chords. In contrast, the hymn-like section which makes up the third and final part of the first movement of this symphony contains chords built on ten of twelve possible roots (Fig. 5.11). In fact, the only two potential chord roots

absent from the passage are those which would have been most closely related to the tonic, C and D. Nevertheless, the repetitive phrase structure and frequent strong cadences in G anchor the music firmly in the tonic, even as the intervening harmonies contribute little to reinforcing it. As in much of the symphony (and in other works from the middle period) root motion by a tritone is particularly prominent, especially when moving to the tonic. In such cases this motion serves as a strong cadential progression.

Figure 5.11, *Symphony No. 2* (1955), first movement, harmonic motion in the third section



Despite this increasing range of harmonic relationships, the harmonies themselves remain almost exclusively triadic. What seventh chords do appear in Hovhaness's music are almost always in second inversion, the result of passing motion in the bass and tenor. This aspect of Hovhaness's musical language was often received with bewilderment by critics, sometimes with humorous results. Robert Evett, in a 1959 review of *Mysterious Mountain*, said of the work that "harmonically, it tends to be more conservative than Monteverdi, for instance, or Sweelinck."[228] Andrew Imbrie described in Hovhaness's music a "restraint in the use of harmonic resource which borders on the antiseptic," and for Harold Shapero, Hovhaness's harmonies were "over-lax."[229] Evett's comparison between Hovhaness and two (admittedly quite adventurous) composers of the early Baroque is telling. A critic steeped in the modernist

[228] Evett, "Music of Alan Hovhaness."
[229] Imbrie, Andrew. "Review." *Notes, Second Series* 10, no. 1 (December 1952): 150–51.
Shapero, Harold. "Review, Shepherd of Israel. Cantata for Cantor, Recorder (Or Flute), String Quartet (Or String Orchestra) and Trumpet Ad Libitum by Alan Hovhaness." *Notes, Second Series* 10, no. 4 (September 1953): 681.

environment could not help but view the harmonic aspect of music except as it fit into a teleological narrative about the historical necessity of increasing harmonic complexity. Hovhaness's unwillingness to conform to this model (and the critical response it sometimes provoked) was a testament to his anti-modernist convictions. That said, despite the simplicity of much of the harmony in Hovhaness's music, there are marked idiosyncrasies in his employment of the basic materials of tonal harmony that nevertheless served to personalize his harmonic language. One might, for example, search the classical repertoire in vain for any stretch of music containing as many consecutive root position triads as the one cited above, but this is typical of Hovhaness.

As the second movement of *Mysterious Mountain* is strictly polyphonic, and based largely on the fourth movement of the much earlier *String Quartet No. 1*, it does not really factor into a discussion of Hovhaness's middle period style. However, several aspects of the third movement do merit mentioning. The first concerns the movement's form, at first glance a kind of rondo (ABACA) with five distinct parts. Hovhaness, however, explained that he actually conceived of such structures in three parts, the concluding (ACA) being in his conception all of a piece. This three part form, concerned more with a dramatic progression of events than balanced proportion, was said to have been inspired by an instruction from di Giovanno, and consists of an "1.Introduction," "2.Vision/Surprise," and "3.Hymn of Praise." This particular movement's introduction (the first "A") consists of an abbreviated version of the hymn-like music that is the most important material in the movement played by muted brass. The "B" section which follows certainly delivers the required "surprise," standing as it does in stark contrast to the rest of the movement. A repetitive phrase in a 3+4+3+3 *tala* begins in the harp, and slowly undergoes a long, "mountainous" crescendo, overlaid with a gradually thickening canon at the unison played

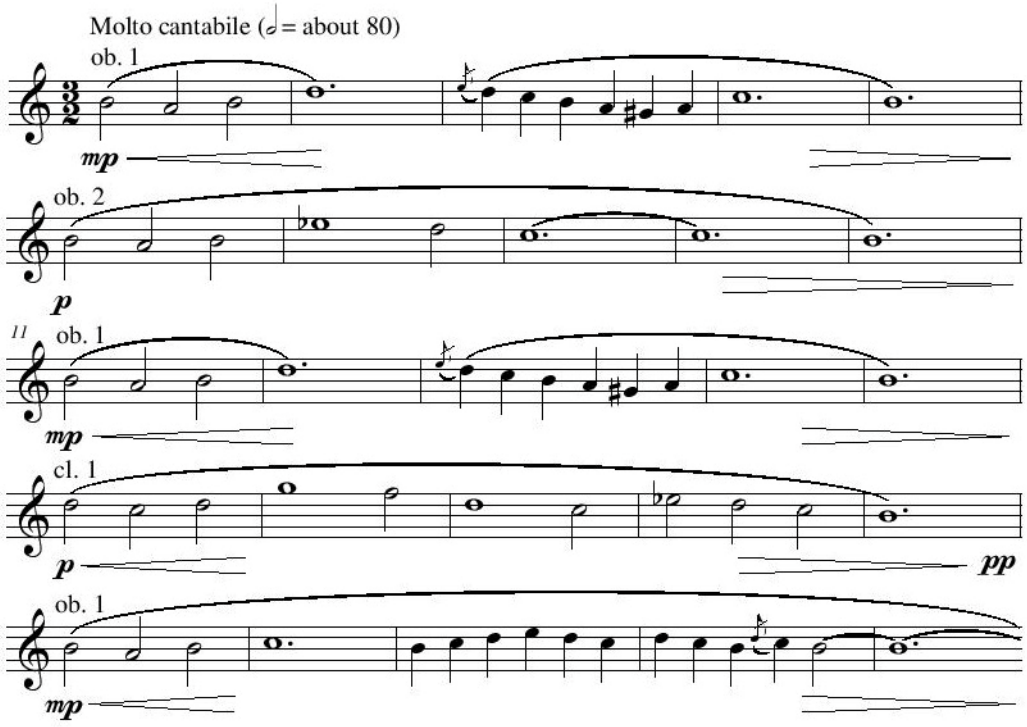
sostenuto in the winds and brass. The rest of the movement is of a uniformly serene, religious character, and thus serves its role as a "hymn of praise" in response to the visionary surprise. Hovhaness saw a relationship between this three-part form and the "Jo-Ha-Kyu" formal principle in *Gagaku*, retroactively applying it to describe the form of the overture to *Avak the Healer*, apparently having decided that di Giovanno had intuited what he later discovered to be a Japanese concept.[230] In the liner notes for a recording of his *Symphony No. 19*, Hovhaness put a more grandiose spin on the same idea, describing a three-part form consisting of "1.Cosmic Adoration," "2.Cosmic Processional/Dance," and "3.Cosmic Death and Glorification."[231] The clearest manifestations of this formal type are, however, found in the final movements of symphonies such as this one. Two other clear examples can be found in the *Symphony No. 46* and *Symphony No. 50*, with evocations of a mountain thunderstorm and volcanic eruption, respectively, providing the necessary "surprise."

Another aspect of the third movement of *Mysterious Mountain* meriting attention concerns the woodwind-dominated "C" section, and a curious anecdote about its composition related by the composer. Hovhaness recalled that when first composing this section, he made an attempt to recapture music that had occurred to him during a stirring dream, and that the result was initially composed of five four-bar phrases. Later, when copying the parts for the symphony, he was suddenly seized with weariness and drifted off. The dream recurred, and he awoke to find that he had missed a bar in each phrase. He quickly made the necessary corrections, resulting in a series of five five-bar phrases, comprising what he rather curiously referred to as a "square root"

[230] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.
[231] Hovhaness, Alan, North Jersey Wind Symphony, and Sevan Philharmonic. *Music of Alan Hovhaness*. Crystal Records, 1990.

form (Fig. 5.12).[232] Visionary aspect aside, this anecdote is important for what if reveals about the numerological significance Hovhaness attached to rhythm, and phrase structure in particular. In addition to the five-by-five symmetry that resulted from this revision, the extension of each phrase from four to five bars was likely symbolic of moving beyond the mundane (represented by the square four bar phrase) into a higher realm of spiritual contemplation. Hovhaness found this passage to be one of the most affecting parts of any of his works.[233]

Figure 5.12, *Symphony No. 2* (1955), third movement, "five-times-five" phrase structure



The importance of rhythmic patterns and phrase lengths to Hovhaness is testified to by the fact that their description often makes up the bulk of his otherwise usually terse program notes. A regularly occurring *tala* which seems to have held special significance for Hovhaness, especially in later years, is the 7/4 (3+4) pattern that Arnold Rosner interpreted as Hovhaness's

[232] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[233] Ibid.

musical signature (a-lan ho-VHA-NESS).[234] This rhythmic pattern also roughly corresponds with several *talas* commonly employed in Hindustani music.[235] In liner notes for a recording of a much later symphony, Hovhaness explained another aspect of this rhythm's significance, writing of a melody cast in this *tala* that "3 beats is spiritual, 4 beats is strength of earth. This melody combines spirit and earth."[236]

Although Hovhaness harbored resentment towards critics for the rest of his life, there seems to have been no shortage of positive critical assessments of his music beginning in the 1950s.[237] Critical reaction to *Mysterious Mountain*, which in the years following its premiere received numerous high profile performances around the country, was overwhelmingly positive. In particular, critics operating outside of important centers of new music on the East coast had no compunctions about lauding Hovhaness's resistance to the modernist mainstream. One newspaper's editorial board, writing under the byline "Found: Composer Who Writes Music," wrote of *Mysterious Mountain* that, "not for Hovhaness (thank heaven!) are the stark struggles with 12 tones [celesta tone rows notwithstanding] or other such theoretical constraints which may well intimidate many a composer who otherwise would write freely and instinctively."[238] Another critic, in a judgment that was perhaps prescient but premature, commented that "After some quite dismal and futile experiments for the past 25 years or so, American music is trying to get sensible again. In that movement, Mr. Hovhaness is right at the head of his class."[239] Nonetheless, Hovhaness would have continued to be able find a source for his outsider's resentment of the mainstream in the form of the expected vitriol from critics more committed to

---

[234] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 157.
[235] Clayton, Martin, *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance*.
[236] Fujihara, Hinako, Walla Walla Symphony, and R. Lee Fiese. *Symphony No. 47, Opus 348: Walla Walla, Land of Many Waters*. Seattle, Washington: Fujihara Record Co., 1982.
[237] Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."
[238] "Found: Composer Who Writes Music." *Cleveland News*, December 30, 1957.
[239] Roussel, Hubert. *The Houston Post*, December 16, 1956.

modernism. Hubert Doris (a card-carrying member of the "Boulangerie") wrote that "Hovhaness is, in his own way, equally removed from the real problems of making music. Give him an ostinato, a traditional rhythmic figure, and an exotic title, and you can almost predict the result … sterility."[240]

Despite continued resistance to his music in some circles, in the wake of the premiere of *Mysterious Mountain* Hovhaness quickly became one of the most successful composers in the country. The middle period and the years directly following it marked the height of his career, and the opportunities afforded Hovhaness by this newfound success resulted in the production of some of his richest scores. In May 1956, Hovhaness was featured in a *Life Magazine* article which placed him (photographed with his cat, Rajah) among the nine most prominent living American composers.[241] He was one of a handful of famous musicians invited to attend a performance by the 85-year-old Pablo Casals at the Kennedy White House on November 13, 1961.[242] In 1963 alone, BMI reported over a thousand performances of his works.[243] By 1964 Hovhaness was, according to BMI, one of the five most-played living American composers, along with Bernstein, Copland, Barber, and Schuman.

During this period, Hovhaness did in fact become a "mainstream" figure of sorts, at least in terms of how his career had progressed. Aside from Stokowski, the Ajemian sisters, and Martha Graham, Hovhaness also received support from Howard Hanson (president of the Eastman School) and, later on, Andre Kostelanetz, who arranged for the commissioning of several of Hovhaness's works for the New York Philharmonic.

---

[240] Doris, Hubert. "Reviewed Works." *The Musical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (July 1957): 416–18.
[241] "Boom for U.S. Composers." *Life*, May 21, 1956.
[242] Ross, Alex. *The Rest Is Noise*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
[243] "Hovhaness Works Played Often." *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, February 11, 1963.

In 1955, the same year as the premiere of *Mysterious Mountain*, MGM began to issue LPs of Hovhaness's music at the behest of George Avakian (Anahid Ajemian's husband).[244] These were the first important commercially available recordings of his work. During the next year, Hovhaness introduced Avakian to Ravi Shankar, leading to the sitarist's first recording contract.[245] Also in 1956, Hovhaness spent the first of several summers teaching short-term at the Eastman School on the invitation of Howard Hanson.[246] Probably the most well-known of the composers who studied with Hovhaness during this time is Dominick Argento, who wrote that Hovhaness was "the most original composer among [his] teachers," and that he taught him the "importance of spontaneity and going one's own way."[247]

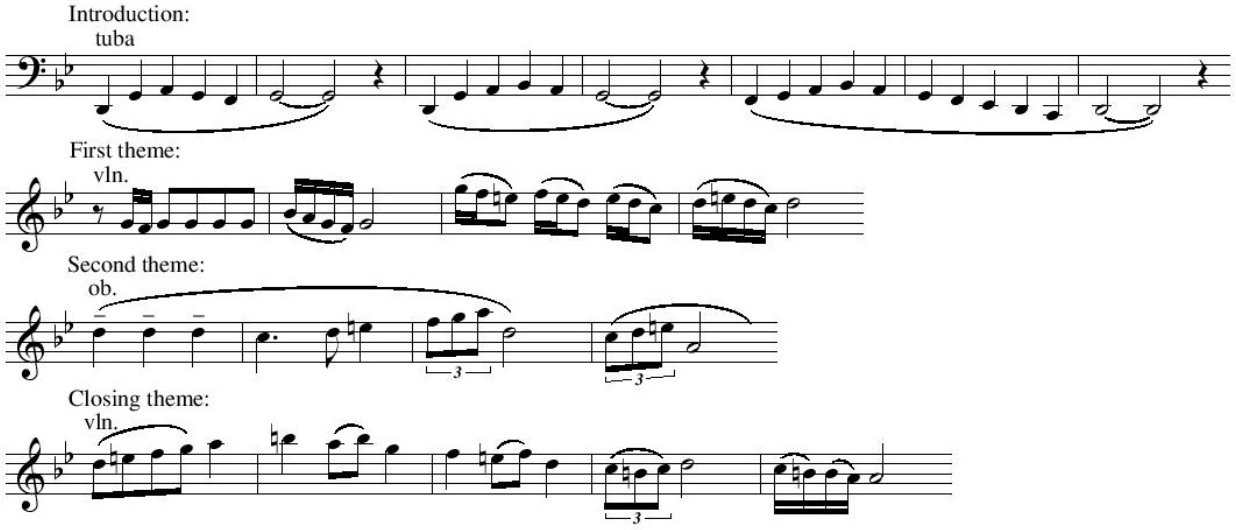
In December of that year, Hovhaness's *Triptych* for chorus, soloists, and orchestra (including the *Easter Cantata*) was broadcast nationally on CBS, two days before Christmas.[248] 1956 also saw the Carnegie Hall premiere of Hovhaness's *Symphony No. 3*, which had been commissioned by Stokowski following on the success of *Mysterious Mountain*.[249] The outer movements of this work are notable for their neo-classicism. While the symphony's persistent modality ensures that its sound is still recognizably Hovhaness's own, it is one of only a handful of works in which he deliberately evoked not only the formal procedures of 18th-century Western classical music, but also a Mozartean rhythmic drive, replete with bouncing spiccato eighth notes in the violins and violas. (Another rarity along these same lines is the *Sonata for Piano* Op. 145 from the same year.) The tonal layout and configuration of thematic material in this symphony's first movement (Fig. 5.13) fit much more comfortably into the "textbook" sonata form mold than

---

[244] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[245]Rother, "A Composer Echoes in Unexpected Places."
[246] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, June, 1956.
[247] Argento, Dominick, *Catalogue Raisonné as Memoir*, 12.
[248] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Judith Malina, December 14, 1956. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
[249] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."

did that of Hovhaness's earlier, less self-conscious uses of the form (such as in the outer movements of the *Violoncello Concerto*).

Figure 5.13, *Symphony No. 3* (1956), first movement, sonata form themes



The second theme in particular provides the expected lyrical contrast, and the closing section/codetta includes typically repetitive cadential motion, reinforcing the new key area. However, the first movement's development section is still comprised of a modulating series of canons rather than any sort of free thematic or tonal development. The symphony's second movement is a rare instance of Hovhaness using a symmetrical "arch" form. The movement is dominated by a long, dreamy central section, flanked by two broad "mountainous" crescendos (reminiscent of the visionary "surprise" from the third movement of *Mysterious Mountain*) and a thematically related introduction and coda.

Hovhaness continued to be based in New York during 1957, a year that witnessed a continuing stream of high-profile commissions and performances. In March, Stokowski conducted the premiere of *Ad Lyram* with the Houston Symphony, and in June the *Concerto No.*

8 was premiered at Eastman.[250] In September, Robert Shaw conducted *Mysterious Mountain* with the Cleveland Orchestra, and the following December Hovhaness himself conducted the work with the Detroit Symphony.

Perhaps most prestigious of all was the Koussevitzky Foundation commission which came in 1958 and resulted in the *Magnificat*, another one of Hovhaness's more frequently performed larger works. It was later recorded for commercial release by the Louisville Orchestra in 1961. The *Magnificat* contains several pseudo-aleatoric passages which, unlike the "spirit murmur" found in *Lousadzak* and other earlier works, occupy the musical foreground with arresting intensity, if only for a short duration. This is largely a result differences in orchestration. Moving beyond pizzicato strings, Hovhaness began to score *senza misura* elements for bowed strings and even for the chorus. The progressive boldness in the scoring of such *senza misura* passages is a trend in Hovhaness's music which continued into the next decade.

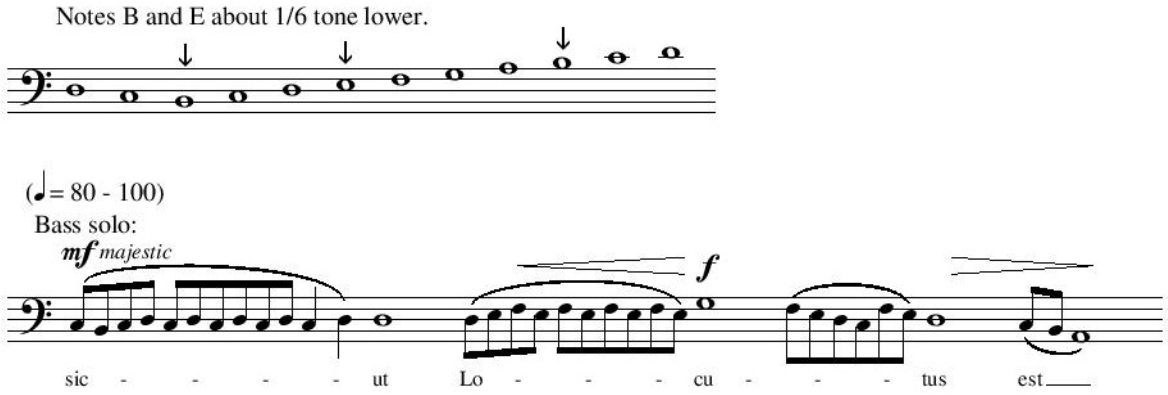
Also in evidence throughout many sections of the *Magnificat* is the stock three-part complex texture of melody, sustained support, and freewheeling cyclical figures in the background detailed in the previous chapter. The *Magnificat* demonstrates the great range of expression Hovhaness achieved using this basic texture in conjunction with a wide variety of different scorings and different harmonic and modal content.

Hovhaness's instructions for the bass soloist in the "Sicut locutus est" from the *Magnificat* raise the issue of how he approached tuning and microtonality. At first glance, the solo part appears to be entirely "white key" diatonic. However, Hovhaness instructs the singer to perform all of the B's and E's in the movement "about 1/6 tone lower," essentially resulting in a

[250] Schorr, Burt. "Hovhaness's 'Ad Lyram' Inspiring Work."

diatonic mode with slightly larger semitones, and two correspondingly slightly smaller whole tones (Fig. 5.14). Probably not coincidentally, this results in a mode identical to the "Eastern scale" described in the writings of Komitas.[251]

Figure 5.14, *Magnificat* (1958), "Sicut locutus est," microtonal tuning



Hovhaness's occasional uses of microtonality can be seen in the context of a reaction against equal temperament that was an aspect of American experimentalism during this era, most fully embodied in the figure of Harry Partch. Hovhaness expressed admiration for the Mexican composer Julián Carrillo and the Polish-American composer Lucia Dlugoszewski, in both cases presumably for their work with microtones.[252] Despite making numerous pronouncements about the limitations of equal temperament, Hovhaness was an eminently practical composer. He was free of the modernist utopian idealism that led Partch to invent his own instruments to experiment with different tunings (ensuring that his works are rarely heard in performance). Thus, the scattered examples (mostly from the 1950s) of Hovhaness composing with microtones for the most part resemble this one. The musician is generally directed to alter the tuning of one or more scale degrees by about 1/6 tone, reflecting Hovhaness's conviction that true "pure tunings" come

[251] Komitas, *Armenian Sacred and Folk Music*, 166-168.
[252] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.

from the musician's ear, not from new instruments or styles of notation. Hovhaness only rarely made more specific demands, for example specifying the ratios by which the six-note mode used in *Wind Drum* was to be tuned. The many uses of Indian ragas noted thus far have referred of course to their equally tempered approximations, at least on the page. (While its basic melodic source materials consist of seven-note scales, Indian music conceptualizes the octave as being divided into twenty-two rather than twelve parts.) Hovhaness does have one work, *O Lord Bless Thy Mountains*, written for two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart. This, however, seems to have been the product of the specific demands of the commission, as elsewhere Hovhaness described quarter-tones as merely compounding the artificiality of equal temperament.[253]

Much more common in Hovhaness's music than the actual employment of microtones themselves (excluding those that are the incidental result of glissandi) are ways in which their effect can be simulated without making great demands on the performers. The employment of dissonant drones to this effect has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, and the use of parallel dissonances can work much in the same way (Fig. 5.15). Another way of simulating microtonality specific to the piano involves a particular kind of articulation combining sustained and non-sustained sounds that, when executed rapidly, can create the illusion of a bending pitch (Fig. 5.16). The use of false unisons to suggest the "in between" notes of a scale functions on a similar principal, but is not limited to the piano (Fig. 5.17).

[253] Ibid.

Figure 5.15, *Suite for Piano* (1954/1967), III. Mysterious Temple, simulation of microtones through parallel dissonances

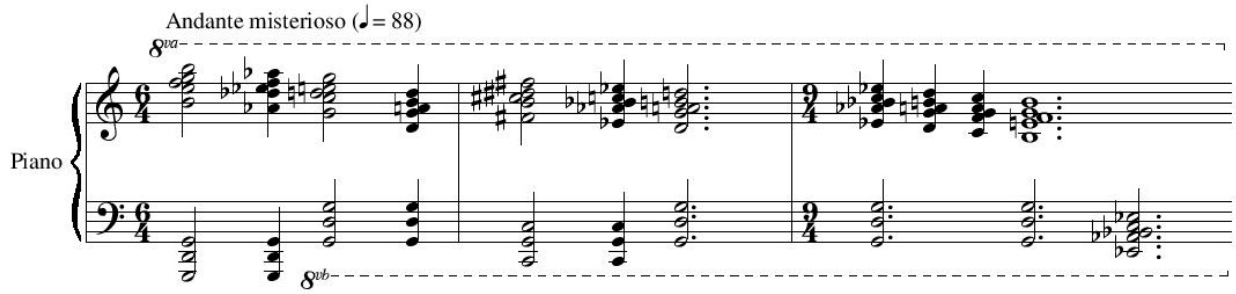


Figure 5.16, *Suite for Piano* (1954/1967), II. Invocation Jhala, simulation of microtones

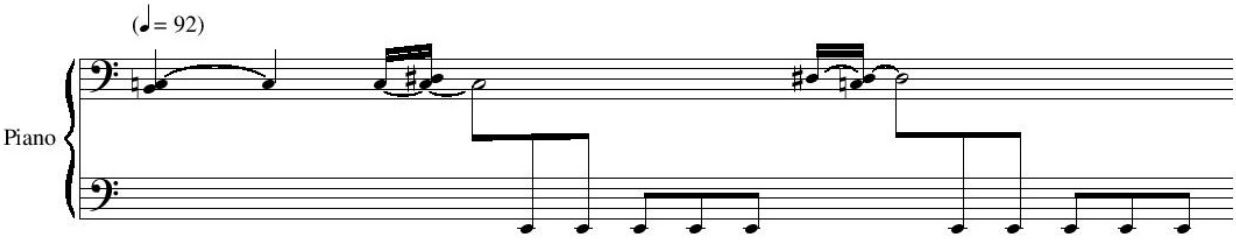
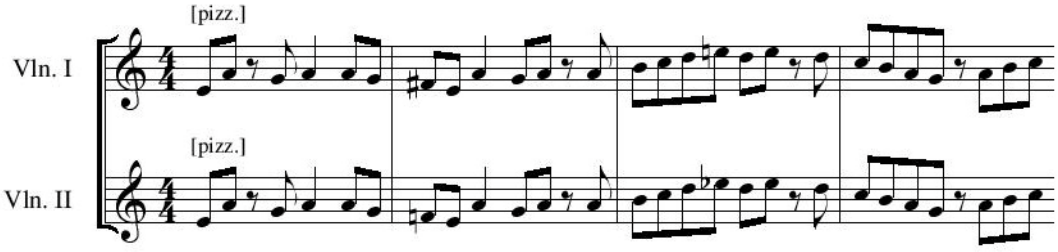


Figure 5.17, *Symphony No. 6* (1959), false unisons simulating microtones



Hovhaness gave some hint as to the rationale underpinning his occasional employment of microtonality in the front matter of the score of *Shepherd of Israel*, a cantata of sorts from 1952, and Hovhaness's only work using a Hebrew text:

> Scales with augmented seconds lose their nobility and become cheap when transferred from their ancient practice to the modern usage of the West because the tempered scale is especially destructive to these larger intervals or rather, the falseness of equal

> temperament is nowhere more obvious than in the cheap modern augmented second: therefore, in this section of my work this scale should be heard in its ancient majesty – and the arrows are used to help the performer attain the true character of the scale.[254]

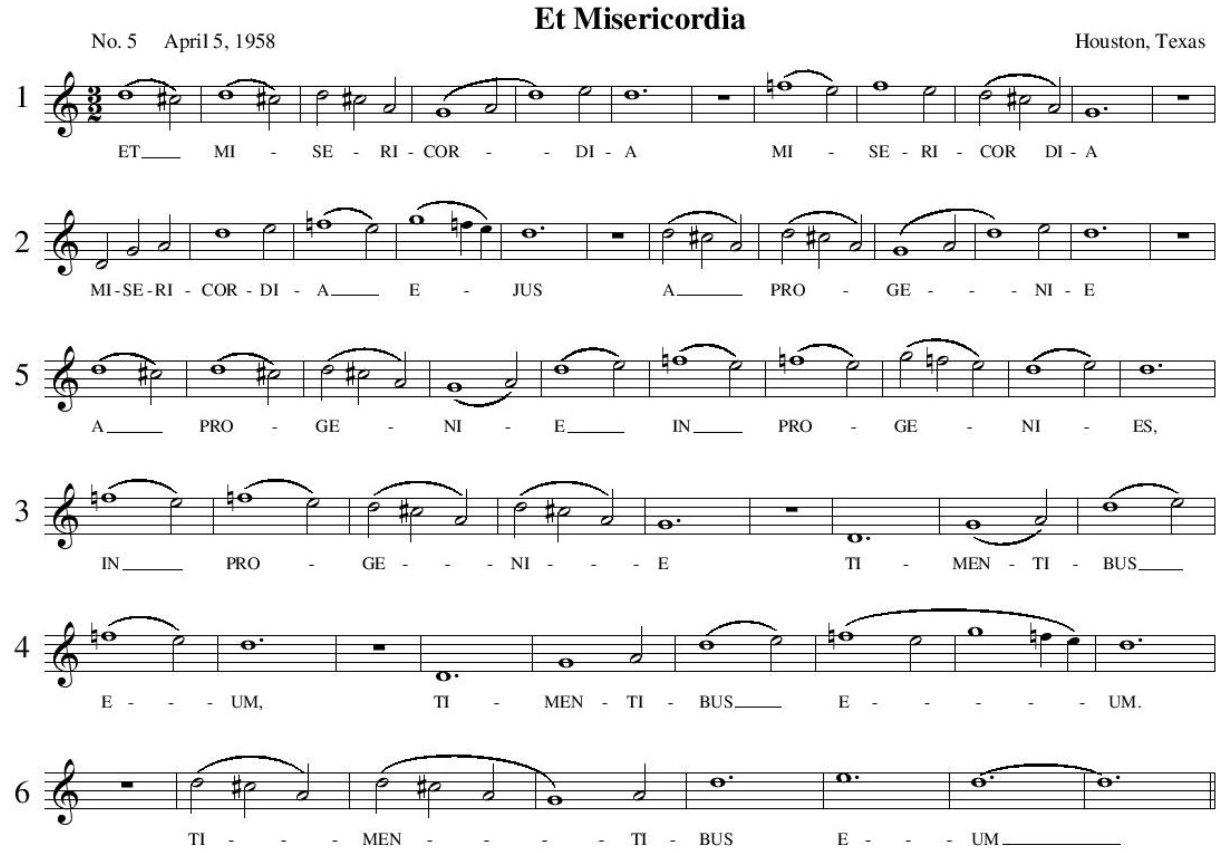
Considering that this work was commissioned by the newly-formed state of Israel, Hovhaness's implication that modern Jewish music had lost something of its essence as an essentially non-Western ancient musical style under the influence of equal temperament is clear enough. This performance note also recalls Hovhaness's confrontation with Bernstein at Tanglewood a decade prior, entailing as it did a misunderstanding over a scale with an augmented second. The sentiment underlying this passage is also reminiscent of Komitas's writings on the subject of tuning.

As sketches for Hovhaness's *Magnificat* survive and have been made available to the author, this work is also a good place to briefly discuss what can be discerned about Hovhaness's compositional process. He is said to have composed away from the piano, often late into the night and/or in various bizarre locations.[255] He also liked to work on several sections of a work simultaneously to explore the various ways in which they might interact.[256] A glance at Hovhaness's sketches for the "Et misericordia" from the Magnificat (set for soprano solo, and utilizing one of Hovhaness's typical three-part textures) shows, unsurprisingly, that the leading melodic line was Hovhaness's initial inspiration (Fig. 5.18). The melody is cast in a six-note subset of the "acoustic scale" (also the 64th *Melakarta* raga). Perhaps less expected is the reordering of the phrases after the fact indicated by numbers written in the left-hand margin.

---

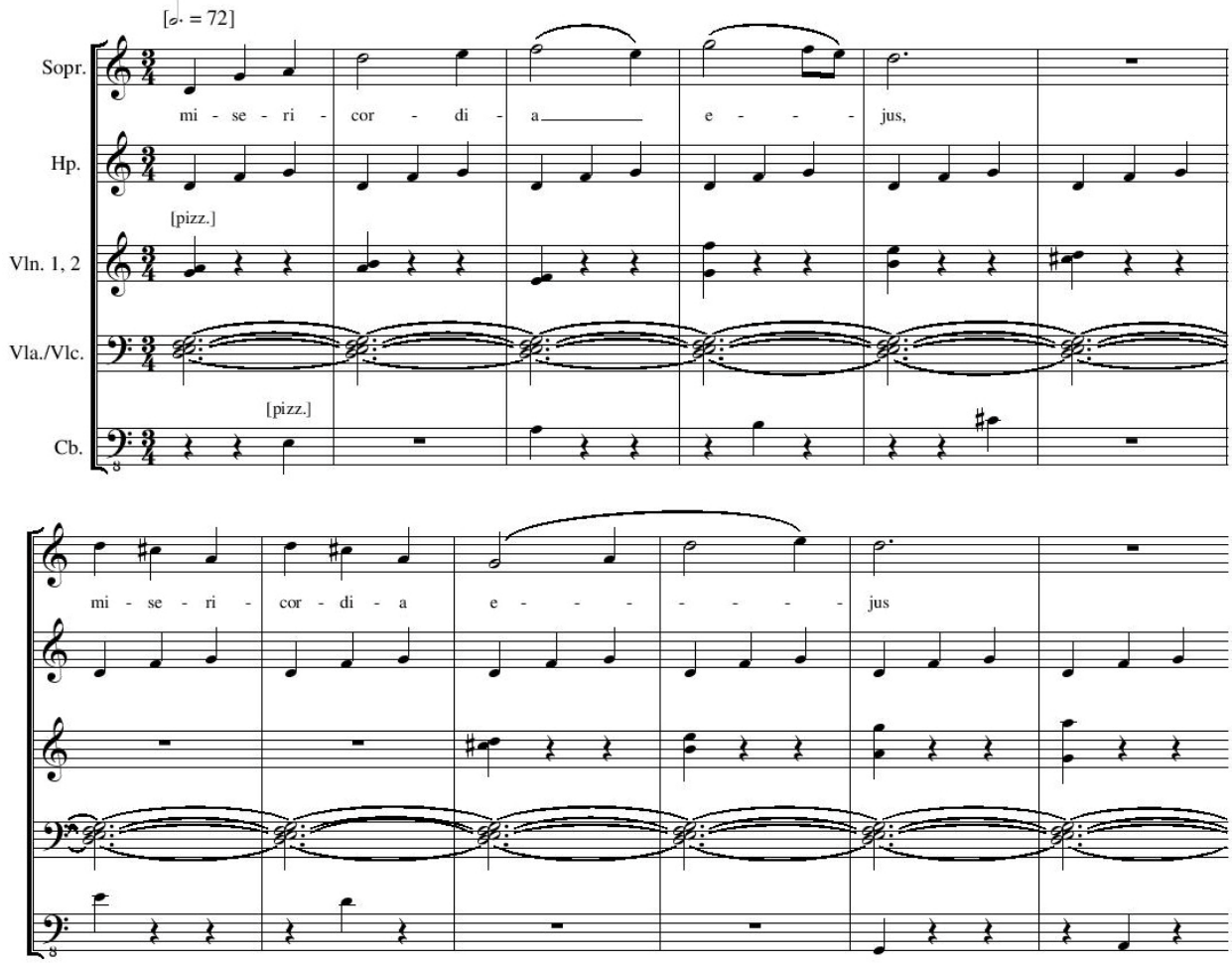
[254] Hovhaness, Alan. *Shepherd of Israel*. Tel Aviv: Israeli Music Publications, 1953.
[255] Hovhaness, interview, March 1984.
Daniel, "Hovhaness: In and Out of Our Time."
Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[256] Argento, Dominick, *Catalogue Raisonné as Memoir*, 15.

Figure 5.18, *Magnificat* (1958), "Et misericordia," sketch



A comparison with the finished movement (Fig. 5.19) shows that Hovhaness also significantly reworked the way in which the text and music align during the process of completing the final version. Hovhaness's approach to writing for the voice was almost exclusively melodic, and his word setting often has very little to do with the natural rhythms or stresses of the text, be it Latin or English. (This is also an aspect of Hovhaness's music which certain singers themselves have taken the initiative to modify in performance and recordings.) Hovhaness finished out the movement with the addition of sustained support for the melody (a four-note diatonic cluster held in the cellos and an ostinato figure in the harp) and background rhythmic cycles (violin and double bass pizzicato). The change from 3/2 to 3/4 may also indicate that he decided on a quickening of the tempo.

Figure 5.19, *Magnificat* (1958), "Et misericordia"



1958, the year of the composition of the *Magnificat*, was another very successful one for the 47-year-old composer. In January, Robert Shaw conducted *Mysterious Mountain* with the Boston Symphony in Symphony Hall, the first time Hovhaness's music was performed by the Boston Symphony proper and a belated recognition of his stature by the musical establishment of his hometown.[257] *Mysterious Mountain* had its New York premiere the next month, with Stokowski conducting the Symphony of the Air, and soon after it was recorded by the Chicago

[257] Elie, Rudolph. *The Boston Herald*, January 25, 1958.

Symphony under the direction of Fritz Reiner.[258] Despite the Armenian period being almost a decade in the past, Hovhaness gave a concert of Armenian music, including songs of Komitas as well as his own compositions, at the Boston Conservatory (where he had previously taught) in March of 1958. In April, Stokowski conducted the *Easter Cantata* in Houston, where Hovhaness returned later in the year to hear a performance of his *Meditation on Orpheus*, also conducted by Stokowski. He once again spent the summer at Eastman, where his orchestral work *Vision from High Rock* was performed. Finally, 1958 was also the year in which Hovhaness received, from the University of Rochester, the first of several honorary doctorates.[259]

One of Hovhaness's last major scores that can be comfortably situated in the "middle period" is his *Symphony No. 6* of 1959, subtitled "Celestial Gate." This subtitle, borrowed from one of Hermon di Giovanno's "automatic" paintings, seems especially descriptive of a recurring rising and falling chordal passage in the strings (another "mountainous," aspirational gesture, reaching for the heavens). Hovhaness was insistent, however, on the limited nature of programmatic elements in his instrumental music, claiming that the titles of his works were "almost always afterthoughts," and that he wished "to leave everything as vague as possible."[260]

The *Symphony No. 6*, one of Hovhaness's most extraordinary scores, was commissioned by Edward Benjamin, a wealthy southerner who at one time sponsored a composition competition for "music for quiet listening" at the Eastman School.[261] The expressive aims of Hovhaness's symphony were probably guided by Benjamin's love for "quiet" music, although it is likely that this was a task he found very easy to take to heart. Although they are of a very

---

[258] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[259] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[260] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.
Hovhaness, "Giant Melody in Nature and Art."
[261] Hanson, Howard, and the Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra. *Music for Quiet Listening*. Mercury Records, 1959.

subtle sort, and all within the realm of a general quietude, this one-movement symphony is nevertheless full of internal contrasts. It is by no means lacking in formal coherence, as one reviewer seems to have implied when he wrote that *Celestial Gate* was "no symphony," but merely "a tiresome tautology of clichés."[262] It is true that most of Hovhaness's mature compositions bearing the designation "symphony" have little to do with 18th- and 19th-century symphonic form, or the "organic" thematic development, drama, and dynamism which had come to define the genre. Rather, they are generally an assemblage of smaller, self-contained sections, as is the case here. At their most inspired, however, Hovhaness's symphonies of this kind nevertheless display a considered and highly personal approach to large-scale form. In fact, Hovhaness's reliance on short sections, each with a single, distinct character, is an important part of what lends his music its particular, almost Baroque, directness.

An important part of Hovhaness's "personal common practice" related to this was the frequent recurrence of both large and small-scale "stock" modes of musical expression, each with its own distinct affect (one might even venture to call them "topics"). A few of these include hymn-like passages scored for divided strings, "cantorial" melodies loaded with chant-like repeated notes, martial quintuplet figures in the brass, and a peculiar, quick, secco flourish often found punctuating the end of a musical phrase. Others, such as *jhala* and (as will be described in the next chapter) *oibuki*, were derived from non-Western music.

The *Symphony No. 6* is emblematic of this highly sectional approach to form at its most compelling. Although it is comprised of many smaller parts, they recur and interact in subtle

[262] Berry, Wallace. "Review: Symphony No. 6 (Celestial Gate), Op. 173 by Alan Hovhaness." *Notes, Second Series* 19, no. 4 (September 1962): 701–2.

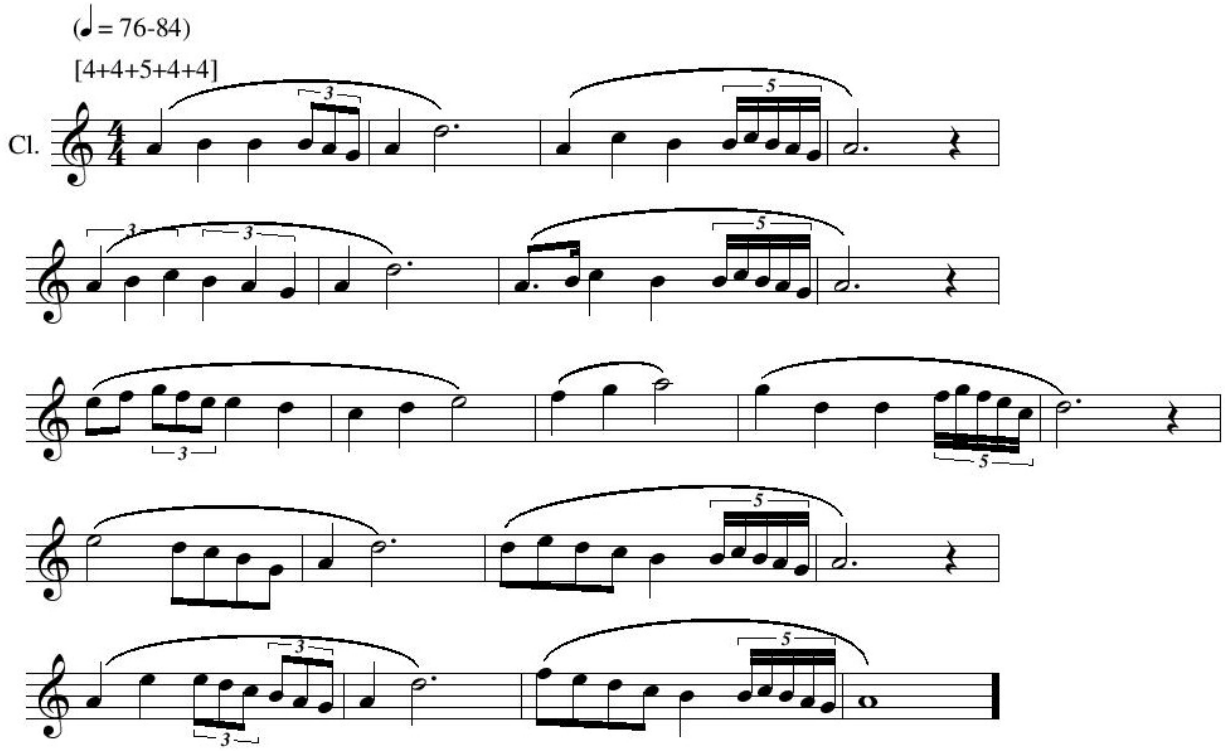
ways, and are tied together by a variety of related details that help lend the symphony formal coherence. (Fig 5.20)

Figure 5.20, *Symphony No. 6* (1959) formal outline

Section:	A	B	C	B	C	B	C^1	C	A^1	B	C	B	D	E	A	F	coda
	bsn. melody	"gate" chords	main theme	""	""	""	fugato	4 vlns.	vla.	""	brass	""	"cantorial"	dance	bsn.	hymn	polychords
Tonality:	F	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	F	F	F	F	F	A	F	F	F

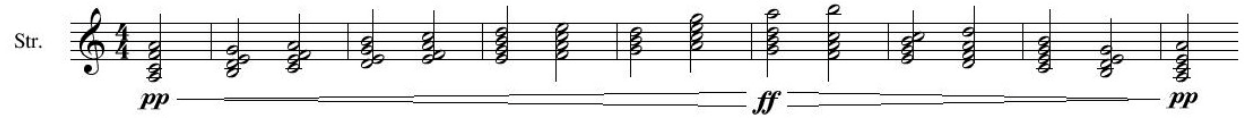
Instead of employing a dynamic, goal-oriented tonal structure (on which even a work as "Eastern" as *Lousadzak* still relied), *Celestial Gate* oscillates gently back and forth between twin tonal poles (A and F) that give the impression they are not so much in opposition as in harmonious coexistence. The first half of the symphony is dominated by subtly varied restatements of a main theme which originated in *Arshalouis*, an uncatalogued work for violin and piano from the 1940s (Fig. 5.21). The phrase structure of this melody may have, like that discussed in the third movement of *Mysterious Mountain*, possessed numerological significance for the composer. In this case, rather than each of the melody's five phrases being five bars long, the "transcendent" five-bar phrase occupies a central position, resulting in a symmetrical 4+4+5+4+4 phrase structure.

Figure 5.21, *Symphony No. 6* (1959) main theme



Another recurring element which knits the symphony together is the arching "celestial gate" chords, which expand in compass on each of their first three iterations, seemingly reaching higher each time before falling to earth (Fig. 5.22).

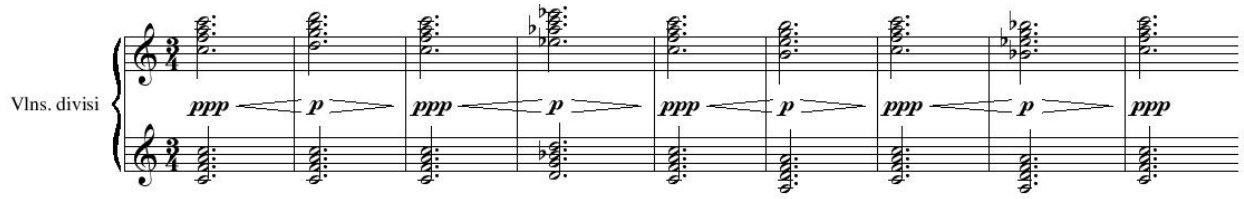
Figure 5.22, *Symphony No. 6* (1959) "gate chords," first iteration



These repeatedly unfulfilled attempts to enter the celestial realm are finally rewarded in the symphony's ethereal coda, which is set almost entirely in the highest register of the orchestra. Particularly striking are a series of polychords for the violins divided in eight parts (Fig. 5.23). These chords harken back to Hovhaness's early experiments with polyharmony from the 1930s,

but now the vertical combinations are strictly limited to chords which are diatonically related. The result is necessarily not only more consonant, but also more consistent.

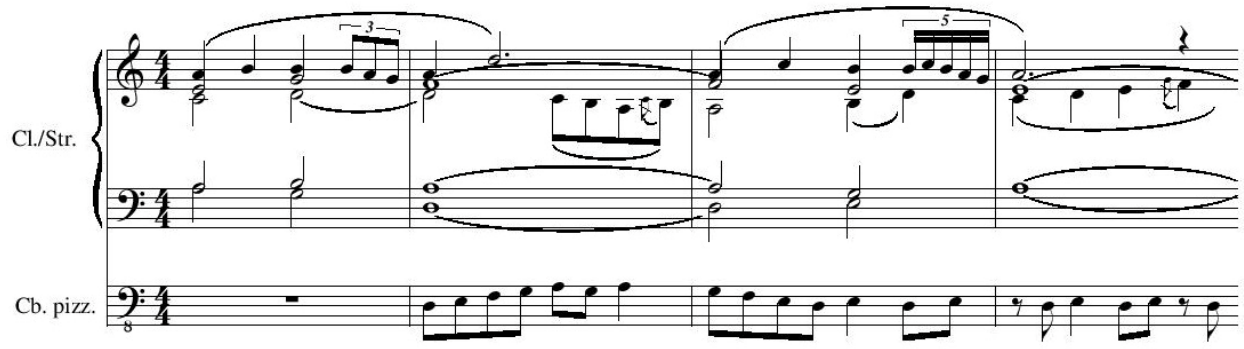
Figure 5.23, *Symphony No. 6* (1959) coda, polychords



A final element which deftly ties together the separate sections of the symphony involves the pizzicato bass line that underpins three of the four statements of the main theme (note also the "Armenian grace notes" in the inner voices accompanying the tune) (Fig. 5.24). In most of Hovhaness's middle period works, such figures are essentially athematic background elements in a complex texture, such as that described at the opening of the first movement of *Mysterious Mountain*. However, as Marco Shirodkar has observed in his overview of the Hovhaness symphonies, this particular figure is in fact a thematically significant foreshadowing of the dance-like allegro in the second half of the symphony.[263] This figure returns yet again in the hymn-like section near the end of the work, having retreated once more into the background, now a gentle reminiscence rather than an unsettling premonition.

[263] Shirodkar, Marco. "Alan Hovhaness Symphonies - Part 2 : Symphonies 1 - 14." Accessed February 19, 2016. http://www.hovhaness.com/Sym_01_14.html.

Figure 5.24, *Symphony No. 6* (1959) thematic foreshadowing in the basses' pizzicato



In addition to the compelling progression of various moods and feelings that give this symphony its affecting emotional arc, it is musical details like those touched on here that tie the symphony (and many of Hovhaness's other most inspired works) together without trumpeting their motivic interrelatedness. It is unsurprising that such details might be overlooked by a critic conditioned by stylistic prejudice to regard unabashedly tonal music with no pretensions to symphonic grandeur as insignificant and poorly constructed by default.

CHAPTER 6 – Travels Abroad (1960-1967)

In June of 1959, Hovhaness received the second of his honorary doctorates from Bates College in Maine, and afterwards spent the remainder of the summer teaching at the Eastman School for the last time.[264] At the height of his prestige, he was able to obtain several grants allowing him to make extended trips abroad for the purpose of studying non-Western music. The effect on Hovhaness's own music was immediate and profound. In September 1959, Hovhaness left for India on a Fulbright grant.[265] It is hard not to think of the United States' attempts to build cultural ties with India in terms of the nation's Cold War neutrality, but it is doubtful that Hovhaness was concerned by such matters, considering that his interest in Indian music already went back more than two decades.

On route from Athens to Tel Aviv, Hovhaness reported seeing a (geographically fantastical) vision of Ancient Armenia unfold outside his cabin window.[266] Upon arriving in India, he was initially based in New Delhi at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, a center for the preservation of Indian culture which still exists today. Frequent performances of his music back in the United States continued unabated, including the premiere of a new opera, *Blue Flame*, in a concert version by the San Antonio Symphony.[267] Hovhaness's notebooks from this time in India are full of attempts to jot down what he heard, and of various notes about the structure of different kinds of Indian music. In October, together with his wife at that time Elizabeth Whittington, Hovhaness attempted to enter Tibet from India by jeep via the Rohtang pass, but

---

[264] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, July 7, 1959.
[265] Ibid., April 20, 1959.
[266] Hovhaness, Alan. "Alan Hovhaness Flies Over Old Armenia." *Hairenik Weekly*, December 17, 1959.
[267] Ibid.

was turned away.[268] On New Year's Day 1960, he participated in an all Hovhaness concert under the auspices of the Madras (Chennai) Music Festival, which included the premiere of *Nagooran*, a work written exclusively for South Indian instruments that had been commissioned by All India Radio (he later made an alternate version rescored for Western instruments).[269] Hovhaness taught each part to the Indian musicians (who were not fluent in Western notation) by rote. February saw two more Hovhaness concerts in Chennai, coincidentally a city with a long history of Armenian diaspora activity. One of these included both the premiere of the *Arjuna Symphony* (No. 8, actually a renamed version of a work written during the 1940s) and a performance by Hovhaness himself at the piano improvising on Indian scales.[270] The Indian musicologist P. Sambamoorthy, who had spent time in the West and instructed Henry Cowell in Carnatic music during the 1930s, wrote of the concert that Hovhaness's music represented a "new fertile untrodden field" in cross-cultural musical exploration.[271] He identified the mode of the symphony, which in fact changes throughout the course of the piece as was typical of Hovhaness's music of the 1940s, as being centered on *natabhairavi* (the Carnatic equivalent of natural minor, indeed the mode in which the symphony begins and ends). Another Indian reviewer wrote that he "was greatly impressed by the remarkable capacity of Dr. Hovhaness to understand and assimilate the Indian system of music and successfully attempt to do something original and creative … [It] is noteworthy that an orchestra consisting of Western instruments could so successfully depict the intricacies of Karnataka ragas."[272]

In March, the Indian sojourn came to an end when Hovhaness flew to London for several recording sessions. Much of the rest of the year was actually spent in Switzerland, another

[268] Dikijian, "Alan Hovhaness: Passage to India," 23.
[269] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[270] Daniel, Oliver. Broadcast Music, Inc., April 1960. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.
[271] Hovhaness, Alan. *Symphony No. 8, "Arjuna."* New York: C. F. Peters, 1960.
[272] Ibid.

mountainous country in which Hovhaness spent a good deal of time off and on throughout the 1960s. He rented a house for a year in Kriens, a suburb of Lucerne at the foot of Mt. Pilatus (indeed, a local legend about the mountain being the resting place of Pontius Pilate later provided the inspiration for one of Hovhaness's operas).[273] Hovhaness's decision to relocate to Switzerland was perhaps influenced by the fact that over the coming years an increasing number of his works were recorded in England, and he wanted to be based close by. For the most part, however, it seems that as soon as he was financially able, Hovhaness wanted to move somewhere that he could live surrounded by mountains. Hovhaness often spoke of Wagner, a composer he admired greatly, in terms of his relationship to the mountains of Switzerland, claiming he could hear their presence in the majestic music of *Parsifal*.[274]

It was also in 1960 that Hovhaness made his first trip to East Asia, although it was a relatively brief one and left little time for musical study. Mostly, the trip was filled with performances. After a brief stint in South Korea, Hovhaness traveled to Japan, where he visited Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, and Yokohama.[275] The concerts he conducted with the Tokyo Symphony and Japan Philharmonic were broadcast on Japanese television, and included the second and eighth symphonies.[276] Much of Hovhaness's most important exposure to Japanese music actually took place later in Hawaii. He arrived there in February for a semester at the University of Hawaii (then, as now, its composition department was focused on possibilities for combining the music of the East and West, a reflection of Hawaii's own cultural makeup).[277] The Honolulu Symphony welcomed Hovhaness with a performance of his *Vision from High Rock.*

---

[273] Dikijian, "Alan Hovhaness: Passage to India," 25.
[274] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[275] Ingraham, "An Analytic Investigation of Four Works by Alan Hovhaness with Emphasis on His Mysterious Mountain (Symphony No. 2)," 14.
[276] Daniel, Oliver. "Alan Hovhaness to Conduct Major Japanese Orchestras." Broadcast Music, Inc., 1960. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.
[277] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, Feb. 15, 1960.

During this stay, Hovhaness studied Korean and Japanese instruments, and most importantly studied Japanese *Gagaku* with Masatoshi Shamoto, playing in the university's *Gagaku* ensemble under his direction.[278] Hovhaness's residency at the University of Hawaii culminated in May with the premiere of *Wind Drum*, a cantata of sorts written to accompany a performance by the Korean dancer Hall Pai Hum.[279]

In July, Hovhaness returned to Japan on a Rockefeller Grant, this time for a more extended stay. Based in Tokyo, he attended many *Bunraku* and *Noh* theatre performances, and continued his studies of *Gagaku* with Masataro Togi, an imperial court musician.[280] As was the case during his stay in India, he quickly composed a work attempting to incorporate what he had learned for performance on site, in this case the cantata *Fuji*, for women's voices and small orchestra, which also set Japanese poetry.[281] Hovhaness also traveled to Korea to study *Ah-ak* (Korean court music, related to *Gagaku*). He published an effusive article in *Korea Journal* praising the music he encountered.[282] In January 1963, Hovhaness conducted a performance of his *Symphony No. 8* with the Seoul Philharmonic. The following February his new opera, *Spirit of the Avalanche*, was premiered in Tokyo.[283]

One source claims that at this juncture "Hovhaness found his music much better known in Japan than in the United States."[284] There seems to be little evidence that this might still be the case; Hovhaness is today best remembered in the United States and in Armenia. Such reports back in the United States may have been an attempt to bolster Hovhaness's image as a musical

[278] Kinnear, Tyler. "Alan Hovhaness and the Creation of the 'Modern Free Noh Play.'" University of Oregon, 2009, 18.
[279] Winters, Lee. "Wind Drum's Premiere Excites Interest." *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, May 30, 1962.
[280] Kinnear, "Alan Hovhaness and the Creation of the 'Modern Free Noh Play,'" 20.
[281] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[282] Hovhaness, Alan. "Korean Music Is the Most Expressive, Sublime and Free in the World." *Korea Journal* 3, no. 3 (March 1963): 29, 32.
[283] Kinnear, "Alan Hovhaness and the Creation of the 'Modern Free Noh Play,'" 109.
[284] Kastendieck, Miles. "Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, Fifth Edition," 1046–48. G. Schirmer, 1964.

explorer who had absorbed "authentic" non-Western musical traditions to such an extent that had convinced the locals. Nevertheless, the surviving responses of local critics do seem to attest to the fact that Hovhaness's music was quite well received in Japan during this time. His popularity and the warmth with which he was received were detailed at length in a piece in the *New York Times*.[285] Hovhaness was reportedly "lionized" by the Japanese press.[286] *The Asahi Evening News* wrote of a performance of the *Symphony No. 3* that, "There is no element of brutality in the Hovhaness symphony … he manages to get a feeling of exaltation without resorting to ugliness or sarcasm. In this respect he is virtually alone among his colleagues."[287] This is strikingly reminiscent of many of the reviews of performances of *Mysterious Mountain* in the United States during the previous decade which had praised it for its resistance to modernism. Another Japanese reviewer wrote of Hovhaness's arrival in his country that, "the man really capable of solving this problem (the blending of Eastern and Western styles) in an artistically logical way is present in Japan."[288]

The *Gagaku* instruments with which Hovhaness became intimately familiar during his time in Japan and Hawaii included the *shō* and *hichiriki* (he later remembered having a special affinity for the latter).[289] These are not actually the first non-Western instruments that Hovhaness had studied (although it seems he never really became proficient on any of them). Back in his Boston days he had also played at the *sitar* and *veena*, as well as the *Saz* and *Oud*.[290] He even worked at learning the *Shamisen*. Although many of them remained unpublished, Hovhaness

---

[285] Parmenter, Ross. "ALAN HOVHANESS POPULAR IN JAPAN; U.S. Composer Conducts the Philharmonic in Telecast of Two of His Works." *The New York Times*, May 2, 1960.
[286] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[287] Michaelyan, "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness."
[288] Ingraham, "An Analytic Investigation of Four Works by Alan Hovhaness with Emphasis on His Mysterious Mountain (Symphony No. 2)," 13.
[289] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Howard, Richard, October 26, 1979.
[290] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.

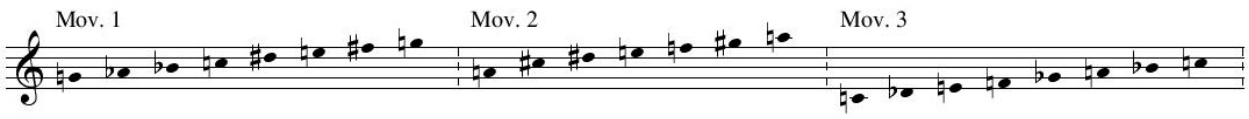
composed a relatively numerous series of works either including non-Western instruments or exclusively written for them. He generally made only simple, melodic use of these instruments, rarely exploring in any real depth their particular characteristics, and none of these pieces can be counted among Hovhaness's most significant scores. Smaller examples include the *Sonata for Ryūteki and Shō*, two somewhat later pieces for Javanese Gamelan ensemble (written at the request of Lou Harrison), and sonatas for *koto* and "ch'in" (the Chinese *guqin*). Larger examples include two symphonies (numbers 16 and 35) for combinations of Korean instruments with the Western orchestra (both of which were the result of commissions from Korea), and *Mystery of the Holy Martyrs*, a concerto for *oud* and string orchestra. *Shambala*, a concerto for violin, sitar, and orchestra initially intended for Ravi Shankar and Yehudi Menuhin (that until recently went unperformed) features a sitar part which is entirely improvised, with only the changes of mode and the general progression of different musical characters indicated by the composer.

Much more important were the myriad technical devices that Hovhaness absorbed from non-Western musical practice and applied to his own compositions for Western instruments, some of which have already been expounded upon in chapter 4. Such materials became increasingly prominent in Hovhaness's music from this time, which I will refer to as his "Eastern period," for lack of a better name. The first large-scale work from this period was the *Symphony No. 15* of 1962. (The sudden jump in numbering is largely due to the fact that during the intervening years Hovhaness had revised and reclassified several of his larger works from the preceding decades as symphonies.) The fifteenth, a completely new work, was subtitled "Silver Pilgrimage," after the Indian novel by M. Anantanarayanan. The symphony shows not only the influence of Hovhaness's renewed contact with Indian music, but also his deepening knowledge of *Gagaku*, particularly in its consistent pan-modal approach. The work, originally written for the

Louisville Orchestra, was given its New York premiere by Leopold Stokowski and the American Symphony Orchestra in Carnegie Hall on March 28, 1963.

The symphony's scalar material is distinct from the modes which had for the most part characterized Hovhaness's music up to this point, indicating that his renewed contact with Indian music had once again expanded his horizons in regards to the breadth of possible modes. That said, only the second movement's mode (a six-note subset of *Latangi*, the 63rd *Melakarta* raga) can be classified according to the South Indian system. Although the modes found in the first and third movements could have been drawn from other ragas that Hovhaness claimed to have recorded during his stay in India, it is more likely that they were invented by the composer. Each of the symphony's first three movements uses only one mode throughout, completely without any "chromatic" alteration (Fig. 6.1). The use of a single mode unaltered for long stretches was new to Hovhaness's music, and seems almost certainly to have been the product of his extensive contact with the music of India, Japan, and Korea during this time. In certain cases, this modal "consistency" could be extreme. *Wind Drum*, for example, uses only one six-note mode for its entire duration of around half an hour. The simplicity of the modal material in the *Symphony No. 15* is matched by an extreme formal simplicity: each movement is cast in either a simple ternary or binary form.

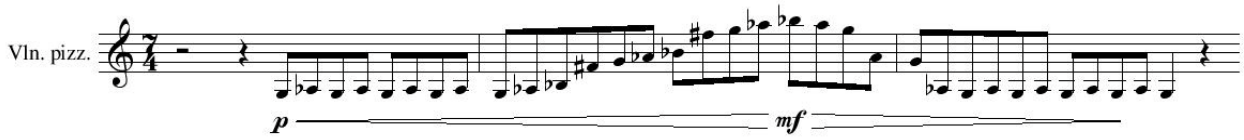
Figure 6.1, *Symphony No. 15* (1962), modes, movements 1-3



The result of the combination of this new modal consistency with Hovhaness's stock three-part texture can be observed at the outset of the first movement. The main melody, played

by the violas doubled variously by English horn, oboe, and bassoon, slowly rises in register as it completes the mode note-by-note. The "drone" elements are provided by a four-note cluster in the cellos (G, Ab, Bb, C, the "lower half" of the mode) and by "spirit murmur" pizzicato in the second violins, again restricted to the pitch content of the same seven-note mode. The cyclical elements are, as before, sonically distinct from the other layers. The timpani plays a quiet quintuplet flourish that recurs every fourteen beats, while the basses play a 43-beat cycle pizzicato. The final cyclical element is yet another piece of "mountainous" musical symbolism, a rising and falling seventeen-beat pizzicato figure in the first violins that recurs every 39 beats (Fig. 6.2). Once again, it consists of pitches entirely confined to the movement's mode.

Figure 6.2, *Symphony No. 15* (1962), first movement, cyclical pizzicato figure



The interaction of this figure with the spirit murmur element is carefully calculated. As its first notes are identical to those on which the second violins have already been hovering, it seems to gradually emerge from the murmuring background on each appearance and slowly recede back into it at its close. The intermittent recurrence of this figure, rising up in different metrical positions over the main theme before subsiding into the hazy background, is akin to the effect of a long scroll painting of a mountain range shrouded in mist. (A Japanese critic made just such a comparison in an attempt to describe how Hovhaness's "static" conception of form differed from the Western symphonic norm, the effect of which he likened to a photograph.[291])

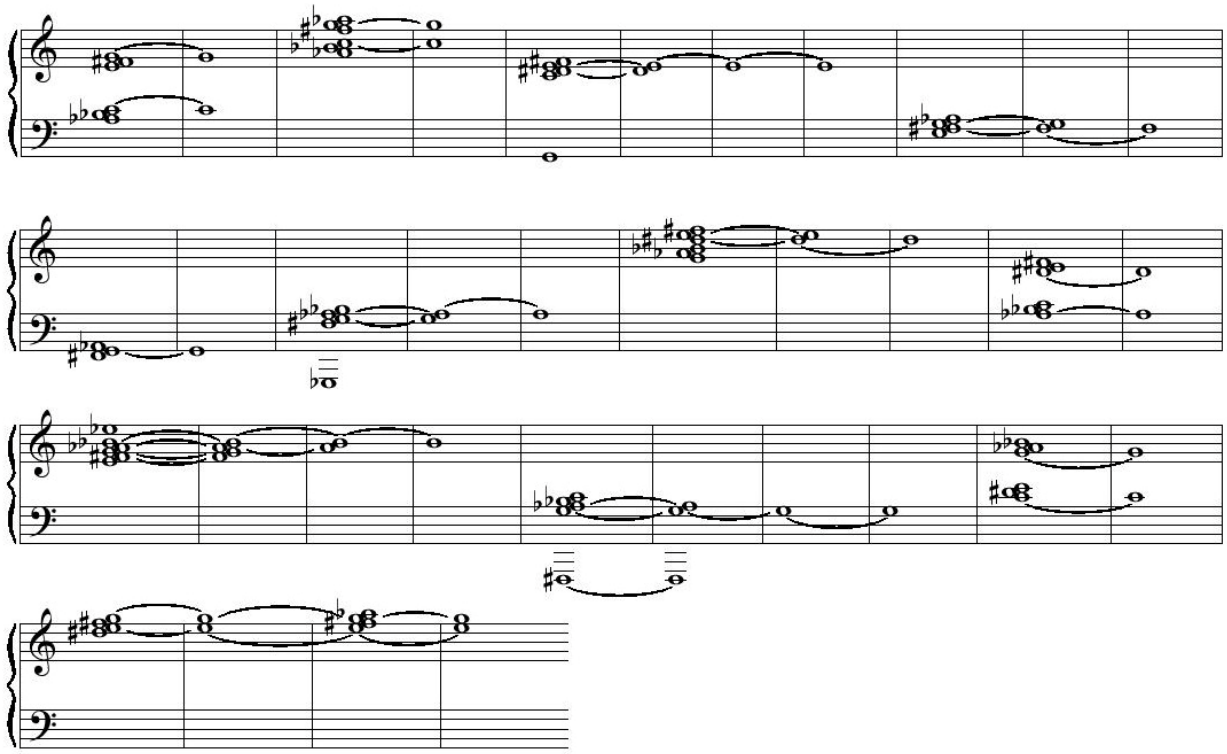
[291] Michaelyan, "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness."

This new pan-modal approach rendered Hovhaness's "complex" textures somewhat less "complex" than before. The "automatic" cyclical background elements are now distinguished from the foreground elements only through timbre and not through pitch, rendering them somewhat less colorful, although perhaps more thoroughly integrated. There is a tendency for such arrangements as the one described in the preceding paragraphs to feel as though they become somewhat routine in the music of this period.

Despite the symphony's Indian subtitle, the cluster chords which make up much of the first movement's central section (Fig. 6.3) are evidence of one of the earliest specific techniques gleaned from Japanese music to make their way into Hovhaness's work. These clusters are once again completely confined to the notes of the mode. This texture, in which certain notes of the chord are released while others are sustained, is modeled on the way in which the Japanese *shō* (mouth organ) is often played. Hovhaness, in a lecture he gave on Japanese music at Elmira College, referred to this as the "dragonfly" effect, comparing the effect of the dissonances resulting from such textures to that of a dragonfly landing on the surface of the water before taking flight again.[292] Although Rosner interpreted this as a harmonic device, the significance of such figures is in fact primarily textural.[293]

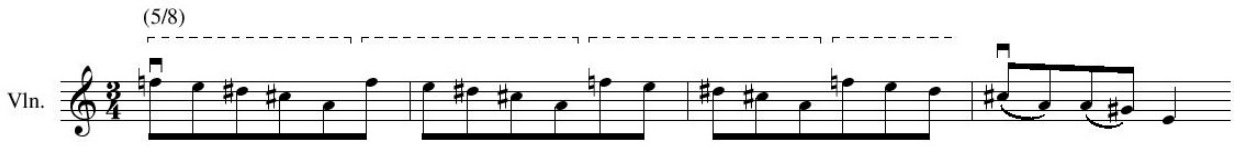
[292] Hovhaness, "Giant Melody in Nature and Art."
[293] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 99-100.

Figure 6.3, *Symphony No. 15* (1962), first movement, clusters



A common rhythmic feature of melodies in the music of this period can be observed in the symphony's second movement. Although the movement is in 3/4, the violins' graceful dance-like melody temporarily breaks away into a repeated five-note pattern which implies 5/8 time for three bars' duration (Fig. 6.4). As the melody then resolves back into the main rhythmic stream, this technique might be seen as an outgrowth of the local polyrhythms discussed in the music of the Armenian period (see Fig. 4.25), although now the context is a melodic one.

Figure 6.4, *Symphony No. 15* (1962), second movement, melodic polyrhythm



The symphony's finale contrasts with the preceding three movements not only because it does not stick to one mode throughout, but also because it contains imitative counterpoint and triadic harmony. These are elements which soon largely disappeared from Hovhaness's musical language for the remainder of this style period. Hovhaness smooths out what otherwise could have been a jarring contrast between three pan-modal and essentially monophonic movements and a finale in a contrapuntal, harmonic style by first introducing the fourth movement's main theme against a background of diatonic clusters which recall the pan-modal treatment of melodic material found in the rest of the symphony (and are also strongly reminiscent of the kind of harmonic background typically provided by the *shō*) (Fig. 6.5). Over the course of the transition to the fourth movement's central section, these clusters gradually evaporate, replaced by a sort of fugal exposition (Fig. 6.6). (The melodic material here may look familiar, it was recycled from *Etchmiadzin*.) The final restatement of this melody is once again in a pandiatonic "*Gagaku* style," giving the movement a clear ternary structure despite its being monothematic.

Figure 6.5, *Symphony No. 15* (1962), fourth movement, pandiatonic setting of the theme

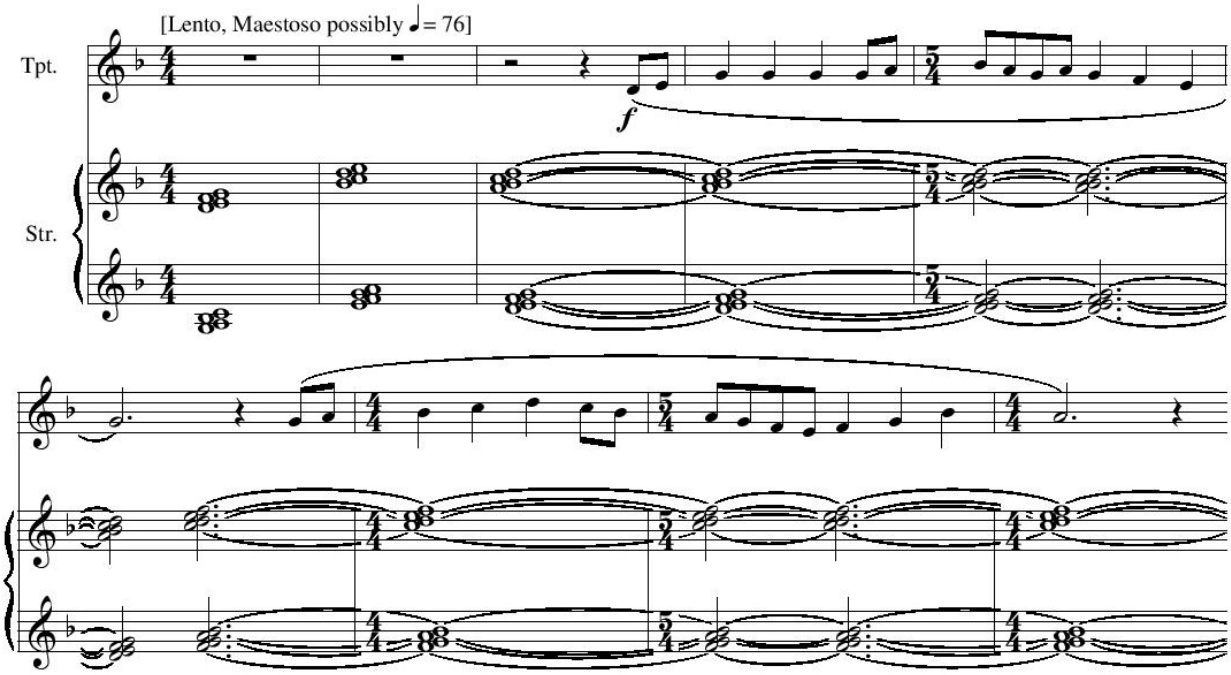
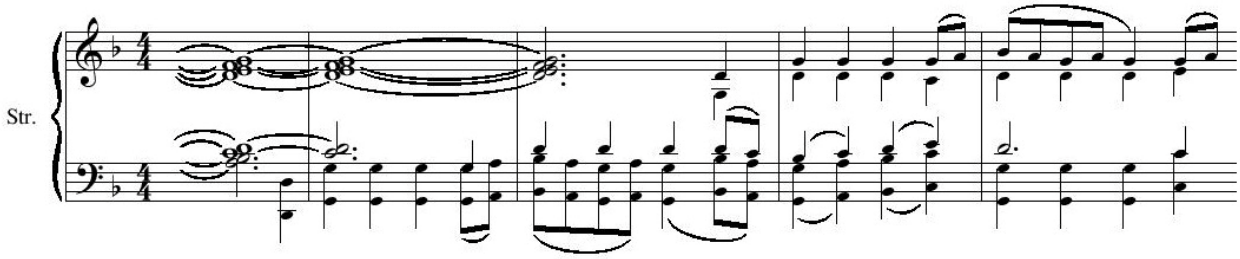


Figure 6.6, *Symphony No. 15* (1962), fourth movement, transition from polymodality to counterpoint



Because of the new stylistic orientation of the "Eastern" period, combined with the fact that Hovhaness's works were now being published en masse by C. F. Peters, one of his most important compositional preoccupations during the early 1960s was the revision and (re)publication of earlier works. In some cases, these revisions could be quite drastic, as with the *Variations and Fugue* for orchestra, based on a movement from one of the early discarded symphonies. The *Piano Quintet*, another one of the more radical examples of a revision of an

early piece, is an excellent work in which to examine how Hovhaness approached this task. Its source material is among the oldest of all the early works that Hovhaness revised and published around this time. The quintet is based on the *Suite for Pianoforte and Strings* of 1927 which was briefly discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. At the time this music became the *Piano Quintet*, it was already thirty-five years old This was not the first time this particular childhood work had furnished Hovhaness with the framework for the composition of a new piece, seemingly written "on top" of the old one. The *Concerto No. 9* for piano and strings of 1954 had also been based on the suite. As might be expected considering the magnitude of Hovhaness's musical evolution over the intervening years, the differences between the original and the two revised versions are vast.

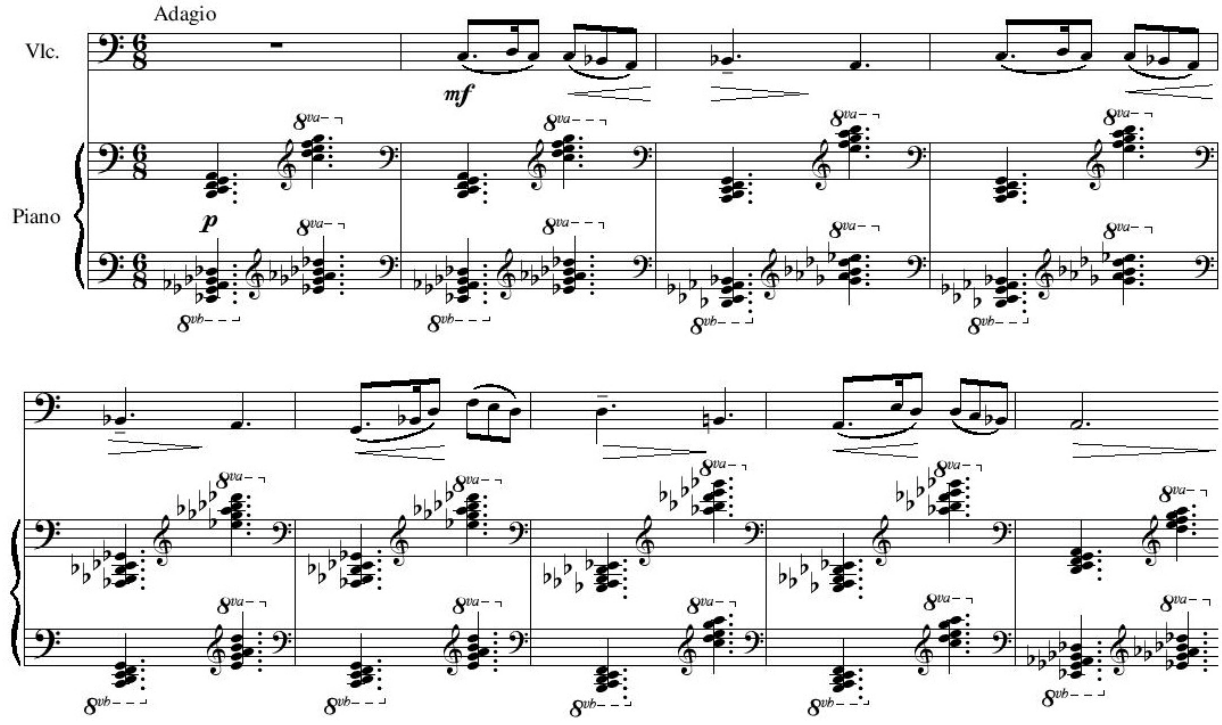
The most prominent aspect of these revisions is the addition of cluster chords in the piano, which largely replace the sparse modal harmony of the original. The resulting admixture of simple, tonal melodic material with a dense accompaniment of clusters is somewhat reminiscent of the early piano works of Henry Cowell. The after-the-fact "dissonating" of earlier music also brings to mind the unlikely example of Ives. Hovhaness, however, was unmoved by the "race-to-the-patent-office" modernist imperative which was clearly part of what drove these other two composers, and so he never made any attempt to backdate these revised versions or pass them off as originals. In a short article about the revision of one of his piano works (the *Macedonian Mountain Dance No. 2*) along these same lines, Hovhaness was frank about the relationship between the revised version and the original, writing that he "fixed the piece – shortened it, used stronger cluster chords, sticking to one mode only…"[294] The preferences expressed for cluster

[294] Skaggs, Hazel. "How a Composer Revises His Work: A Rewritten Piece by Alan Hovhaness." *Clavier*, June 1971, 21.

chords and sticking to one mode are strongly suggestive of Hovhaness's pan-modal leanings during this "Eastern" period.

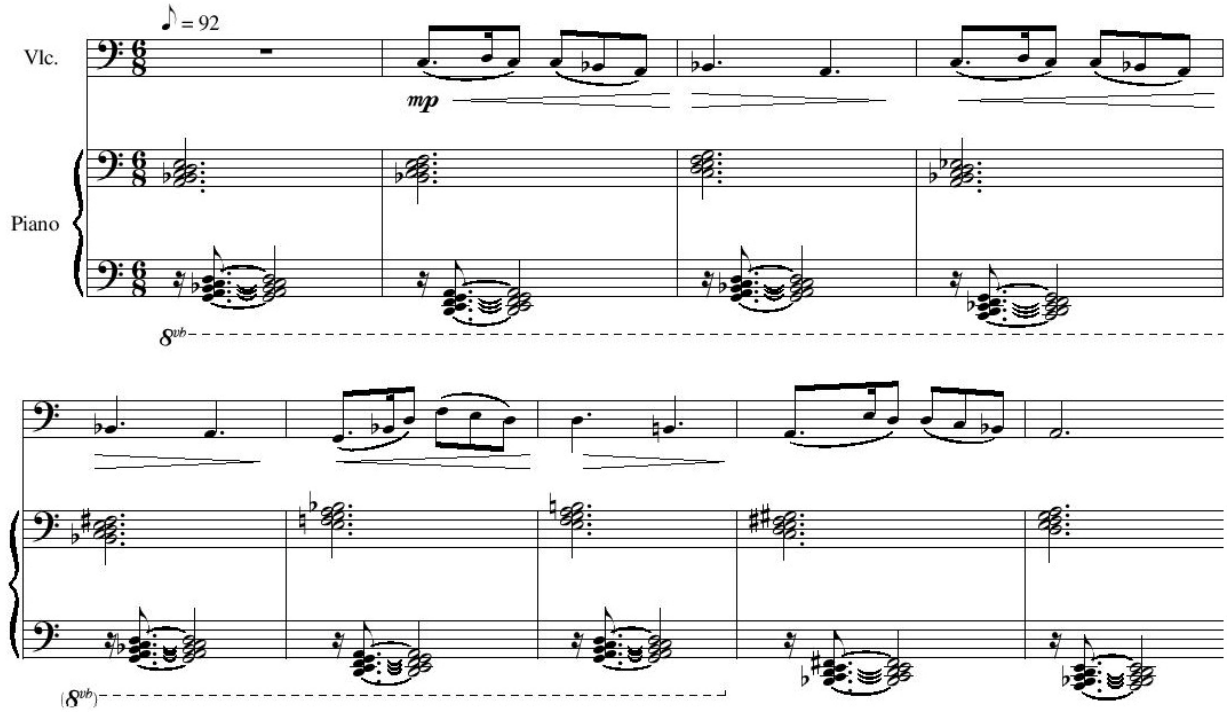
A comparison between Fig. 1.4, Fig. 6.7, and Fig. 6.8 shows the evolution of the same passage over three different versions. This excerpt opens the second movement of the original suite, and the third movement of the two later versions, which include newly added first movements. The cello's melody is completely unaltered in all three versions. In the *Concerto No. 9*, Hovhaness replaced the piano's original arpeggiated accompaniment figure with clusters (arranged in pseudo-polytonal white/black key layers) spread across the entire compass of the piano. The resulting texture is an "open" one, and there seems to be no particular correspondence between the changing voicing of the clusters and the progression of the melody.

Figure 6.7, *Concerto No. 9* (1954) second movement, opening



The piano accompaniment to this passage was again replaced by clusters in the *Piano Quintet*, although the effect is somewhat subtler. Two five-note clusters per bar (one in each hand) combine to form verticalizations of different seven-note modes which loosely follow the progress of the harmony in the original. These modes are for the most part diatonic. However, in the bar which had originally contained a French augmented-sixth chord, Hovhaness uses two five-note clusters which combine to form a complete whole-tone collection, of which the original harmony was a four-note subset. This final version is therefore actually slightly closer in spirit to the original suite.

Figure 6.8, *Piano Quintet* (1962) second movement, opening



In 1963, Hovhaness sought to take stock of what he had learned of Japanese music, working on a "book" on *Gagaku* (actually a collection of detailed transcriptions of thirteen

Gagaku pieces which was completed, but remained unpublished).[295] In the same year, Hovhaness collaborated again with Martha Graham, producing the ballet *Circe*, which later became the *Symphony No. 18*.[296] This was also the year in which Hovhaness began releasing recordings of his music on his own record label, "Poseidon." Although he later lost ownership of the company in a divorce, this was a major step in his entrepreneurial promotion of his work, ensuring his ability to continue living off composition alone for the rest of his life. Many of the recordings of Hovhaness's music now available are in fact re-releases of these Poseidon recordings. They were made at the composer's expense, and so even using relatively inexpensive British studio musicians as a way to work around restrictive union regulations back in the United States, rehearsal time was limited. Hovhaness for the most part conducted these recordings himself.

In 1964, Hovhaness produced a new orchestral work, *Floating World*, which was profoundly influenced by his studies of *Gagaku*. Hovhaness described *Gagaku* as a "harmonic and contrapuntal music" that made "sophisticated use of dissonance," and both these aspects are in evidence in *Floating World*.[297] Although the work is named after a Japanese Buddhist concept, Hovhaness also revealed in an interview that the piece, in particular the long, ghostly march episode in its second half, was inspired by the story of the battle of *Dan-no-ura*.[298]

What Hovhaness conceived of as the "harmonic and contrapuntal aspect" of *Gagaku* is probably most accurately described as a highly developed kind of heterophony. Hovhaness modeled the climax of this symphonic work very closely on the characteristic heterophonic texture found in *Gagaku*. This texture is comprised of three main parts, each contributing one

[295] Hovhaness to Howard, Richard, October 26, 1979.
[296] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[297] Hovhaness, "Giant Melody in Nature and Art."
[298] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.

element to the heterophonic result. The *hichiriki* and *ryūteki* (a kind of flute) play the main melodic line in slightly differing versions, already a heterophony of sorts. The *shō*, which generally plays five or six-note chords resembling "modal clusters" built around the primary notes of the melodic line, provides a kind of harmonic background. Unlike a typical chordal accompaniment in Western music, this harmonic part is confined to a high register, often unfolding above the melody. Finally, plucked instruments including the *biwa* and *koto* play a *secco* outline of the main sostenuto melodic line, completing the heterophonic complex (Fig. 6.9).

Hovhaness's orchestral realization of this same texture is reproduced in Fig. 6.10. The main melodic line is taken by the winds and brass (the doublings therein contain slight inconstancies, although perhaps not as dramatic as those typically occurring between the *hichiriki* and *ryūteki*). The background harmony is provided by thick chords in the strings, whose highest pitches outline the most important notes of the melody (in *Gagaku*, it is generally the lowest pitches of the melody which anchor the harmony). Finally, various non-sostenuto heterophonic variants are played by the double basses pizzicato, the vibraphone, and the chimes, fulfilling the role of the *koto* and *biwa* (note in particular the resemblance between the *koto* and double bass parts in the two examples).

Figure 6.9, *Etenraku*, excerpt (percussion not included)[299]

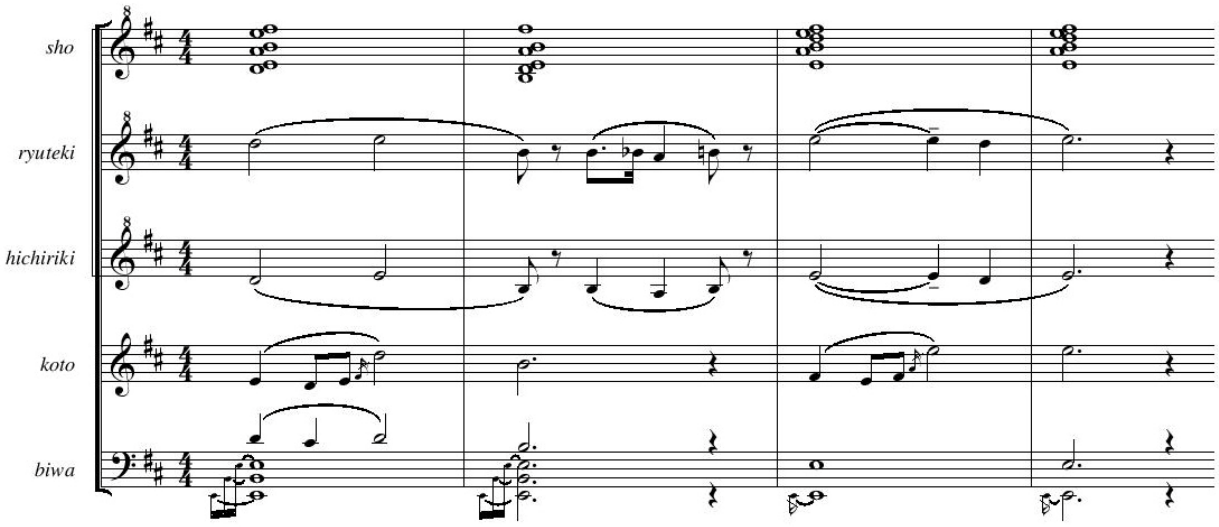
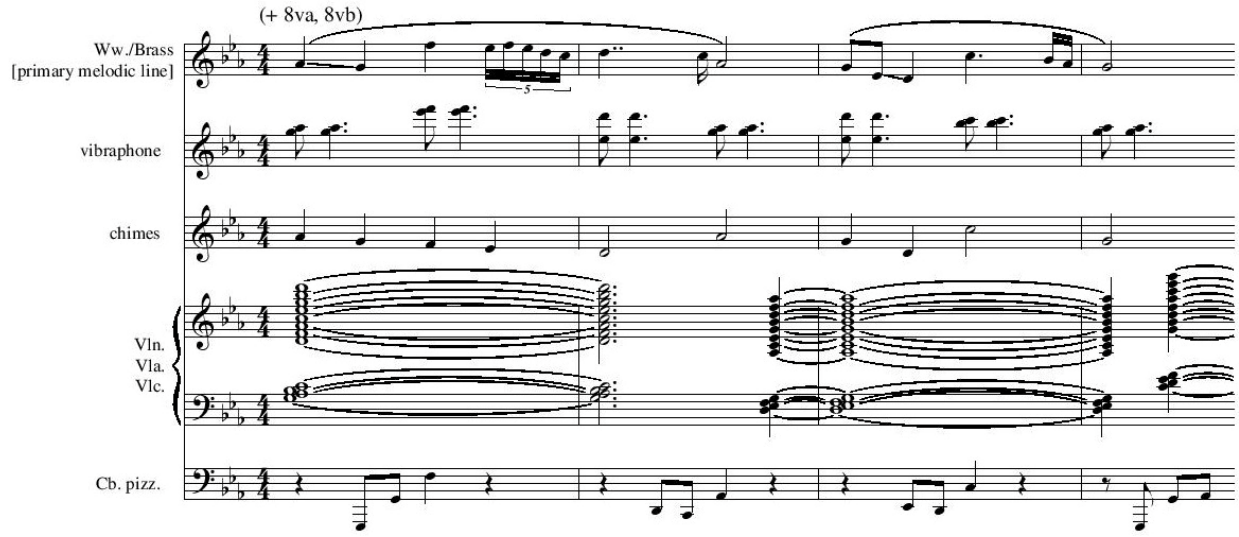


Figure 6.10, *Floating World* (1964), heterophonic texture



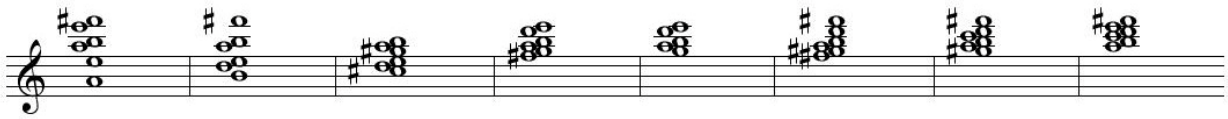
Heterophony of this sort is quite distinct from that observed in *Lousadzak*, and much more aggressive in the rhythmic displacement of its constituent parts. The study of *Gagaku* was the impetus for this shift. Textures of this kind also make up the bulk of the *Symphony No. 17*,

[299] Rose, and Kapuscinski. "String Orchestration." Stanford Gagaku Project. Accessed February 19, 2016. https://ccrma.stanford.edu/groups/gagaku/combinations/mixstg-en.html.

whose curious ensemble of “metal instruments” (partly a response to the circumstances of the commission) was also designed to contain different parts that could fulfill these same general roles. In this symphony, the three trombones take up the main melodic line (their sliding tones evoking a kinship with the *hichiriki*), six flutes play the “*shō* chords," and metallic percussion once again provide a punctuating heterophonic outline of the main melody.

The *shō* was particularly influential on Hovhaness, and he described its tone as “perhaps the most celestial sound in all music.”[300] (Benjamin Britten also studied the instrument, which provided him a model for the organ part in *Curlew River*.) Hovhaness’s sketchbooks contain detailed transcriptions of the various chords produced by the instrument (Fig. 6. 11).

Figure 6.11, *shō* chords from Hovhaness’s sketchbook



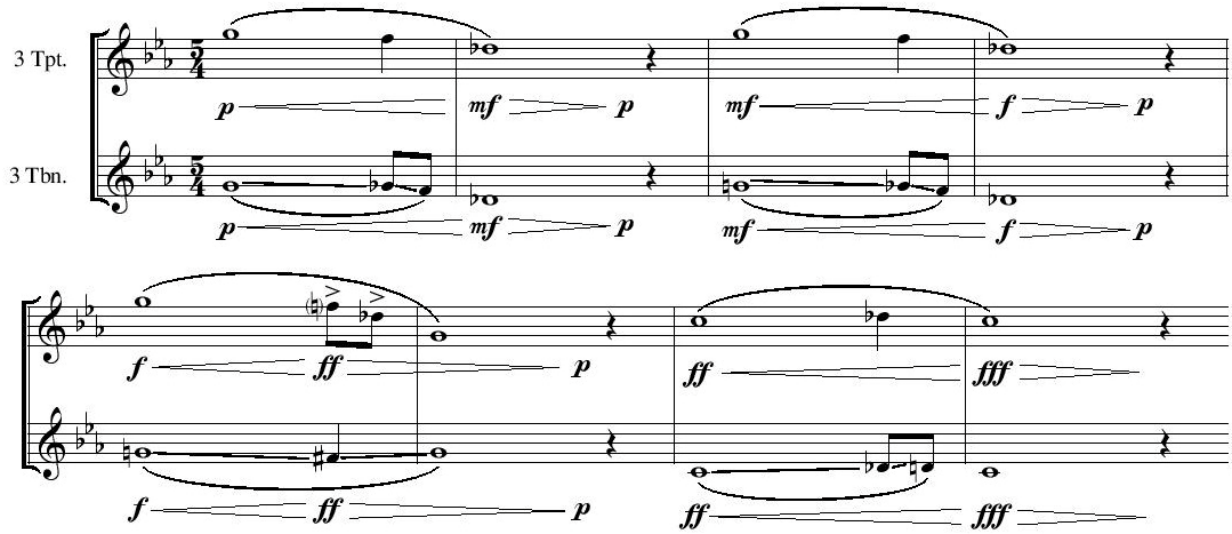
The idea of the harmony being “above the melody” (or at least restricted to a high register) was particularly stimulating for Hovhaness.[301] His claim that “the harmony of *Gagaku* and its concept could readily be applied to any kind of modal melodic line” is practically a prescription for the pan-modal style of the music of this period.[302] Chords resembling the harmony of the *shō* can even be found in some of Hovhaness’s piano works from these years. However, he most often orchestrates his “*shō* chords" for thickly divided strings. Although woodwinds in combination can approximate the sound of the *shō* most closely (Hovhaness does occasionally use the flutes in this way), the strings are better suited to capturing its even, unbroken tone. A

[300] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[301] Hovhaness, “Giant Melody in Nature and Art.”
[302] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.

precedent for this kind of scoring could have been provided by the 1931 orchestral arrangement of *Etenraku* (the most famous *Gagaku* piece) by Hidemaro Konoye, which was performed by Stokowski while he was working in Philadelphia in the 1930s.

Another example of *Gagaku*-inspired heterophony found in *Floating World* occurs in a passage in which the trombones and trumpets play two versions of the same melody separated by an octave (Fig. 6.12). The grinding dissonance which occurs as a result of the discrepancy between these two versions of the same melodic line is highly reminiscent of the "false-unison" heterophony occurring between the different versions of the melodic line played by the *hichiriki* and *ryūteki* in the *Gagaku* ensemble (compare with Fig. 6.9).

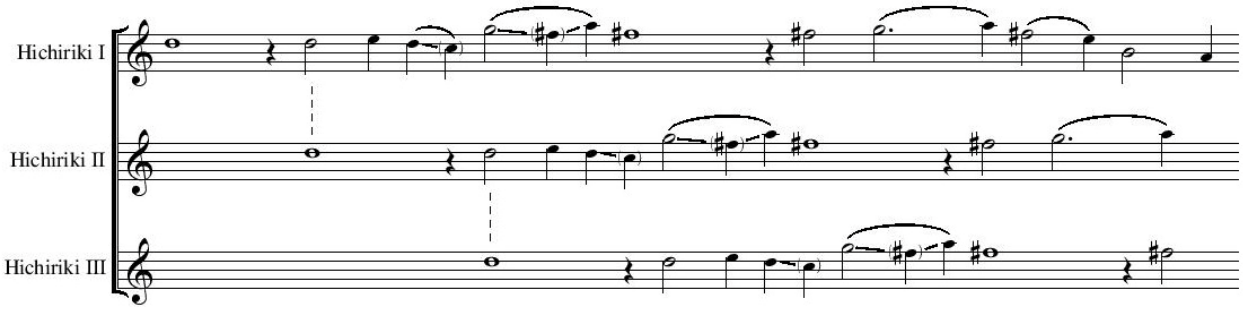
Figure 6.12, *Floating World* (1964), dissonant heterophony modeled on that between the *ryūteki* and *hichiriki* found in *Gagaku*



A final technique absorbed from Japanese music in evidence in *Floating World* is the *oibuki*. Literally "chase blow," *oibuki* refers to what Hovhaness described as "triple canons," in which the three members of each "wind section" of the ensemble play the same material, but in

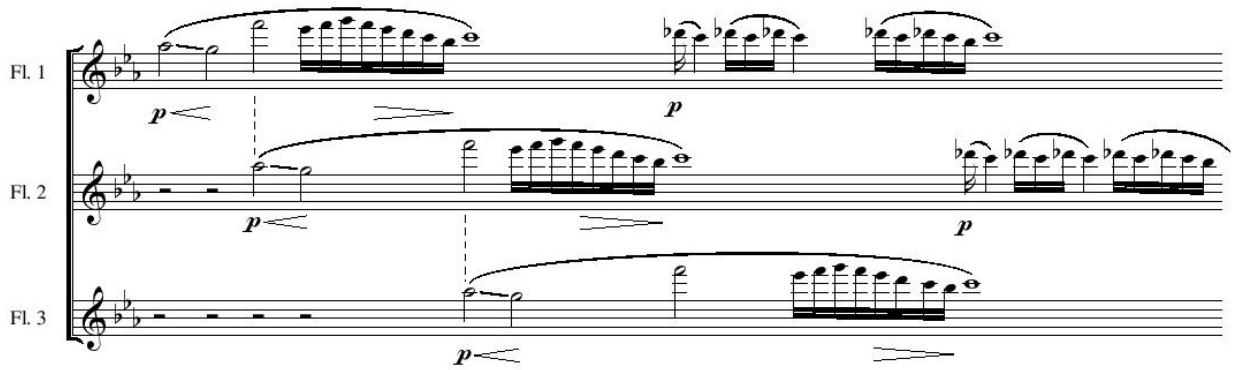
staggered entrances (Fig. 6.13).[303] The resulting three-part "canons" are metrically unregulated, but the success of the effect is guaranteed by the modal consistency of the materials and the already high level of dissonance established as normative by the musical style. Such music is generally used in *Bugaku* (which dispenses with the string instruments of the *Gagaku* ensemble), to accompany dancers.[304] One of Hovhaness's adaptions of this technique in *Floating World* is scored for three flutes, which enter one-by-one with the same unmeasured melody in exactly this sort of *senza misura* canonic procedure (Fig. 6.14). The melodic subject in this case begins with the head of the work's main theme, and so the *oibuki* takes on a pseudo-developmental role akin to a fugal treatment of a previously heard melody.

Figure 6.13, *Ichikotsuchō Chōsi* (*oibuki*), transcription by Hovhaness (*hichiriki* parts only)



[303] Hovhaness, "Giant Melody in Nature and Art."
[304] Malm, William. *Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments*. Tokyo ; New York: Kodansha International, 2000.

Figure 6.14, *Floating World* (1964), *oibuki*



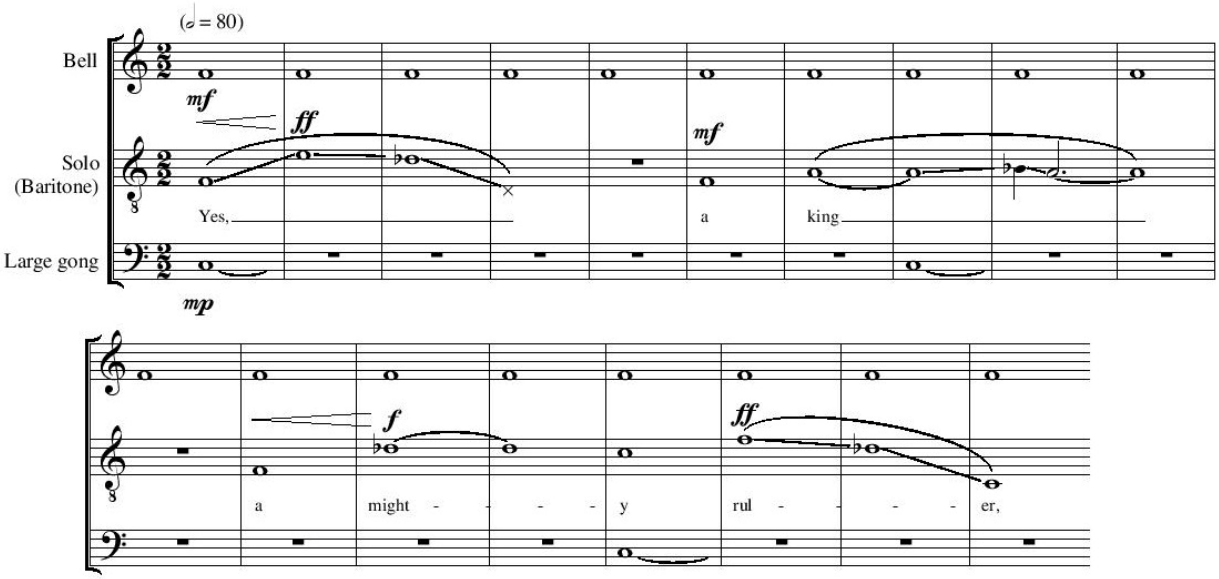
Although in *Gagaku* they are a relative rarity, *oibuki* became a stock device in Hovhaness's music over the coming years, called on to fulfill many different expressive needs. Perhaps the technique chimed well with Hovhaness's preexisting fondness for canons at the unison, which went back to the music of the early period. In one regard, Hovhaness never actually went as far as his Japanese model, in that he only ever employed this technique melodically, never writing unmeasured "harmonic canons" like those which occur between the three *shō* in some of the music he transcribed.

In his thesis on *Noh* elements in Hovhaness's operas, Tyler Kinnear has demonstrated the depth of Hovhaness's engagement with this Japanese theatrical style, describing many correspondences between the traditions of the genre and Hovhaness's "Eastern period" operatic works.[305] (Kinnear also included the slightly later pseudo-oratorio *Lady of Light* in his discussion, although it stands apart from these other works stylistically.) Hovhaness himself described the important influence of *Noh*, *Bunraku*, and *Kabuki* on his approach to both the music and dramaturgy of these stage works, for example telling one interviewer that "most of my operas are not operas in the sense of Wagner or Verdi, or the other Italians, or Mozart, or Handel, who was

[305] Kinnear, "Alan Hovhaness and the Creation of the 'Modern Free Noh Play.'"

a great opera composer. I like very much the Japanese *Noh* drama."[306] Part of what the emulation of *Noh* entailed was an attempt to capture something of its characteristic "heightened speech style" *kotoba*, what Hovhaness referred to as a kind of "Oriental *Sprechstimme*."[307] While there is something of this in all of the stage works of the "Eastern period," this element is at its most extreme in *The Leper King* of 1967 (Fig. 6.15). The passage cited below is also an example of a stripped-down version of Hovhaness's stock three-part texture: the leading melodic line in the voice is accompanied by a drone F tolled out by the tubular bells and a single tam-tam stroke recurring in a seven-bar cycle. Much of the vocal writing in this work lacks any specified pitch, and is instead notated "gesturally" on a single staff (as in Schoenberg's *Ode to Napoleon Bonaparte*.)

Figure 6.15, *The Leper King* (1967), "Oriental *Sprechstimme*"



[306] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.
Hovhaness, interview, 1985.
[307] Kinnear, "Alan Hovhaness and the Creation of the 'Modern Free Noh Play,'" 50.

Other *Noh* elements in the operas of this period described by Kinnear include their brevity, the recurrence of specific role-types, the use of masks, their instrumentation, and the placement of the orchestra on the stage.[308] Also reminiscent of *Noh* is the use of exclusively male voices and the limited and ritualized stage action.[309] These elements were then combined with other musical materials derived from *Gagaku*.

The most successful of these stage works is the short chamber opera *The Travellers*, of 1965. The opera received its premiere in April 1966 at Foothills College in Palo Alto, California. Its accompanying chamber ensemble consists of only three flutes, percussion, and harp. The small size of this group also bears a debt to the music of the *Noh* theatre, which generally employs an ensemble of only a single flute and three percussionists. *The Travellers* is a simple parable about youth, old age, death, and the cyclical nature of existence (a recurring theme in both Hovhaness's music and thought). The cyclical idea is expressed through the use of a symmetrical form, which is completed at the close of the opera with the replacement of one generation of nameless "travellers" through time and the universe by the next (Fig. 6.16). The recapitulation of the "A" and "B" material in the second half of the work are not exact, and they differ in terms of both their modal content and their specific melodic material. Nevertheless, the repetition of the same textures and dramatic situations at these junctures ensures that the form remains unambiguously clear. The five-part division of this opera's form, as Kinnear noticed in relation to some of the other works of the period, likely owes something to the typical arrangement of the *Noh* drama in five different parts known as *dan*.

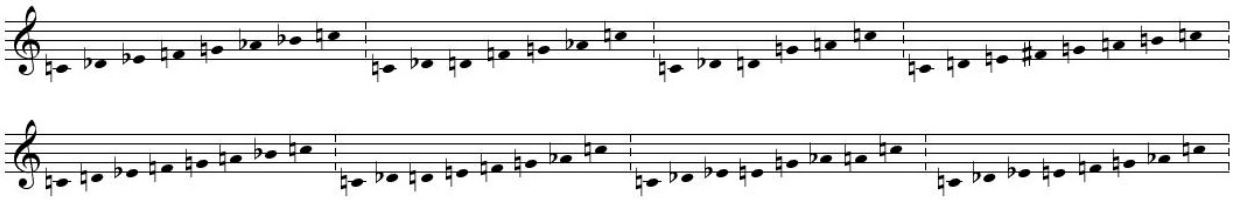
[308] Ibid., 84.
[309] Ibid.

Figure 6.16, *The Travellers* (1965), symmetrical form

A	B	C	B	A
prelude	"Terrible! Out there"/wordless chorus	wedding scene: preparations – "Ring around the merry wheel" – conclusion	"Terrible! Out there"/wordless chorus	*postlude*

The music of *The Travellers* is completely devoid of any real harmonic content. The only vertical simultaneities that occur are the result of either drone accompaniments or canons at the unison or octave, which, when employed without regard for the strict control of their harmonic result are in essence a decorated form of monophony, not a true expression of polyphony. The work also contains no modulation, with C treated as the central-tone throughout. The opera does, however, pass through eight different modes all based on C, lending each section of the work its own particular color (Fig. 6.17). One stretch in the Lydian mode (or the 65th *Melakarta* raga), for example, precedes the central wedding chorus, lending the scene an air of excitement and expectation that contrasts with the rather somber ("flatty") outer sections of the opera.

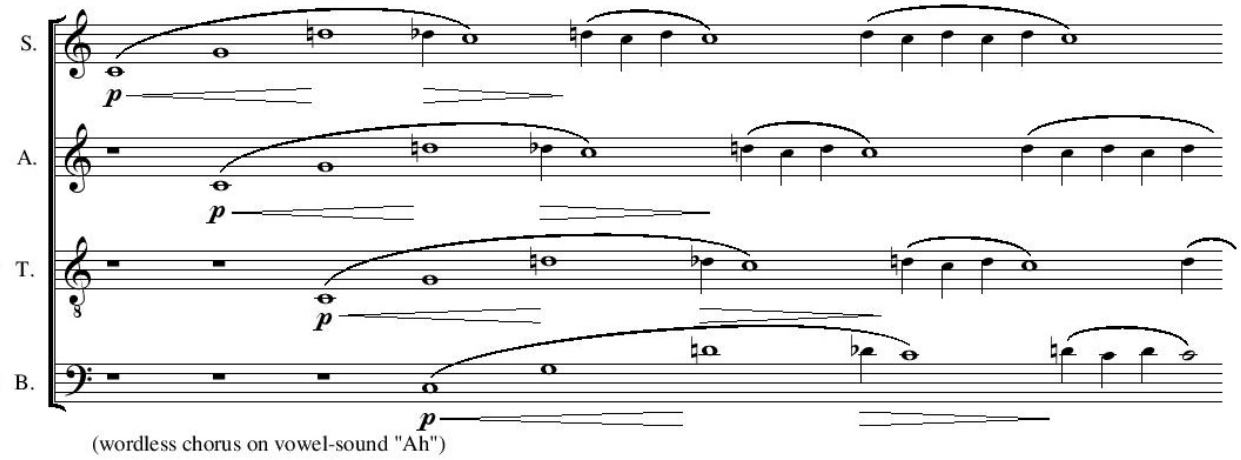
Figure 6.17, *The Travellers* (1965), modes



One of the opera's most striking passages involves the application of the *oibuki* free canonic texture to the wordless chorus (Fig. 6.18). Hovhaness calls upon the technique in this instance to summon up a sonic image of the free-floating "endless star galaxies" which face the travelers as they depart their refuge (in the opera a "spaceship," a metaphor for the earth as it

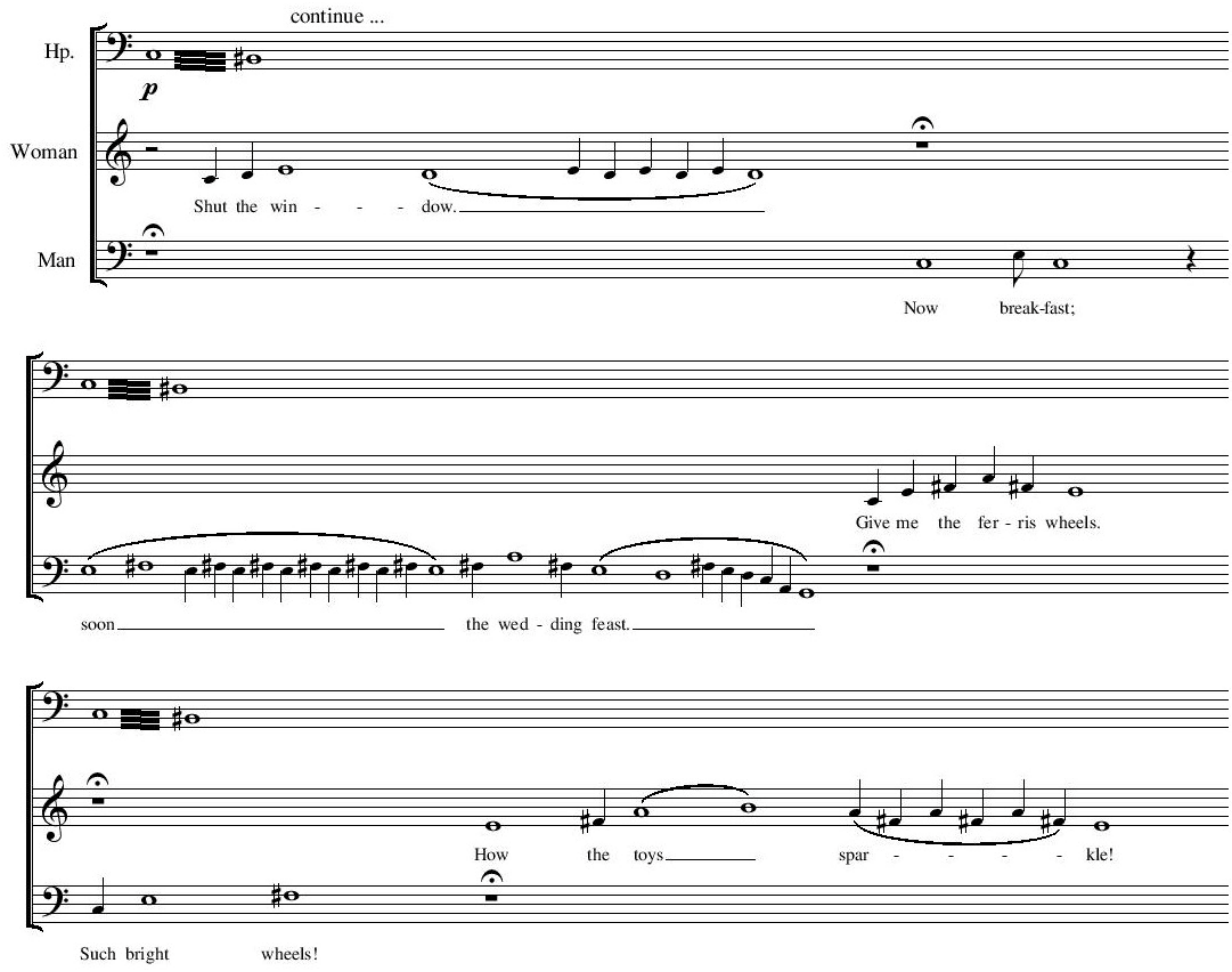
hurtles through the universe that Hovhaness called on again in his program note for the *Symphony No. 11*) to meet the eternal.

Figure 6.18, *The Travellers* (1965), *oibuki* for wordless chorus



Most of the vocal writing in the opera resembles that in the excerpt reproduced in Fig. 6.19. The vocal style in *The Travellers* is slightly more melodic in comparison with most of the other stage works written around the same time, and "Oriental *Sprechstimme*" is less in evidence. The effect of the profusion of melismas (which any performer would do well to interpret with a great deal of rhythmic freedom) is solemn and ceremonial rather than decorative. The voices are accompanied only by a murmuring tonic drone in the harp. The sparseness of the result (especially when compared with the textural opulence of some of Hovhaness's orchestral scores of this period) is probably the strongest evidence of all of the impact of *Noh* on Hovhaness's dramatic music. There is only scant employment of the techniques discussed so far in this chapter by which Hovhaness usually enriched the texture of his "Eastern" period works without impinging upon their essentially monophonic character with the addition of too much harmonic content.

Figure 6.19, *The Travellers* (1965), monophonic texture



Responding to this sparseness, the local reviewer who attended the premiere lambasted the opera, calling it a "shoddy, second rate composition," and complaining that "the six vocal soloists were forced to sing in tortured, dreary monotones." Indeed, if the measure of a work's "Easternness" is to be taken by its avoidance of harmony, lack of modulation, and reliance on sliding tones, then the *Noh*-influenced dramatic works of this period might be called Hovhaness's most uncompromisingly, "authentically" Eastern. It is perhaps also for this reason that none of these works have had any sort of life following their premieres, either on recordings or in performance.

Other potential reasons for this neglect are the issues surrounding Hovhaness's libretti and text setting more generally. The fluid relationship between text and music in his work has already been touched on in regards to the sketches for the *Magnificat*. As a result of this fluidity, Hovhaness's prosody often goes against what might usually be considered "correct" word setting, ignoring the natural stresses and rhythms of the language and decorating unimportant words with extended melismas. In certain works, perhaps those whose effectiveness is ensured by the force of their inspired melodic content, this can give his vocal writing a ceremonial, archaic character. In others, it can just come off as a technical flaw.

Although Hovhaness for the most part wrote his own texts, both for operas and shorter works, his literary skills were usually not up to the level of his musical ones. In an interview late in his career, he remarked on the writing of these libretti that, "I took it just as seriously [as composing], but I don't pretend it can stand up especially."[310] Nevertheless, Hovhaness rarely worked with librettists, and was largely self-reliant in this regard. The proposed opera collaboration with Judith Malina was scrapped after the completion of only a few numbers. A major factor in Hovhaness's decision to write his own libretti was that was unable to find texts closely tailored to his preferred musical forms.[311]

The libretti of the stage works of this period all share similar characteristics. They are largely unrhymed and unmetered (for example, only the central "wedding chorus" of *The Travellers* is cast in rhymed couplets). Hovhaness also tended towards the poetic omission of articles, even in his program notes. In addition, these libretti are staunchly non-dramatic, or in Kinnear's words, "they have little to do with the development of a story. Rather they focus on a

[310] Gagne, 129.
[311] "Discussion of 'Saturn' with Alan Hovhaness."

single unifying theme … most librettos aim at providing a message of unconditional love and/or oneness with the universe."[312] Hovhaness claimed that the libretto of at least one of these operas, *The Burning House*, was written "automatically," in a visionary state akin to those that sometimes "brought" him melodies. After the completion of the work, the Buddhist significance of the drama was explained to him while he was in Japan.[313] The libretto of *The Burning House* also contains a passage inspired by an episode from Hovhaness's own life, during which he was held up by a thief on the streets of Boston but refused to back down, interpreting these events as a sort of spiritual test of his force of will.[314] It is plausible that there are other such biographical correspondences to be drawn between events in Hovhaness's life and those in his operas.

Although the uneven quality of Hovhaness's libretti at times hampers the effectiveness of his dramatic works, his decision to write his own texts was nevertheless a testament to his creative singlemindedness. Even when he engaged with the literary products of others, he had a tendency to see them through the lens of his own (mystical) beliefs. He latched onto a reference to Mount Ararat in Thoreau as significant, and saw in the plays of August Strindberg an expression of Buddhist ideas.[315] He even claimed that "the psychology of Freud was known by the Tibetan priests and was in the *Book of the Dead* of the Tibetans."[316] In his choice of sacred texts too, Hovhaness could be observed "eliminating the more prosaic texts, leaving only the 'mystical' ones, which accords well with [his] usual style."[317] This singlemindedness was part of

---

[312] Kinnear, "Alan Hovhaness and the Creation of the 'Modern Free Noh Play,'" 57.
[313] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[314] Malina, *The Diaries of Judith Malina, 1947-1957*, 440.
[315] Hovhaness to Cohen, June 16, 1976.
Malina, *The Diaries of Judith Malina, 1947-1957*, 347.
[316] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.
[317] Music, David W. "The Larger Sacred Choral Works of Alan Hovhaness." *The Choral Journal* 44, no. 4 (November 2003): 11.

what allowed Hovhaness to bring together disparate materials and ideas and effortlessly shape them to serve his own artistic purposes.

On July 4, 1965 the Chicago Symphony, conducted by the young Seiji Ozawa, premiered Hovhaness's *Fantasy on Japanese Woodprints* with Yoichi Hiraoka as the xylophone soloist. This work has made its way into the periphery of the percussion concerto repertoire. The following August, Hovhaness departed for Moscow on a Russian tour which was sponsored by the U.S. State Department as part of a cultural exchange program with the Soviet Union.[318] This tour included the only visit Hovhaness ever made to Armenia. He was reportedly impressed by the mountains and delighted with his visit to an Armenian village, but rejected all subsequent invitations to visit Soviet Armenia.[319] He spent much of the remainder of the year back in Switzerland. In February of 1966, Hovhaness conducted a concert with the Seattle Youth Symphony, the program of which included the *Variations and Fugue* for orchestra. This was the beginning of his relationship with the city that later became his home. June saw the premiere of another *Noh*-inspired opera, *Pilate*, at Pepperdine College in Los Angeles, and by the next month Hovhaness was back in Switzerland.[320] In December Hovhaness again returned to Seattle, this time to serve as composer in residence with the Seattle Symphony, an appointment which extended through the next year.[321]

Perhaps Hovhaness's most ambitious score from this time was the *Symphony No. 19*, subtitled "Vishnu." It is, in line with the musical language common to the works of this period, heavily reliant on techniques derived from both Indian and Japanese music. The symphony was commissioned by Andre Kostelanetz for the New York Philharmonic, which gave the premiere

[318] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[319] Khachikyan, Garik. *A Tribute to Alan Hovhaness*. Alan Hovhaness International Research Centre, 2006.
[320] Kinnear, "Alan Hovhaness and the Creation of the 'Modern Free Noh Play,'" 110.
[321] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."

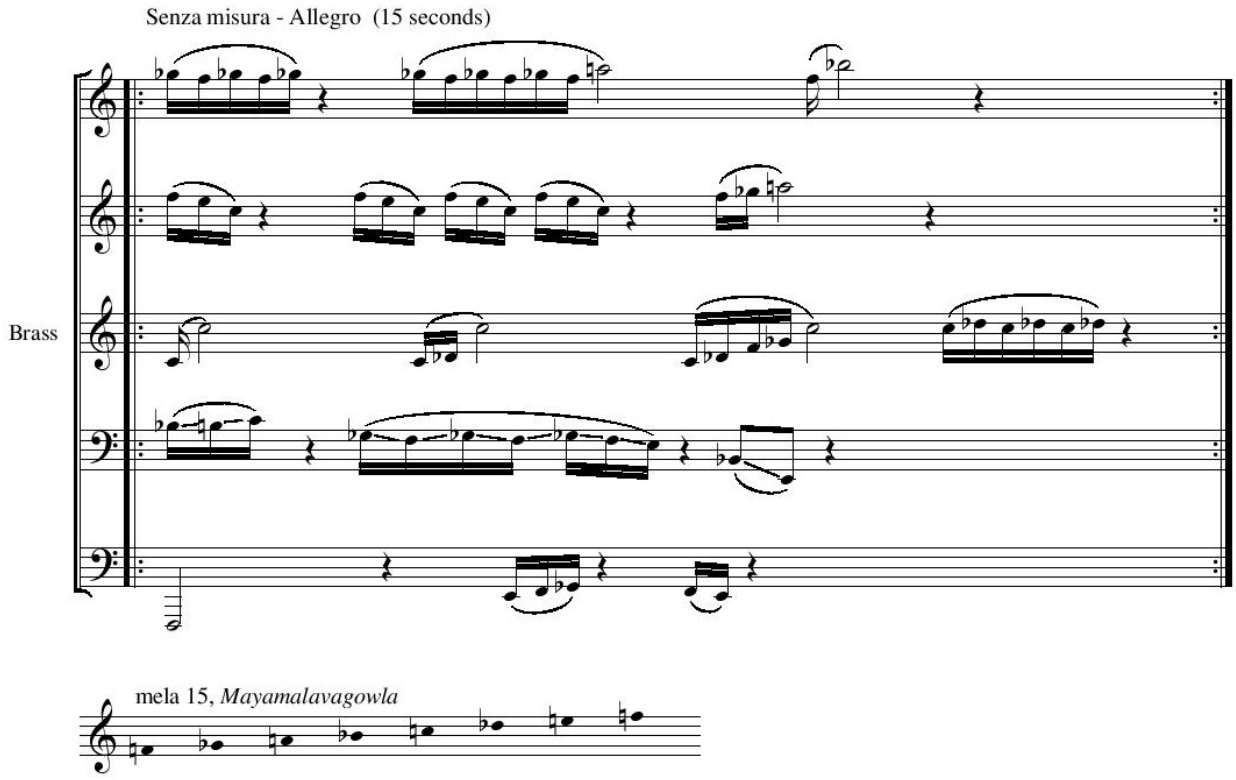
of a heavily cut-down version under the title *To Vishnu* on June 2, 1967 (Kostelanetz was often cavalier in adapting Hovhaness's works to his own specifications after they were completed). Hovhaness later recorded the complete symphony for Poseidon at his own expense. The *Symphony No. 19* represents the culmination of Hovhaness's experiments in the limited kind of aleatoric music that had begun in *Lousadzak* more than two decades prior. In this work, the role of free-rhythm passages is no longer limited to a background or "bordering" function. Rather, music of this kind occupies a good deal of the work's duration and is thus the locus of a great deal of its foreground musical interest. The rest of the piece consists of a great variety of different *oibuki*, as well as long stretches of unbroken monophonic melody accompanied by drones. None of these three textures is new to Hovhaness music, but they are used here with remarkable consistency, even severity. As they are more rhythmically grounded, the five sections featuring long melodies in monophonic settings stand apart from the *senza misura* and *oibuiki* passages that make up much of the work, functioning as stable "islands" amid free-flowing musical evocations of cosmic chaos (Fig. 6.20). This arrangement is reminiscent of the contrast between metrically stable tutti sections and rhythmically free piano cadenzas that was a driving force behind the form of *Lousadzak*. Each of these five melodic "islands" is composed strictly within a single mode, as is typical of the music of the "Eastern" period. The central Allegro giusto is based on material found in the "wedding chorus" from *The Travellers*.

Figure 6.20, *Symphony No. 19* (1966), form

oibuki/ senza misura	**Largo solenne** [F]	oibuki/ senza misura	**Andante con moto** [A]	oibuki/ senza misura	**Allegro giusto** [D]	oibuki/ senza misura	**Andante** (+ inter-ruptions) [F]	oibuki/ senza misura	**Largo solenne** [F]	oibuki/ senza misura

Vishnu opens with an arresting *senza misura* passage scored for brass and percussion, whose pitch content (apart from a passing tone in the trombone resulting from a glissando) is strictly confined to the 15th *Melakarta* raga, a mode which dominates much of the work (Fig. 6.21). The effect of this passage, with its dissonantly clashing high trumpets, is a far cry from the tentative pizzicato murmuring in *Lousadzak* which constituted Hovhaness's first experiment with *senza misura* writing.

Figure 6.21, *Symphony No. 19* (1966), opening *senza misura* passage for brass



As the symphony progresses, such deployments become increasingly bold. The passage reproduced above returns with new added layers which further enrich the texture. Some of the *senza misura* passages in *Vishnu* are no longer confined to a single mode. The cumulative effect of their pitch content amounts to a chromatic wash, although their various constituent elements

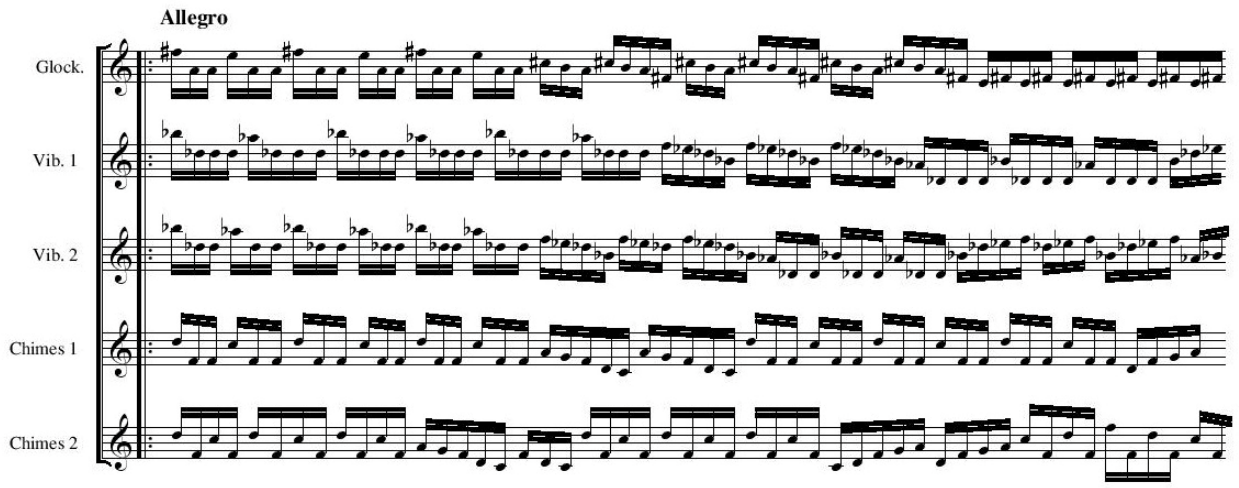
all still have recognizable modal identities, which certainly has some influence on their effect. However, particularly in *senza misura* passages which involve thickly divided strings, Hovhaness often writes a level of melodic detail into each part which is bound to be imperceptible in the final result, and seems to contribute little to the overall effect. This is perhaps related to Hovhaness's attempt in this work to give musical expression to a many-layered "divine intelligence," simultaneously aware of the manifold individual events unfolding on both the terrestrial and cosmic planes in a way that no human mind can comprehend.

Particularly striking among the many free-rhythm passages in the symphony are those scored for metallic pitched percussion instruments. Hovhaness gave a clue as to the effect he was striving for in such passages when he wrote that, "I would prefer the massive free rhythm bell orgies of Zurich to the spineless glockenspiel, chimes, and vibraphone of our industrial orchestras. I would like to ring all the bells in the thousand towers of the lost Armenian city of Ani in wildly clashing free rhythm."[322] The passage reproduced in Fig. 6.22 combines this idea with the *jhala* texture. Five different *jhala* for pitched percussion instruments sound simultaneously. Each is written in the same pentatonic mode, but in three different transpositions (dividing the octave evenly by major thirds) divided by instrument type. Although Hovhaness did have to make do with glockenspiel, vibraphone, and chimes, his derogatory reference to their "industrial" origins is characteristic of an anti-modernist sensibility. This elevation of the archaic is also in line with Hovhaness's ideas about the music of ancient Egypt and China and his notion that many of humankind's richest musical achievements have been lost to the past, the antithesis of a "progressive" modernist outlook. Hovhaness sought to distance himself from the "intellectual" use of quasi-aleatoric techniques similar to his own in European music (for

[322] Israel, "Form, Texture, and Process in the Symphonies for Wind Ensembles by Alan Hovhaness," 162.

example that of Lutosławski) which began around the same time *Vishnu* was composed.[323] The *oibuki* technique in particular was legitimized for Hovhaness's by its derivation from a non-Western musical practice with a lengthy tradition.[324]

Figure 6.22, *Symphony No. 19* (1966), polytonal *senza misura jhala*

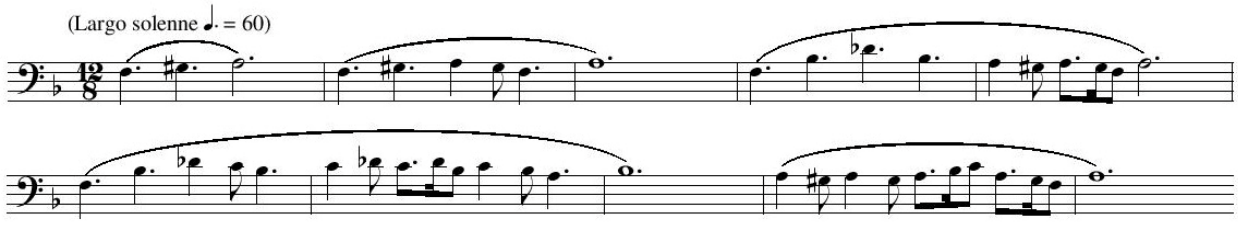


The long melody which threads its way through the last of the symphony's five melodic "islands" also appears in Hovhaness's score for the documentary *Man of Two Worlds*, which like *Vishnu* dates from 1966 (Fig. 6.23). Its subject was the life of the first Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, and his literal and metaphorical navigation between the worlds of East and West. *Man of Two Worlds* was part of NBC's "The Twentieth Century" series, which commissioned a string of well-known composers to score documentaries which aired every Sunday.[325] This melody from *Vishnu* is heard during footage of Nehru's funeral procession. The *senza misura* passage for brass discussed above was also employed in the documentary, where it accompanies footage of the religious violence that erupted following the partition of India.

[323] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.
[324] Ibid.
[325] Briggs, John. "AIDING THE COMPOSER; Original Musical Scores Are Obtained For 'Twentieth Century' Series." *The New York Times*, April 12, 1959.

Hovhaness was often approached to score documentaries or other television programs with "exotic" themes (*Everest*, *Assignment India*, etc.). As is the case here, the scores he produced seemed to have mostly consisted of material recycled from his concert works, and his film scores in general do not seem to have been the locus of any serious artistic engagement on the part of the composer. Nevertheless, given this symphony's Indian theme, the knowledge of such associations can lend added poignancy to the music.

Figure 6.23, *Symphony No. 19* (1966), "lament for Nehru"



The harp chords which accompany this "Lament for Nehru" demonstrate an interesting confluence of Hovhaness's "constructed chord" technique and modal practice (Fig. 6.24). These chords can be analyzed as triads with added semitonal dissonance, or as deriving exclusively from the mode used throughout this section, a six-note subset of the 32nd *Melakarta* raga (or the first Armenian church mode) (Fig. 6.25). The effect is that of a veiled but perceptible harmonic motion, rocking back and forth between chords built on the tonic and subdominant, but nonetheless meshing with the mode and not impinging upon the essentially monophonic character of the passage. Hovhaness often scored such chords for the harp, the sweetness of whose timbre softens their dissonant effect.

Figure 6.24, *Symphony No. 19* (1966), "lament for Nehru," harp chords

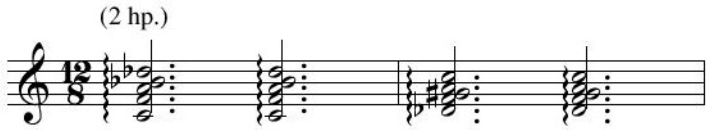
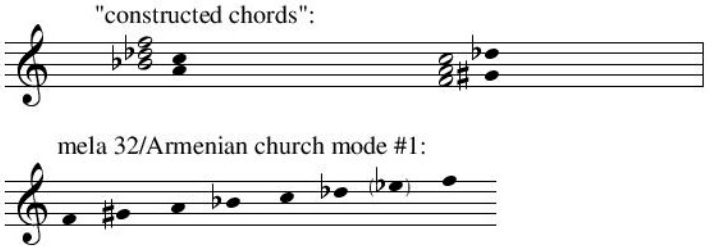
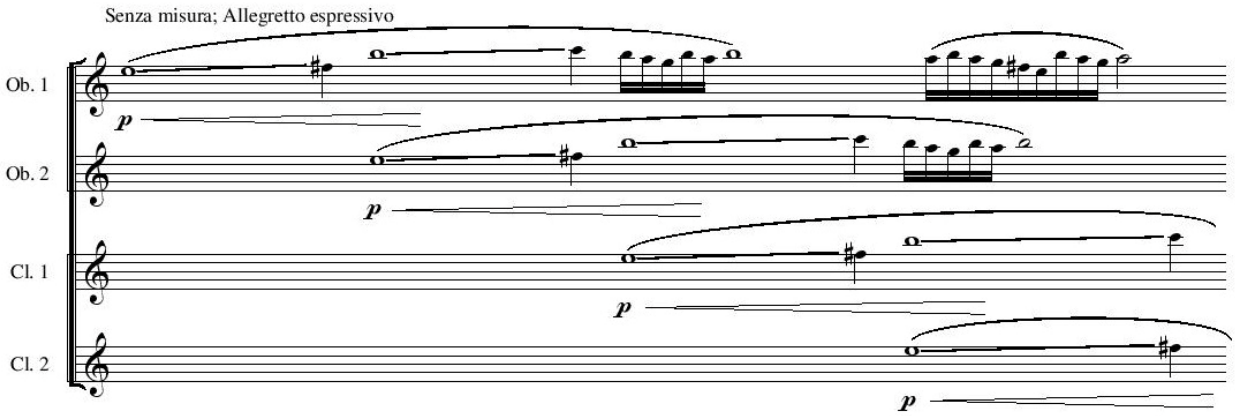


Figure 6.25, *Symphony No. 19* (1966), harp chords, two possible derivations



One element absorbed from Eastern music whose integration into Hovhaness's musical language was perhaps less successful are the sliding tone effects that Hovhaness calls for from the woodwinds in many parts of the symphony (Fig. 6.26).

Figure 6.26, *Symphony No. 19* (1966), woodwind slides in a four-part *oibuki*



These slow glissandi, which can be played with ease and to excellent effect on many of the non-Western wind instruments (such as the *hichiriki* and *ryuteki*) that Hovhaness had by this time studied in depth, are nearly impossible to perform on the woodwind instruments of the

Western orchestra, excepting to a limited extent the flute. Such passages are hardly ever executed convincingly on any of the available recordings of Hovhaness's music, and Stokowski once remarked on this problematic aspect of his orchestration.[326] Hovhaness himself was, of course, also aware of this limitation in the capabilities of the Western orchestra, once remarking that he wished its woodwind and brass instruments (trombone aside) were better at executing slides, and even calling for the addition of slide trumpets into the brass section.[327] Hovhaness's continued insistence on such sliding tone effects in the woodwind parts of his scores from this period in the face of their unattainability was a rare concession to idealism by an otherwise eminently practical composer.

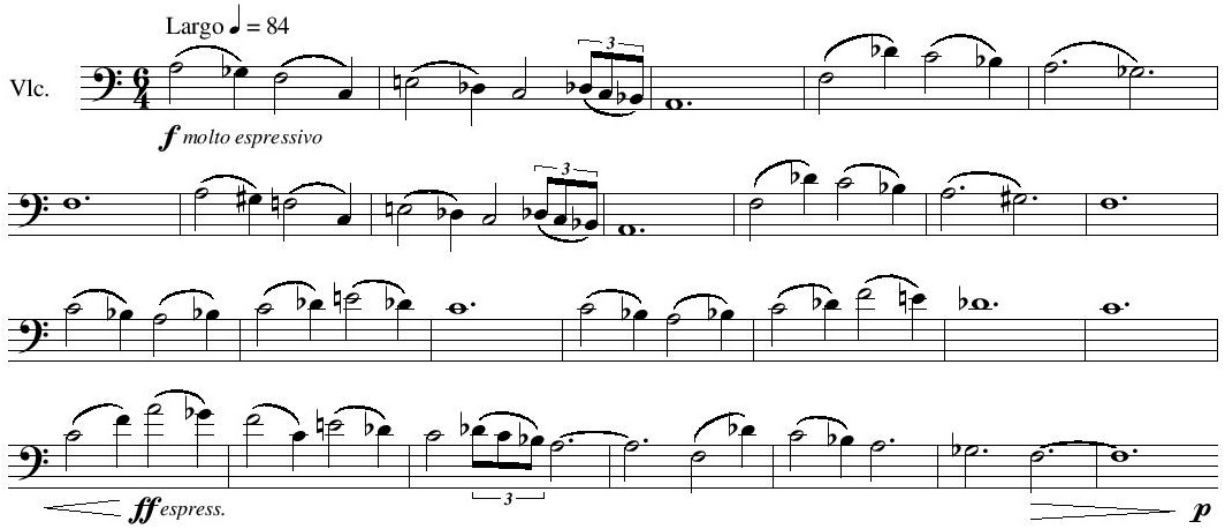
One of the last large scores that can be comfortably situated in Hovhaness's "Eastern" period is the orchestral work *Fra Angelico*, of 1967. Although Hovhaness's use of *senza misura* in this work is more sparing than in *Vishnu*, *Fra Angelico* does contain one striking example of this technique at its most highly developed. Beginning with the first violins divided in sixteen parts, each section of the orchestra is introduced in succession, resulting in a massive orchestral crescendo unfolding over the course of several minutes. The orchestration is calculated so that each successive entrance is audible over the building fray, and the whole process is crowned by the commanding entrance of the three trumpets playing a sharply articulated figure in their highest register.

Fra Angelico is an essentially monothematic piece, and much of it consists of repeated statements of a long melody appearing under different guises, including in a variety of "open" canons. This melody (Fig. 6.27) is another one of those which Hovhaness claimed came to him

[326] Hovhaness, interview, September 28, 1977.
[327] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.

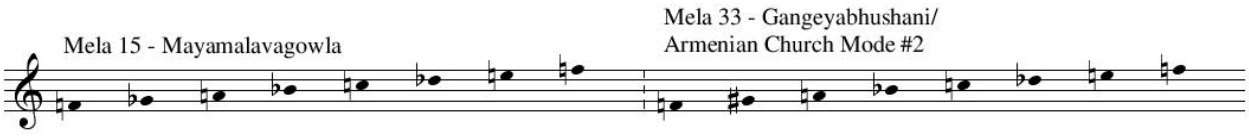
in a visionary state, this time accompanied by a miraculous return to good health after a period of illness.[328] The title of the work is a reference to the fact that Hovhaness felt the Italian Renaissance painter Fra Angelico's work was the result of similar visionary experience.[329]

Figure 6.27, *Fra Angelico* (1967), main theme



The "ABA" modal structure of this melody is meaningfully reflected in several other parts of the work at important structural points. The melody begins in the 15th *Melakarta* raga, but with the addition of G-sharp in its seventh measure shifts to the 33rd (or the second Armenian church mode). In the final phrase, G-sharp reverts back to G-flat, and the initial mode is restored (Fig. 6.28).

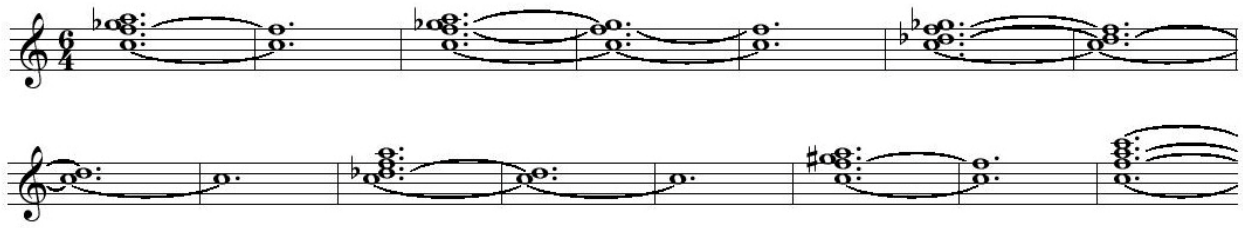
Figure 6.28, *Fra Angelico* (1967), modes



[328] Ibid.
[329] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.

The *oibuki* for three violins (set against a *shō*-like modal cluster) that opens the work follows this exact same modal scheme. This particular passage, a combination of Indian and Armenian modal materials with a texture derived from Japanese court music used to conjure up the mysticism of a 14th-century Italian painter, is an excellent encapsulation in microcosm of the breadth of Hovhaness's eclectic transcultural explorations. The passage leading into the work's climax also reflects the same modal scheme, this time expressed "vertically" in four-note chords whose "subtractive" texture is once again reminiscent of the music of the *shō*. The effect of the "subtractive" texture in this case is particularly dramatic, in essence amounting to a series of "failed" dissonances against a dominant drone that are superseded by the arrival of a sonorous F-major chord, the first pure triad in the entire work and a ringing affirmation of its tonal center (Fig. 6.29).

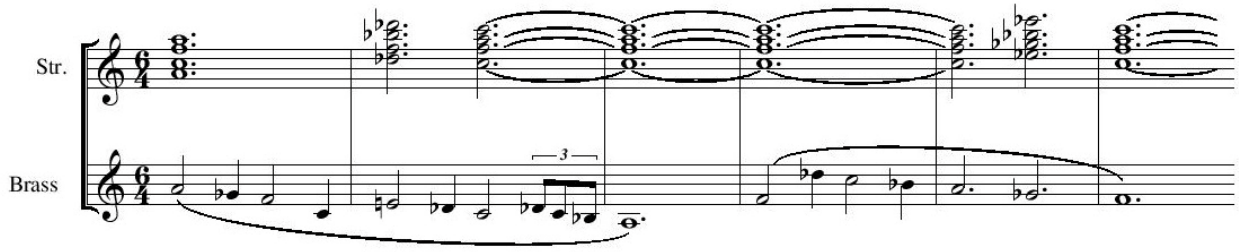
Figure 6.29, *Fra Angelico* (1967), lead-in to the climax



The climactic restatement of the theme that follows is accompanied throughout by lush triadic harmony doubled in four octaves by richly divided strings (Fig. 6.30). This passage is particularly effective because of the complete absence of triadic harmony in the work up to this point. In the words of Arnold Rosner, "the chordal writing at this point takes on considerable majesty, through the slowness of harmonic change, and the anchoring F-major, which might be weaknesses rather than strengths in a longer section or in a work where triadic vocabulary had

been customary."[330] This same affective contrast between harmonic and non-harmonic music is key in many of Hovhaness's most compelling scores. The unabashed return to triadic harmony in this passage also looks forward to the music of Hovhaness's next and final style period.

Figure 6.30, *Fra Angelico* (1967), climax with triadic accompaniment



Hovhaness was hardly alone among American composers in his interest in non-Western music, particularly that of India and the Far East. Chinese-American composer Chou Wen-chung listed Hovhaness as among a group of American composers "who learned from Eastern music, and who have helped make the United States the center of activities in assimilating non-Western musical ideas and practices" alongside John Cage and Lou Harrison (whose personal relationship with Hovhaness was detailed in chapter 4) as well as Henry Cowell and Colin McPhee.[331] Earlier precedents had been set by Henry Eichheim, who had spent time in Japan and China and whose work was also conducted by Stokowski, and by Roy Stoughton. Stoughton was a friend of Hovhaness during his Boston years and wrote organ works in a 19th-century Orientalist vein, but nevertheless played a role in interesting the young Hovhaness in non-Western music.[332]

[330] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 338.
[331] Chou, "Asian Concepts and Twentieth-Century Western Composers," 219.
[332] Hovhaness and Davies, interview.

Lou Harrison once remarked that most critics had little idea of the depth of Hovhaness's knowledge of the non-Western musical styles he had studied.[333] This has unfortunately also been true of some musicologists who have attempted to describe Hovhaness's place in this trend in American music. Most recent discussions along these lines, whether "for" or "against" Hovhaness, have been made against the backdrop of the deconstructionist critique of Orientalism that has in recent decades finally made its way into musicology. The prevailing sense that there is something unsavory about a Western composer employing elements gleaned from various non-Western musical traditions has perhaps also impeded scholarship on Hovhaness's music. The notion that artistic representations of another (Eastern) people's culture can abet the colonial domination of that people does illuminate certain aspects of 19th-century music. In the *Oxford History of Western Music* Richard Taruskin defines Orientalism (in relationship to the subject matter at hand) as when a nation produces art that "[represents] an alien or exotic community for their own purposes and their own consumption." Taruskin then goes on to detail how, in certain operas produced in 19th-century Russia and France (both of which were engaged in colonial escapades in the Islamic world at the time) this could serve to bolster the audience's own sense of national identity.[334]

The first part of this formulation (forgetting for a moment all the performances of his work in India, Korea, and Japan, and the fact that his relationship with non-Western music in large part began as an exploration of his own Armenian heritage) does seem to apply to Hovhaness. As is evidenced by the many reviews which remark upon it, his music's "exotic" content was undoubtedly one of the most important factors in its reception, especially early on in

[333] Kohanov, "The Muse on the Mountain."
[334] Taruskin, Richard. "Chapter 7 Self and Other." In *The Oxford History of Western Music, Music in the Nineteenth Century*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.

his career. The Armenian elements in Hovhaness's music were in fact often received as generic pan-Eastern exoticism by those outside the Armenian community, rather than as specifically nationalistic. (Hovhaness was not alone in this regard among the Armenian-American musicians of the diaspora.)[335] In his review of Hovhaness's 1947 Town Hall concert, Olin Downes went so far as to write that "now and then, in the course of the tales of A Thousand and One Nights, one comes across a passage of formula, which goes as follows 'The stranger, entering my tent, and improvising in a mode I knew not, sang' – We thought of this at the concert given by Alan Hovhaness …"[336] Downes's evocation of *A Thousand and One Nights*, probably best known in the West in its translation by Richard Burton, the 19th-century Orientalist par excellence who snuck into Mecca to make the hajj in disguise, is telling. Conductors too played a role in casting Hovhaness's music in this light. Andre Kostelantez, for example, programmed Hovhaness's music alongside works of typical 18th- and 19th-century musical Orientalism on a "Promenade Orientale" given by the New York Philharmonic.

Considering such a reception history, it is no surprise that some have found it easy to dismiss Hovhaness's music as "contemporary Chinoiserie," as John Corbett has in his essay "Experimental Oriental," which deals with this larger trend in 20th-century American music. Attempting to divide the composers involved into two camps, he writes that "unlike Cowell, Partch, and Cage, who were stimulated by non-Western musics to come up with something conceptually and/or sonically original, Hovhaness, McPhee, and Harrison tended to pay homage with the sincerest form of flattery – cheap imitation."[337] Corbett implies that the works of this second group of composers were the musical equivalent of 1950s "tiki" culture and, in the case

[335] Alajaji, Sylvia, "Diasporic Communities and Negotiated Identities: Trauma, Recovery, and the Search for the Armenian Musical Voice."
[336] Downes, Olin. "Hovhaness Offers Own Compositions." *The New York Times*, February 8, 1947.
[337] Corbett, John. "Experimental Oriental: New Music and Its Other Others." In *Western Music and Its Others*, 173. Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.

of Cowell's later efforts in this arena, draws the inevitable parallel with Rimsky-Korsakov, surely low hanging fruit for any writer wanting to smear a composer with the Orientalist taint. Summing up, Corbett rejects the work of this group of composers, including Hovhaness, as "in [Edward] Said's words, 'domestications of the exotic.'"[338]

What is most revealing about this offhand dismissal of Hovhaness's work is the way in which it manifests a persistent (Western) modernist preoccupation with originality and innovation. Corbett's assertions boil down to a privileging of conceptualism and experimentation over the work of composers who tried, however successfully, to engage with the *actual musical content* of the non-Western traditions that they studied. In truth, Cage's most important inheritance from Eastern culture seems to have been that it gave him the philosophical tools he needed to make the renunciation of self-expression demanded by (Western) modernism in its postwar incarnation. In the case of Hovhaness, the extent to which these borrowed musical materials were integrated into a cohesive musical language and cross-pollinated with other techniques shows that he in fact went far beyond the "cheap imitation" Corbett accuses him of purveying.

Other scholars such as Anthony Sheppard have called for a more nuanced approach to understanding the "cross cultural" efforts of artists like Hovhaness, recognizing that the motivations behind such works of art as well as their modes of reception vary widely.[339] David Nicholls, in the introduction to a collection of articles dealing with this trend in the context of American experimentalism made a similar call for scholarly discretion, writing that:

---

[338] Ibid, 173.
[339] Sheppard, "Continuity in Composing the American Cross-Cultural: Eichheim, Cowell, and Japan.

> It is a commonplace of contemporary criticism to assume that any manifestation of non-Western materials in a predominantly Western context is indicative of imperialist cultural appropriation. However … the reality … is rather more complex. Appropriation (in the strict definition of that term) merely lies at one end of a spectrum of possible interactions … one cannot simply lump together, under a single condemnatory banner, all Western references to non-Western cultures.[340]

Lisa Cook's recent dissertation, *Living in Northwest Asia*, which includes a chapter on Hovhaness's *Symphony No. 6*, takes a similar tack, trying to move beyond the distinctly ungenerous "debunking" mode that has tended to characterize scholarship in this area and instead approach the "transcultural" works of the composers involved on their own terms.[341]

The application of the standard Orientalist rubric to interpret Hovhaness's interactions with Eastern music is initially complicated by the fact that materials derived from non-Western music in his work do not serve simply as musical symbols of "the other" as they might have in 19th-century music. Rather, they represent a deep engagement with musical traditions that Hovhaness saw as being on at least equal footing with those of the West, if not superior to them. He once wrote that, "the Eastern musicians in Korea and Japan are greater by far than any Western musicians."[342] Further, Hovhaness often used musical elements adopted from one culture in works that treat themes from another (as demonstrated in this chapter on multiple occasions), once again complicating the notion that borrowed musical materials are necessarily employed for the purposes of representing, or "othering," the culture in which they originated. One reviewer, noting that despite the fact Hovhaness's *Symphony No. 16* employed several

---

[340] Nicholls, David. "Reaching Beyond the West: Asian Resonances in American Radicalism." *American Music* 17, no. 2 (1999): 127.
[341] Cook, "Living in Northwest Asia: Transculturation and Postwar Art Music."
[342] Hovhaness, Alan. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, November 18, 1962.

Korean instruments there were strong Japanese musical influences, wrote that "[Hovhaness] is not trying to write the national music of a specific country or combination of countries. His aim is to write his own music, enriched from any source or sources that seem appropriate in given circumstances."[343]

Closer examination of the composer's own views reveals an underlying motivation behind his interest in the musical materials of non-Western cultures that was quite distinct from the simplistic exotic appeal that they had for some critics and conductors. Hovhaness's explorations of these musical traditions were inextricably bound up in his staunch anti-modernism, and it is this way of understanding their significance that is most illuminating. The important link between Hovhaness's fascination with non-Western music and his resistance to modernism began to factor into the reception of his work as well, especially along with the rise of the counterculture in the 1960s, whose adherents similarly looked to the East for alternatives to the perceived violence and soullessness of the modern West.

Hovhaness's Eastern period works *do* to some extent consist of idealized representations of the East by a Westerner, and for the consumption of other Westerners. However, the main thrust behind this depiction of the "other" is not to bolster the audience's sense of their own superior national or ethnic identity. Rather, the strongest thread which emerges is a critique of Western civilization made against the foil of an idealized East. This entails an inversion of the Orientalist stereotype of the East as languorous and stagnant in comparison with the dynamic, organized Western world. These shortcomings are recast as virtues worthy of imitation, a much needed corrective for a Western society recklessly lurching into the future, imperiling the entire

[343] Wade, James. "Hovhaness Shows Trend Towards Musical Assimilation." *Korea Journal* 3, no. 3 (March 1963): 28.

planet. (The musical corollary to this East/West binary is obvious, with the dynamism of the tonal system standing in for the supposed dynamism of Western civilization as a whole.) While it is still essentializing, such an approach is nevertheless quite distinct from the chauvinist brand of "othering."

Hovhaness responded to one interviewer's query about the current state of American society with an explicit condemnation of the effects of technological progress, saying "It's gotten worse and worse, somehow, because physical science has given us more and more terrible deadly weapons, and the human spirit has been destroyed in so many cases, so what's the use of having the most powerful country in the world if we have killed the soul?"[344] Hovhaness also saw the developments in modern music which he resisted (particularly serialism and the "scientific" prestige on which it depended) as being inextricably linked with values of modern Western civilization at large, expressing a conviction that "most composers in this century have been affected by our scientific advance, and I'm more affected by something else."[345] The language Hovhaness often used to describe his dissatisfaction with the state of Western music made the perceived connection with industrial modernity explicit. He compared the use of dissonance in much modern music to the "savoring of dull automatic motions of machinery."[346] Hovhaness even spoke of equal temperament in these terms, calling it "a mechanical convention of Western industry … a prison of chrome and glass."[347] His contact with non-Western music offered him a way out:

> To me the hundreds of scales and ragas possible in Eastern musical systems afford both disciplines and stimuli for a great expansion of new melodic creations. I am more

[344] Michaelyan, "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness."
[345] Hovhaness, interview, March 1984.
[346] Kelly, John Jerome, "The Musical Style of Alan Hovhaness," 5.
[347] Johnson, "A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness," 118.

> interested in creating fresh, spontaneous, singing melodic lines than in the factory-made tonal patterns of industrial civilization or the splotches and spots of sound hurled at random on a canvas of imaginary silence. I am bored with mechanically constructed music and I am also bored with the mechanical revolution against such music. I have found no joy in either and have found freedom only within the sublime disciplines of the East.[348]

Although he is not mentioned by name, Hovhaness's description of a music consisting of "sound hurled at random on a canvas of imaginary silence" seems almost certainly to have been a reference to John Cage and his practice of composing using various chance procedures. From this perspective, Cage (the noted student of Zen) appears as an exemplar of Western modernism rather than, as he is often considered, Western music's premiere student of Eastern thought.

For Hovhaness, Eastern music was above all a symbol of timelessness and tradition, and his study of these musical traditions was part of his effort to fashion a musical language that would give the impression of being "untouched by the currents of its time."[349] His success in achieving this goal is attested to by the many responses to his work which remark on its archaic or timeless quality. In his program notes for a concert in 1946, Hovhaness described the music of Ancient Egypt, the Ancient Hebrews, and the Ancient Greeks as representing a kind of lost ideal corrupted by the pedantry of the European tradition.[350] He claimed that the study of "authentic," uncorrupted Armenian music provided a way back into this lost utopia, thus linking his anti-modernism with a kind of Armenian nationalism à la Komitas. Hovhaness later made many similar references to the lost "orchestral" music of Ancient Egypt and China as a kind of

---

[348] "COMPOSER ALAN HOVHANESS DIES AT 89." *New Music Box*, July 1, 2000. http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/Composer-Alan-Hovhaness-Dies-at-89/.
[349] Kastendieck, "Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, Fifth Edition."
[350] Hovhaness, "Concert of Original Compositions."

unrecoverable musical utopia.[351] Such an outlook is the very antitheses of modernist optimism, and is evidence of a way of looking at the history of music that is fundamentally opposed to the "progressive" model to which it is usually made to conform in Western thought, comfortable in a tale of evolutionary development from Perotin through Beethoven to Schoenberg. In this regard, Hovhaness was diametrically opposed to Henry Cowell, for whom non-Western music represented a fund of exciting "new musical resources" analogous to those achieved through his experiments with polyrhythm and the harmonic possibilities of the overtone series.

Although Hovhaness's music has been occasionally described as a "neo-primitivist," this does not accord with the way in which he viewed his adoption of non-Western musical techniques. For Hovhaness, these "sublime disciplines of the East" represented not a return to an undefiled natural state, but peaks of cultural development, akin to the state of the polyphonic art in the West during the high Renaissance. Admittedly, it was paradoxical that without the conditions of modernity (musical and otherwise), an engagement of such depth with non-Western music would have been unthinkable. My close examination of Hovhaness's ideas on this subject is not intended to endorse them as history or reinforce the East/West binary on which they depend, but rather an attempt to account for their significance to his art on its own terms.

Another interesting facet of Hovhaness's relationship with non-Western music was, despite his populist leanings more generally, a recurring preference for "elevated" genres with ostensibly ancient pedigrees over "low" ones. This was related to his anti-modernist quest for a "more ancient music" than the more recent "so called folk music, which has been more or less tampered with in many cases."[352] This tendency is perfectly encapsulated by Hovhaness's

---

[351] Hovhaness, "Giant Melody in Nature and Art."
Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[352] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.

reaction to the differences between the *shō* and the Chinese version of the instrument, the *sheng*: "The sho from Tang dynasty China is to me the most beautiful sound ever heard in this world – the modern sho from present day Taiwan and China is entirely different in sound and style of playing and is devoid of mystery and magic."[353] Although *Gagaku* does have its roots in the music of Tang Dynasty China (a fact to which Hovhaness constantly returns), this musical style was subsequently lost on the Chinese mainland. The mouth organ then essentially evolved into a folk instrument which, as Hovhaness pointed out, is quite different from its Japanese equivalent, which there is good reason to believe more closely resembles the original "courtly" Tang version of the instrument.

Another manifestation of this preference for "elevated" genres was Hovhaness's attitude towards certain musical styles of the "Near East." Although certain early works (such as *Mystic Flute* and *Macedonian Mountain Dance*) do occasionally evoke more familiar Middle Eastern musical styles, Hovhaness derided much "modern" Middle Eastern music as "bad music."[354] Distant echoes of Komitas's attempt to assert an "authentic" Armenian identity against Turkish influences can be felt in this assertion. Perhaps even more importantly, this emphasis on styles of sacred or elevated character was part of an attempt to escape the sexualization that was a key part of the musical Orientalism of the 19th century (as in Borodin's *Prince Igor*). This was summed up perfectly by Virgil Thomson in one of his reviews of a Friends of Armenian Music concert, when he wrote of Hovhaness's music that it was "oriental music from the right side of the railway track."[355]

---

[353] Hovhaness to Howard, Richard, October 26, 1979.
[354] Daniel, "Alan Hovhaness."
[355] Thomson, Virgil. "Near East via Boston." *New York Herald Tribune*, 1947. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

There are of course legitimate criticisms to be made of the ways in which Hovhaness handled these musical materials of non-Western origin. Rosner briefly touched on this, writing that "detractors may claim that Hovhaness's achievement has been merely to write Eastern music for Western instruments. Certainly this is true of some works … At worst the music lacks spontaneity, due to the removal of the basic improvisational character of much Eastern music, and loses some of the percussive physical excitement which characterizes performance on Eastern instruments."[356] This describes fairly well the reason the counter-rhythms in the timpani part of *Anahid* discussed in chapter four do not stand up to a comparison with their Indian models. Although Rosner's criticism of some of Hovhaness's Eastern-inspired works lacking in "spontaneity" remained somewhat vague, it began to point to a musical problem which Chou Wen-chung articulated more precisely. While he allowed that compared with Cowell, "[Hovhaness's] aesthetic response to the material he learned from the East is deeper and his technique more advanced," he nevertheless claimed that the work of both composers, along with the music of Lou Harrison, all manifested the same problem:

> … their music nonetheless contained a hint of what may be called "neo-chinoiserie" … The adaptation of Indian, Indonesian, or Japanese melodic or rhythmic treatment to Western notation and Western instruments – neglecting such life-giving elements in the original models as constant subtle modifications in pitch, rhythm, and timbre, the emphasis on the production and control of tones, the value placed on the expressive as well as the structural functions of single tones – is not, in any true sense, different from the nineteenth century practice of forcing an oriental melody into tonal harmony.[357]

[356] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 341.
[357] Chou, "Asian Concepts and Twentieth-Century Western Composers," 221.

The first part of this criticism largely holds up. Although Hovhaness's admiration for the "microtonal" effects achieved by performers in Eastern music and his careful transcriptions of the gestural subtleties of Armenian folk music show that he was acutely aware of the value of the musical elements Chou criticizes his work for lacking, they were for the most part not an important part of his musical language. For one thing, the considerable difficulties involved in the notation of such subtleties of pitch and timbral variation would have been a considerable deterrent to a composer as practically minded as Hovhaness. What efforts he did make towards these ends, for example the woodwind sliding tones and "Oriental *Sprechstimme*" of the operas of the 1960s discussed in this chapter, were often musically unsuccessful. (Neglect of these musical parameters hampered Hovhaness's engagement with Japanese theatrical styles in particular.) Hovhaness's attempts to adapt Indian rhythmic techniques to the timpani also suffered from this problem. The lack of different playing techniques to establish timbral variety (such as those that are built into the *theka* by which tala are traditionally realized on the *tabla* in Hindustani music) in turn results in an impoverishment of the potential to create multiple rhythmic layers differentiated by timbre.[358]

Chou was wrong, however, to assert that because of these "deficiencies," what Hovhaness achieved was in the end essentially the equivalent of 19th-century musical Orientalism. Putting aside the vast differences between Hovhaness's motivations for engaging with non-Western cultures and those of the 19th-century composers to which he is being compared, Chou's claim underestimates the radicalness of his enthusiastic adoption of homophony and heterophony in the context of the American musical environment of the 1940s. Chou also reduces the essential "Easterness" of all three national musics under discussion (without even broaching the complicated subject of Armenian music) to a single defining set of

[358] Clayton, Martin, *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance*.

characteristics. (One could easily argue, for example, that "the structural function of [a] single tone" is not a factor in Indonesian gamelan music at all.) This reductive judgement prevents Chou from acknowledging the very real differences between the largely manufactured musical elements which constituted the bread and butter of Romantic era musical Orientalism (for example, the "*nega*" signifiers of 19th-century Russian music) and the music of those composers who tried to engage with the *actual* musical traditions of other cultures, however successfully.[359] This holds true even if, as Chou argues, composers such as Hovhaness may have missed out on something fundamental in the process.

Most importantly, Chou's apparent dismissal of Hovhaness's efforts in this arena neglects what was really his signal musical achievement of the period: the seamless, organic integration of so many of the musical techniques he absorbed in Japan and India into his "personal common practice," and the elegance and stylistic consistency of the result. Hovhaness was in this regard very different from Cowell, whose "world music" pieces were for the most part essentially one-offs, and are thus easier to write off as "musical tourism." Hovhaness was assisted in his fluent traversal of different musical cultures by any uncanny talent for finding relationships between disparate traditions. Hovhaness made numerous remarks which paint a vivid picture of how he viewed cross-cultural "fusion," one that accords with the musical evidence presented in this chapter. For instance, Berlioz's speculations on the untapped possibilities of huge orchestras (probably a reference to a particular passage in his *Treatise on Orchestration*) caused Hovhaness to conjecture that he might have been the reincarnation of a musician from ancient China, where such large orchestras had once existed.[360] Hovhaness took Sibelius as one of his "household gods" in the Shinto fashion, and imagined that the Finnish composer could have been the reincarnation

[359] Taruskin, "Chapter 7 Self and Other."
[360] Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."

of another oriental musician, saying that *The Swan of Tuonela* (with its strong double reed presence throughout) would have made an excellent *hichiriki* piece.[361] Hovhaness even claimed that some of the harmonies in *Tristan und Isolde* reminded him of the harmonies of the *shō*, hypothesizing that Wagner too may have been a *Gagaku* musician in a past life.[362] (This one is admittedly harder to explain.)

For one writer, such a worldview was "typical of Hovhaness, naïve, solipsistic, eclectic."[363] True enough. However, this worldview was also what allowed Hovhaness to walk a transcultural artistic path with such sincerity and earnestness, yielding a musical result that simultaneously took important inspiration from various non-Western musical traditions and managed to remain entirely personal. It was this, in combination with his anti-modernist approach, which distinguished Hovhaness from the American composers of his generation for whom the exploration of "world music" was also an important preoccupation. Marco Shirodkar has expressed this elegantly, writing that "…many 20th-century composers flirted with such exotica, but in Hovhaness they find perhaps the most seamless alchemy of all because it was more than a mere flirtation. It was a musical engagement on an aesthetic as well as a technical level."[364]

---

[361] Hovhaness, interview, October 1975.
[362] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.
[363] Mordden, Ethan. *A Guide to Orchestral Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, 537.
[364] Shirodkar, Marco. "Who Was Alan Hovhaness?" Accessed February 20, 2016. http://www.hovhaness.com/Hovhaness.html.

CHAPTER 7 – Later Years (1968-2000)

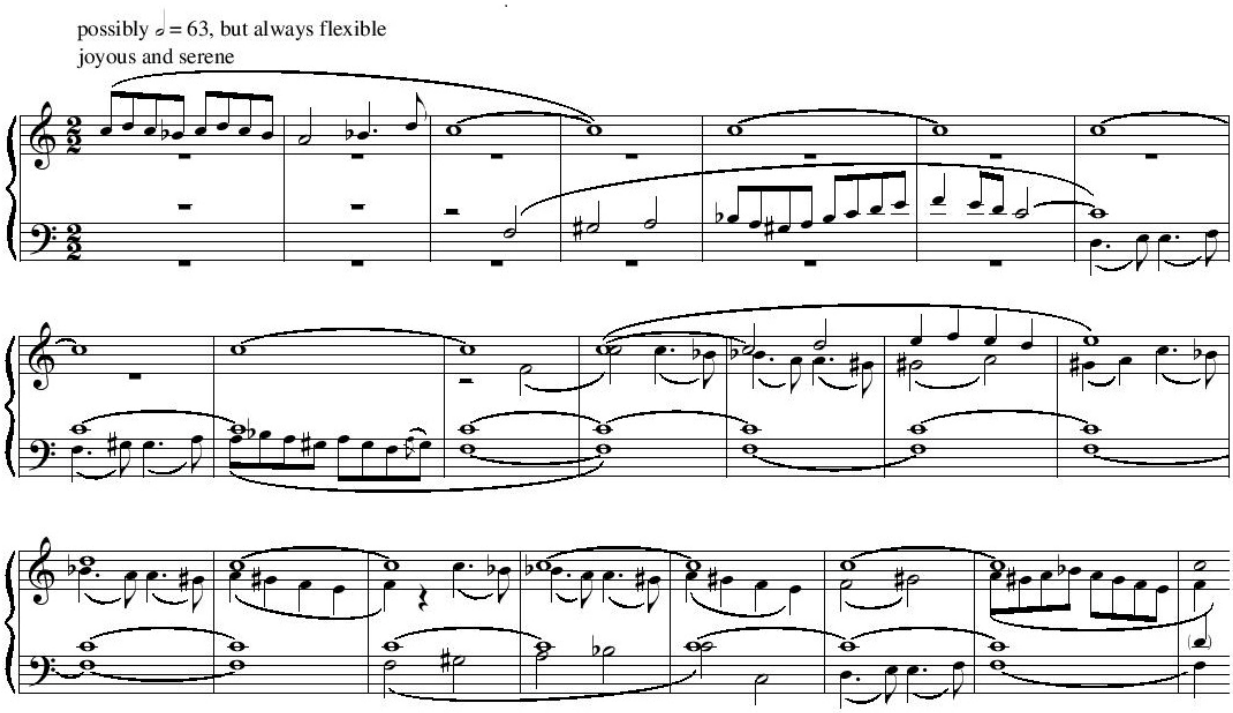
Hovhaness's compositional preoccupation with materials derived from Eastern music seems to have played itself out more or less suddenly in 1968 (the "chamber symphony" *Mountains and Rivers without End*, based on material written during the previous year, is an exception). Hovhaness's music from the years 1968-1973 is stylistically somewhat harder to pin down than the rest of his output, perhaps because it constituted a transitional phase. In an interview given around this time, Hovhaness mentioned that he might be entering a "new" Armenian period.[365] There are a handful of works from these years that marked a return to the treatment of Armenian subject matter and contain a greater concentration of the musical markers of "Armenianness" than had been present in Hovhaness's work since the 1940s (for example the symphonies Nos. 20, 21, 23, and 24, as well as the *Hymn to Yerevan*). However, the style of these works is considerably lusher than that of the spare works of the Armenian period proper. Their spaciousness and rich triadic harmony already indicate strongly Hovhaness's "late period style" (or last period style, at any rate).

A good example of Armenian musical materials in this sort of treatment can be found in *Requiem and Resurrection*, a single movement work for brass and percussion from 1968. The drone-filled polyphonic texture which was commonplace in Hovhaness's music of the 1940s is once again in evidence (Fig. 7.1). However, unlike in the music of that period one mode is used for long stretches without any chromatic deviation, perhaps a holdover from the pan-modal style of the more recent "Eastern" period. The contrapuntal passage cited below is entirely confined to the 35th *Melakarta* raga (also a variant of the first Armenian church mode). The treatment of

[365] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.

dissonance is conventional, although certain irregular intervals do appear as a consequence of the particularities of the mode.

Figure 7.1, *Requiem and Resurrection* (1968), strict polyphonic treatment of the 33rd *Melakarta* raga



Hovhaness's *Symphony No. 11*, subtitled "All Men are Brothers," exemplifies the stylistic diversity of the music of this period. Although the work had initially been premiered in 1961, Hovhaness completed a new, heavily recomposed version in 1969 which had its premiere the following year. It was a kind of "summing up" piece for Hovhaness, perhaps related to the universal ideals which he endeavored to express in the work. Hovhaness later described his entire last period in similar terms as an attempt to bring together the different elements of the musical style which had developed over his career. (The recycling of earlier material in this period also became even more frequent.) In this particular symphony, materials characteristic of each of the preceding style periods discussed in previous chapters can be found. Some of these

materials actually date from the period in question, while others seem to have been newly composed. Hovhaness described the makeup of this symphony somewhat ambiguously as follows: "the Eleventh Symphony actually harks back to my earlier style in the sense that the first movement really came from the time when I was just given a scholarship to the New England Conservatory, and it was really part of the symphony that won a prize at that time. That was back in 1932. So the First Movement was 1932, with some changes here and there. The Second Movement was from about 1960. The Third was from 1969, I think, although the theme might have been an early one from the 1932 period."[366]

Although it appears that the score of the 1932 symphony to which Hovhaness referred may be lost, the chorale-like theme which opens the first movement can also be found in *The Sea Angel*, an uncatalogued work for piano and narrator from 1933. The "Romantic" chromatic non-chord tones that color the harmony are unlike anything Hovhaness had written since his youth (Fig. 7.2). Upon reusing this 36-year-old material, Hovhaness (in addition to changing the key from E to B major and respelling chromatic tendency tones for convenience rather than according to their function) recast it in a 3+2+2+2+2+2 "*tala*," the sort of rhythmic device which had not begun to employ until the 1940s (Fig. 7.3). The bass pizzicato line which underpins the following passage is in fact more characteristic of the orchestration of works from the 1950s like *Mysterious Mountain*. A lengthy section later in the movement featuring a melody scored for viola and English horn contains thick harmonies which are reminiscent of the pan-modal style of the "Eastern" period. The original 1961 version of this first movement was later rechristened *Copernicus*, and in fact constitutes a much more "invasive" treatment of this same earlier material.

[366] Michaelyan, "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness."

Figure 7.2, *The Sea Angel* (1933), Part III.

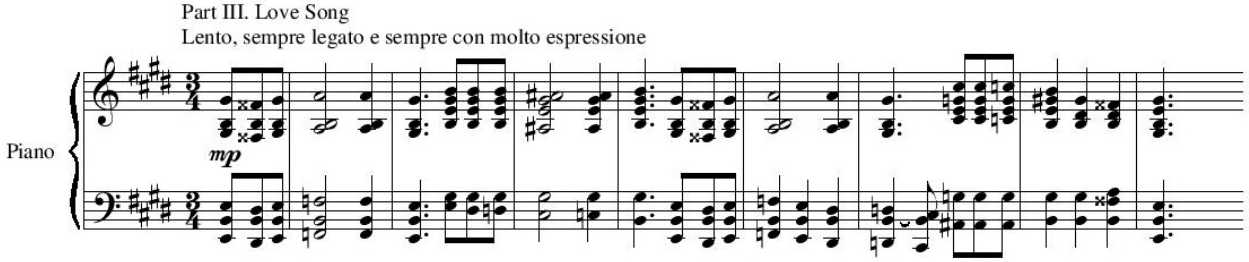
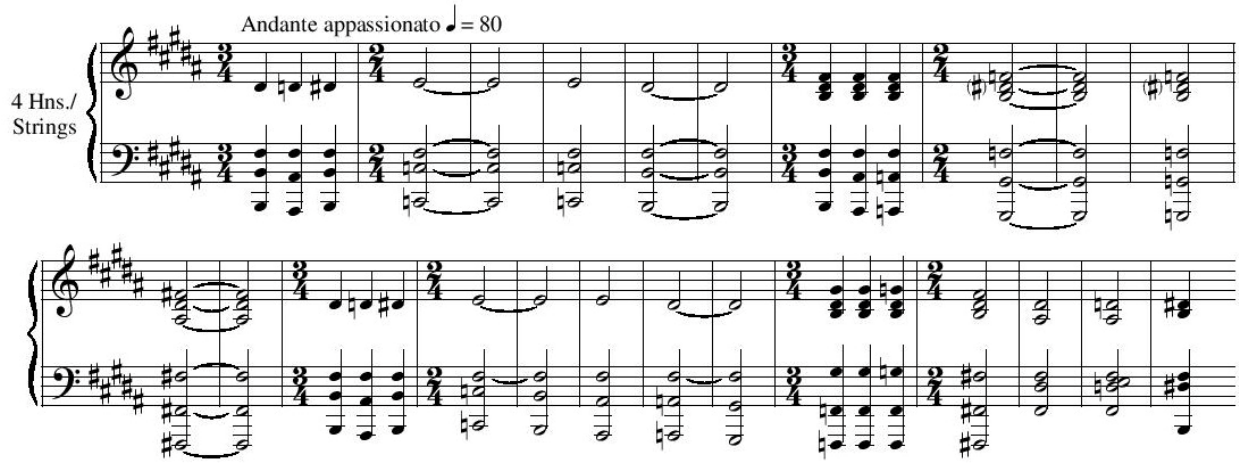
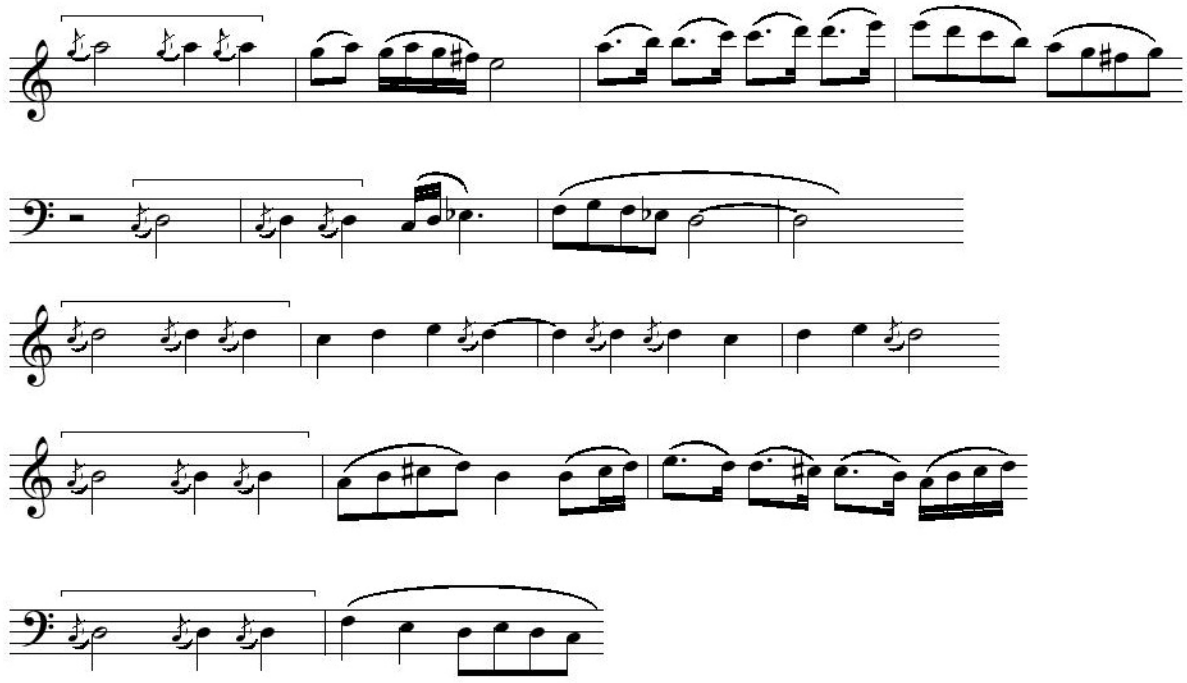


Figure 7.3, *Symphony No. 11* (1961/1969), first movement opening



The second movement of the *Symphony No. 11* is composed in what can be best described as a "symphonic" version of the 1940s Armenian-period monophony, enlivened with short fugatos as well as pan-modal elements. The style of this movement's melodic material in particular recalls the ersatz Armenian folk songs often found in the works of the 1940s. Hovhaness referred to the movement as a "rondo," but it is essentially a continuous progression of different themes of a similar folk-like character, many of which are related through the use of a shared head-motif (Fig. 7.4).

Figure 7.4, *Symphony No. 11* (1961/1969), second movement themes with shared head-motif



The third movement, which according to Hovhaness was made up mostly of material that was newly composed for the symphony's final version, marks a turn to the harmonically lush style which later came to characterize the greater part of the music Hovhaness composed during his last period. However, there are some polymodal touches reminiscent of previous style periods, and even a single *oibuki* for three flutes which serves as a transition.

In the same year that Hovhaness wrote the final version of this symphony, his old spiritual mentor Hermon di Giovanno died during a trip to Greece.[367] Hovhaness spent the summer back in Lucerne, where he completed the opera/oratorio *Lady of Light*. In the fall, Hovhaness returned again to Seattle, where the youth symphony performed *Fra Angelico*. *Lady*

[367] "Hermon Di Giovanno 1901-1969, Memorial Exhibition."

of Light did not have its premiere until 1974, when it was performed at the University of Montana in Missoula.[368] The work was also recorded for Poseidon.

Lady of Light was almost certainly modeled after the oratorios of Handel. Hovhaness particularly admired what he described as the "Homeric" quality of these works, and Handel was, along with Schubert and Sibelius, probably the Western composer that Hovhaness admired most. The libretto of *Lady of Light*, which was as usual written by Hovhaness himself, functions similarly to that of a Handelian oratorio, with each aria and chorus containing only a few repeated lines of text. The lion's share of the narrative is expressed in recitatives which are of limited musical interest apart from a few madrigalisms. In terms of Hovhaness's own artistic evolution, the musical style of *Lady of Light* recalls more than anything the music of the 1950s, although its spaciousness is indicative of his developing "late" style.

Hovhaness explained that the work's subject was inspired by the figure of Saint Vitus (probably a reference to the unlikely intersection between uninhibited dance and religious martyrdom evoked by traditions surrounding the saint) as well as a similar legend he encountered in Switzerland.[369] The eponymous protagonist is portrayed as a dancing "mother of the world," who unites all of her followers in a rapturous "dance of oneness" before being burned alive by brutal warlords and rising to heaven. Even if Hovhaness had not explicitly referred to the piece as a "kind of anti-war statement," its pacifist message would have still been unmistakable, particularly in the fierce defiance of the chorus "fear no more your brutal warlords."[370] It was likely no coincidence that *Lady of Light* was conceived just around the time that the tide of the Vietnam War was turning towards an American withdrawal. It is revealing to view *Lady of Light*

[368] Kinnear, "Alan Hovhaness and the Creation of the 'Modern Free Noh Play,'" 113.
[369] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.
[370] Ibid.

(in particular its dance of oneness "to the sun") in terms of the countercultural "hippie" movement of the 1960s and 1970s with which Hovhaness expressed sympathy, telling one interviewer in 1971 that, "We are in a very dangerous period. We are in danger of destroying ourselves, and I have a great fear about this. There is a great deal of rebellion among the young and I agree with them because I have known this same rebellion all my life."[371] In light of such a remark and Hovhaness's longstanding fascination with Indian culture, it is tempting to view him as a kind of proto-hippie. Hovhaness is even said to have experimented with psychedelics on one occasion.[372] However, given the generational divide in question, it is probably best not to read too much into this comparison.

The form of *Lady of Light* is buttressed by two large outer "pillars," choral/solo movements which Hovhaness described as depictions of "Nirvana."[373] These two movements are remarkably similar. Both are in ternary form (imparting this same form on the piece as a whole) and share the same basic progression of textures and modal material. Their thematic material, while quite similar, is nonetheless distinct. This is an extreme example of Hovhaness's practice of composing "recapitulations" in which, while the specific musical content differs from what has been heard before, the many resemblances are so strong that the effect of restating material from earlier in the work is nonetheless achieved. Subtler examples of this practice of pseudo-recapitulation have already been mentioned in regards to the *Violoncello Concerto* and *Mysterious Mountain*, where they similarly served to provide organic connection between the outer movements of a larger work. One might argue that this technique represents a kind of

[371] Michaelyan, "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness."
[372] Kostelanetz, Richard, *On Innovative Musicians*, 105.
[373] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.

compromise between what is often described as an Eastern "non-linear" conception of form and the Western classical approach.

One of Hovhaness's largest dramatic works, *Lady of Light* effectively uses many of the musical techniques he developed over previous periods in abstract musical contexts for well-defined programmatic purposes. This makes the work quite distinct from the "*Noh* operas" of earlier in the decade. For example, the "mountainous" series of aspirational rising triads (similar figures are found in many of Hovhaness's works) that begin the opening movement serve in this context to evoke the ascent to the celestial realm in which narrative begins. The Lady of Light's immolation is portrayed by an arresting "spirit murmur" on the word "roar," sung by the chorus divided into eight parts. An *oibuki* for three violins, based on a variant of the theme which had initially served to characterize the Lady of Light, functions as an almost literalistic portrayal of the ascent of the soul of the protagonist to heaven, and is a rare example of thematic transformation in Hovhaness's music (Fig. 7.5, 7.6).

Figure 7.5, *Lady of Light* (1969), Lady of Light's theme

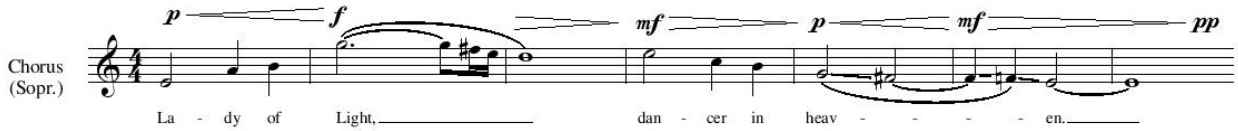
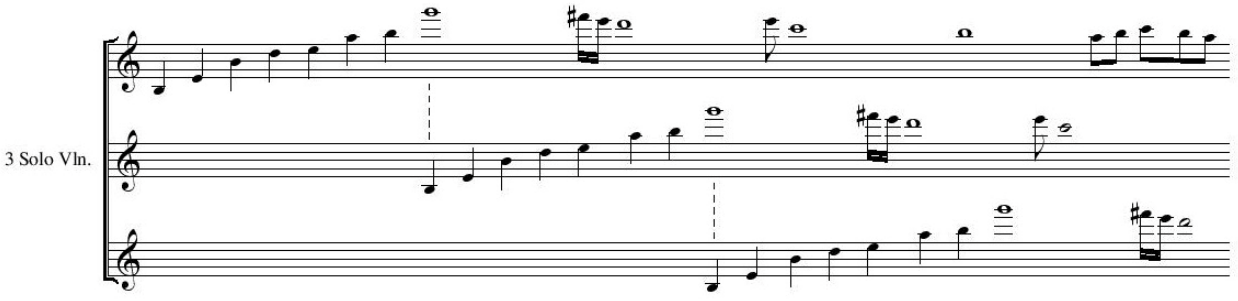


Figure 7.6, *Lady of Light* (1969), "Intermezzo – Lady of Light enters heaven"



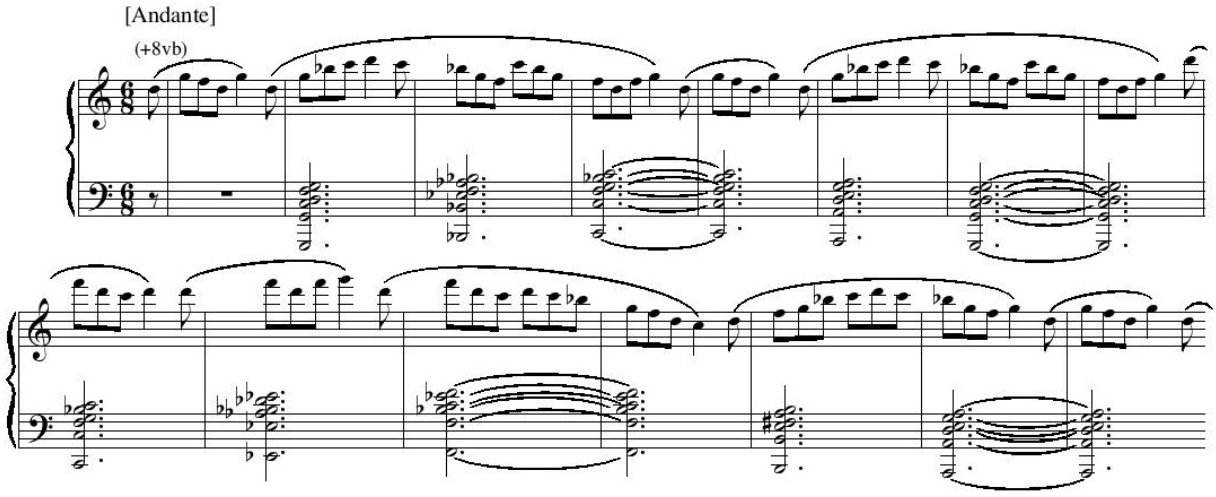
The next year, Hovhaness wrote one of the orchestral works for which now he is best remembered, *And God Created Great Whales*. The musical language of the piece is somewhat of a throwback to the pan-modal style of the "Eastern" period, and the work contains no triadic harmony throughout. Works in this vein continued to appear through the early 1970s, although for the most part without the many overt references to various non-Western musical styles found in the works of the "Eastern" period proper. *And God Created Great Whales* also features a part for tape which consists entirely of the recorded songs of humpback whales. Although he claimed to have made experiments with electronic music in the 1950s, Hovhaness's employment of electronics in his published works was limited to tape parts providing atmospheric sounds such as this one (one movement from the twelfth symphony calls for recorded waterfall sounds).[374] Little attempt is made to organically integrate the whalesong and music, and the tape part is mostly played out over beds of *senza misura* sound similar to those found in many "Eastern period" works in accompanimental roles. Hovhaness himself was somewhat ambivalent about the lasting popularity of *And God Created Great Whale*s – it began as a pops commission from Kostelantez for the New York Philharmonic, which permiered the piece in June 1970.

Perhaps this work's most memorable effect occurs during the second pass through its pentatonic main theme (borrowed from an earlier piece for two pianos) (Fig. 7.7). A series of parallel quartal chords, somewhat out of the ordinary for Hovhaness, pass mysteriously underneath, almost certainly intended to evoke the image of a mammoth whale swimming beneath the placid surface of the ocean. These chords are actually verticalizations of the main theme's pentatonic scale, and so fit quite naturally with the tune unfolding above.

---

[374] Hovhaness, interview, October 1975.
Dikijian, "Alan Hovhaness: Passage to India," 26.

Figure 7.7, *And God Created Great Whales* (1970)



The subject matter of *And God Created Great Whales* seems to hint at an ecological consciousness (the international moratorium on the hunting of humpback whales dates from 1966, four years prior to the work's composition) which Hovhaness occasionally expressed in interviews, voicing his opposition to nuclear power and telling the story of how seeing a grove of pine trees cut down when he was child left him with a life-long "impression of cities taking over the beauty of nature and destroying it."[375] As with Hovhaness's leanings towards Eastern mysticism, this played well in the cultural environment of the 1970s. Picking up on the connection with West Coast hippie culture, one commentator cheekily noted of this work that "Californians in particular find that one grand karma."[376]

In 1970 and 1971 Hovhaness for the most part continued to reside in Switzerland, returning to the United States often for performances, including a 60th birthday concert at Carnegie Hall given by the Long Island Chamber Ensemble in November of 1971.[377] In 1972, he

[375] Hovhaness and Davies, interview.
Hovhaness, interview, October 1975.
[376] Mordden, *A Guide to Orchestral Music*, 537.
[377] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."

made another trip to Japan, but for the most part resided in New York, living in hotels with (considering his professional stature) surprisingly primitive conditions.[378] This same year, C.F. Peters (with a few exceptions) ceased publishing his new works, forcing Hovhaness to look for other ways of disseminating his scores.[379]

In April of 1973, Hovhaness finally moved to Seattle permanently. He remained in the Pacific Northwest for the rest of his life. Once again, it appears as though his basic motivation in choosing where he wanted to make his home was its proximity to the mountains he loved.[380] Seattle also represented a kind of mid-way point between the United States and East Asia.[381] Given its history of other composers who "looked East" (notably Cowell and Harrison), the West Coast has been seen by some as Hovhaness's spiritual home, although he only began to reside there relatively late in his life. By 1989, a *New York Times* reviewer felt comfortable referring to Hovhaness's music as "decidedly West Coast."[382]

Hovhaness immediately began to concertize in his new home city, arranging a concert devoted to his chamber music in July, 1973. In November, he organized a concert at the Seattle Opera House, giving the *Magnificat* and the new symphonies numbers 22 and 23. The next year saw the premiere of the *Symphony No. 29* (really a concerto for euphonium) in Seattle by the Northwest Chamber Orchestra, a now defunct ensemble with which Hovhaness had an ongoing relationship. In March of that year, Hovhaness returned to his alma mater Arlington High School to conduct a concert of his works with the school's wind ensemble. The most important event of 1975 was the premiere of *The Way of Jesus*, a large-scale oratorio, in Saint Patrick's Cathedral in

---

[378] Sobol, interview.
[379] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."
[380] *The Verdehr Trio, Making of a Medium Video Series Part I.*
[381] Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."
[382] Schwarz, Robert K. "A Chance to Meet Some American Composers." *The New York Times*, December 10, 1989.

New York City. In May 1977, Hovhaness was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. An insider credential if there ever was one, it is ironic that this recognition came just as Hovhaness began once again to drift away from the "mainstream." The same year, Hovhaness married the Japanese soprano Hinako Fujihara, who became a frequent musical collaborator over the final decades of his career. 1977 also saw the premiere of Hovhaness's last Kostelanetz commission, a setting of verses from the *Rubaiyat* for narrator, orchestra, and accordion soloist.

Following the move to Seattle, the musical style characteristic of Hovhaness's "late period" more or less settled into place, remaining largely unchanged for the remainder of his productive years. It is hard not to associate this style, serene and leisurely, with the spacious environment of the Pacific Northwest and Hovhaness's newfound domestic tranquility. Certainly pieces with mountain-inspired titles became more common. Many have described this style period as "neo-Romantic." Although the lush triadic harmony and long expansive melodies characteristic of the music of Hovhaness's last two decades might be "Romantic" in the trivial, modern sense of the term, his workmanlike approach to composition during this period was as ever deeply anti-Romantic, as was the largely unperturbed tranquility expressed by the music. This style bears none of the hallmarks of "lateness" usually relied upon to define a composer's final style period after the Beethovenian ideal. Indeed, it flouts practically all of them. Hovhaness, showing no sign of a tortured soul struggling with mortality, entered a period of truly Haydnesque fecundity, the musical products of which are almost uniformly gentle and carefree.

It is telling to return yet again to the figure of Sibelius as a point of comparison. Hovhaness's idol, whether because he was made to feel musically out of step with the times or because he was crushed by the burden of the Romantic/modernist imperative to create "masterpieces" of ever greater profundity, ceased composing altogether during the last decades

of his life after working for years on an eighth symphony that never saw the light of day. Hovhaness, rather than spending years agonizing over a single symphony before destroying it in a bout of self-critical depression, poured out 40 of them, along with a bevy of piano sonatas and copious other works large and small. Because of this large volume of music and the cessation of stylistic development described above, my examination of works from this period must necessarily be even more selective than in previous chapters. In fact, if the length of these chapters were to be chronologically proportional, this final chapter would have to occupy half the dissertation.

Some commentators have claimed that Hovhaness's "late" style constituted a return to the musical style of the early period.[383] In addition to the stylistic similarities between Hovhaness's early and late styles, he continued the practice of recycling musical material composed in his youth, perhaps in an effort to give his output as a whole a kind of cyclic structure. For example, one of the themes in the *Symphony No. 50*, "Star Dawn" of 1983 came from a long-forgotten piano piece of the same name written 50 years earlier. The 1980s also saw a trend of reusing previously discarded piano works in their entirety, essentially unchanged, as individual movements of new piano sonatas. Nevertheless, Walter Simmons has rebutted the claim that Hovhaness's late period works resemble those of his youth, writing that he finds "distinct differences between the works from these two corners of [Hovhaness's] compositional career."[384] It is true that despite similarities, the products of these two periods could not be confused for one another, and certain passages from the late piano sonatas that contain early period material seem to stick out for this reason. Elements shared by both styles (for example a

[383] Simmons, "Fanfare Reviews Alan Hovhaness: Exile Symphony."
[384] Ibid.

preponderance of thick chorale-like writing for the piano) are used with much greater consistency in the later works.

As in the *Symphony No. 11*, elements from other earlier style periods (especially the Armenian period, for example in the fifth movement of *Symphony No. 31*) continued to return, although they sometimes give the impression of having been watered down. Complex textures in the music of the late period generally include only one or two "open" elements (usually unobtrusive rhythmic cycles scored for percussion) in addition to the "closed" portions of the texture.

Reception of the music from these years has so far been divided. While audiences largely seem to have responded favorably to the new recordings of late period works which, under the patronage of his widow, have continued to accumulate since the composer's death, some critics have felt that these pieces show signs not only of stylistic stagnation but also of flagging inspiration. Walter Simmons, for example, a great admirer of some of Hovhaness's earlier music and thus unlikely to have made any knee-jerk dismissal of these works on the basis of stylistic considerations alone, has written that, "although [Hovhaness] continued composing prolifically until a few years before his death, after the mid-1960s – unfortunately and inexplicably (to me, anyway) – the quality of his work plummeted into depths of mind-numbing banality."[385] Simmons's contention that the works of this period are for the most part "extremely simple in texture and structure, and often very slow in tempo and long in duration" is true enough.[386] Marco Shirodkar has also written of a certain "prolixity" apparent in the later symphonies.[387]

---

[385] Simmons, Walter. "HOVHANESS Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra. Lousadzak. Mihr. Vijag. Ko-Ola-U," 2006. http://www.walter-simmons.com/articles/342.htm.
[386] Simmons, "Fanfare Reviews Alan Hovhaness: Exile Symphony."
[387] Shirodkar, "Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary."

One factor which may contribute to the impression that these works are lacking in substance is the extremely "under-marked" appearance of the scores from this period. On average, their level of notational specificity is about on par with Mozart. This trait is by no means confined to the works of the late period. In 1953, Louisville Orchestra conductor Robert Whitney had Hovhaness send him a long list of additional dynamic markings for the *Concerto No. 7* because he found the score to be too vague.[388] (Hovhaness obliged, but instructed that, as in Baroque music, the shape of the melodic lines should naturally imply their dynamics.) This notational sparseness, however, is most apparent in the works of the late period. Some of the very early pieces from Hovhaness's youth recycled during this period, which were initially (somewhat pretentiously) over-marked, were recopied with many fewer dynamic, expression, and tempo indications in the later published versions. As this notational philosophy flies in the face of several hundred years of development in music notation, it is easily seen as another manifestation of Hovhaness's anti-modernism, perhaps borne of a desire to allow performers of his music more interpretive agency. Indeed, the best performances on record of late period works (for example the Verdehr Trio's recording of *Lake Samish* or several recordings of late symphonies for string orchestra conducted by Gerard Schwarz, Hovhaness's most important champion during this period) are all helped along by significant interpretive contributions from the performers.

When Arnold Rosner wrote his thesis in the early 1970s, he was able to view the relatively complex and daring works of Hovhaness's "Eastern" period (for him the "late period") such as the *Symphony No. 19* as the culmination of Hovhaness's creative journey. The composer's actual late period turned out to be much less convenient for the writer trying to cast

[388] Whitney, Robert. Letter to Alan Hovhaness, December 15, 1953. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.

the narrative of his compositional career in similar progressive terms. The music of Hovhaness's actual last period reveals the composer indulging in musical predilections that date back to the 1930s: the grand chorale, tuneful fugues, and long melodies of child-like innocence. In the end, the trajectory of Hovhaness's stylistic development turned out to be as non-teleological as his musical approach, in many ways coming full circle. Whatever the eventual critical consensus, this late style certainly constitutes an undeniable affirmation of the anti-modernist tendencies which played such an important part in Hovhaness's creative approach throughout his career.

Although Hovhaness was able to live exclusively off composition for the rest of his life (he had by this time amassed quite a vast catalogue of published scores and recordings which continued to bring in royalties) he did experience a notable decline in prestige around the time he moved to Seattle. It is impossible to determine whether this decline was a result of the late period stylistic shift, the cause of it, or neither. His friend Lawrence Sobol remembered that "Alan's decade of great prominence was the 1950s," after which he was "overshadowed by a whole different group of composers."[389] This trend continued over the following decades, and by the late 1970s there was, with a few exceptions, a drop off in high-profile commissions. Hovhaness's *Gebrauchsmusik* mentality meant that he had no qualms about taking more modest commissions from youth symphonies and community orchestras. Nevertheless, Arnold Rosner's attempt to cast Hovhaness's career as a struggle against the establishment for acceptance (perhaps taking after the composer's own view) does not hold up to scrutiny. Hovhaness was one of the most successful American composers of his generation; even with his career in relative decline, he continued to compose prolifically in his accustomed style, apparently unbothered by dwindling public interest in the results.

---

[389] Sobol, interview.

One of the few high-profile commissions from these later years came from the National Symphony, which premiered Hovhaness's *Symphony No. 39* in January of 1979, under the direction of Mstislav Rostropovich. The production of symphonies continued unabated, despite the fact that the manuscript of what was the fortieth symphony was stolen in a briefcase from Hovhaness's New York Hotel room earlier in the year and never recovered.[390] This same year, Carlos Santana released his album *Oneness*, which featured a track borrowing a short theme from the second movement of *Mysterious Mountain*, another indicator of Hovhaness's countercultural resonances. In 1980, Carl Sagan's celebrated *Cosmos* series aired on PBS. Its soundtrack was made up largely of extracts of various classical pieces, including several works of Hovhaness.

The use of his music for this purpose was particularly apt considering Hovhaness's own longstanding interest in astronomy dating back to the 1920s.[391] Themes related to astronomy were probably the second most common in Hovhaness's work after mountains (*Journey to Vega*, *Star Dawn*, *Saturn, Copernicus*, *Vision of Andromeda*, etc.). One of the works featured on *Cosmos* was the *Symphony No. 19*, which Hovhaness had previously described as "[symbolizing] the creative forces of the galaxies … the explosions which take place in the central core of giant galaxies of stars when millions of suns explode simultaneously."[392] Hovhaness often drew musical inspiration from this interest in astronomy. In addition to the "star-like" foreign-note bell sounds mentioned in chapter 4, Hovhaness compared the effect of some of his experiments in "controlled chaos" with the asteroid belt, and even saw a deep connection between gravitational

[390] "Manuscript of Hovhannes's New 40th Symphony Stolen." *The New York Times*, January 25, 1979.
[391] "Discussion of 'Saturn' with Alan Hovhaness."
[392] Hovhaness, North Jersey Wind Symphony, and Sevan Philharmonic, *Music of Alan Hovhaness*.

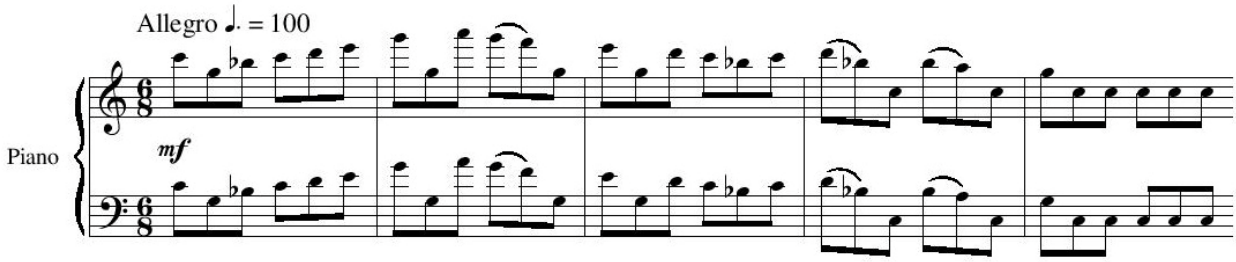
attraction and the attraction to the tonic note in tonal music of all kinds.[393] The most affecting appearance of Hovhaness's music in *Cosmos*, however, came six years later when it was called on to underscore a message of very human concern. The *Prayer of St. Gregory* (by that time relatively famous) can be heard during a "Cosmos Update" in which Sagan makes an impassioned plea for restraint and moral fortitude in our application of potentially dangerous scientific knowledge, something with which Hovhaness ("against nuclear power in all its forms") would surely have agreed.

Aside from the outpouring of symphonies, the most significant products of Hovhaness's turn back to ostensibly classical forms during this last period were some sixteen piano sonatas. The *Catamount Sonata* of 1980, dedicated to the composer's wife, can be taken as representative. Despite this period's generally more "Western" orientation, there are still many traces to be found of the influences Hovhaness had absorbed from various non-Western musics over the years. The opening movement of this sonata, for example, is marked "in the spirit of an alap," the rhythmically free, improvisatory section used to introduce the character of the mode at the beginning of an Indian composition. The three-note drone-like chords of a fifth and octave played by the left hand throughout the movement are likewise modeled after the music of the *tambura*, the plucked string instrument whose drone notes provide a sonic foundation in Indian music. The sonata's second and fourth movements are both in *jhala* style, another persistent Indian influence (Fig. 7.8). In fact, *jhalas* are so common in the late piano sonatas that they essentially became a kind of fast movement genre type. The *jhala* figuration is generally doubled in both hands two octaves apart or occasionally at the twelfth, and is sometimes decorated with the addition of a simple cyclic figure in the left hand.

---

[393] Hovhaness, "Giant Melody in Nature and Art."

Figure 7.8, *Sonata for Piano, "Catamount"* (1980), IV. Allegro



Another common genre type in the late piano sonatas (and symphonies) appears in the sonata's third movement, a hymn-like affair made up of exclusively triadic harmonies (Fig. 7.9). Such homophonic movements are for the most part so stubbornly triadic that Hovhaness sometimes even sketched them writing only the outer voices and figured bass (Fig. 7.10).

Figure 7.9, *Sonata for Piano, "Catamount"* (1980), III. Grand View Farm

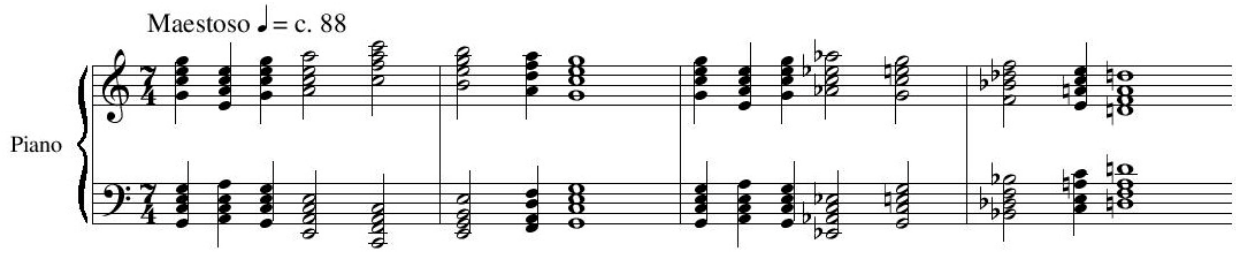
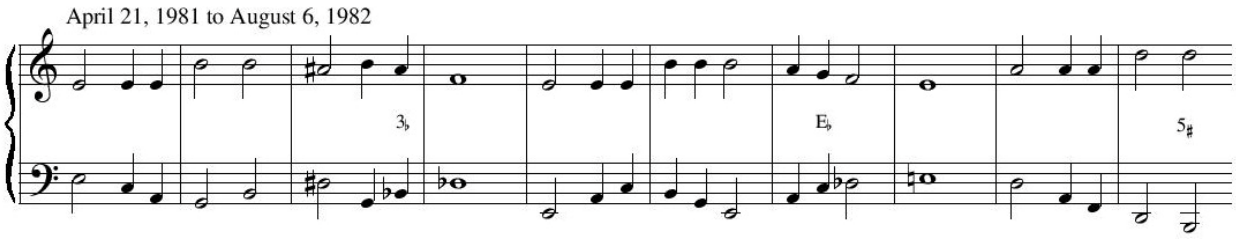


Figure 7.10, two-part sketch with figures (1981/2)



The sonata's fifth movement, "love song," exhibits a harmonic peculiarity that is also common to many, if not most of the works of the late period. Its slowly unfurling melody is in a

completely diatonic to C major, but its chordal accompaniment consists almost entirely of chains of half diminished seventh chords "used in an unorthodox, nonfunctional manner," broken only by cadences on the tonic C major (Fig. 7.11). These half diminished sevenths are for the most part connected by one or two common tones (there are more possibilities in this regard than with plain triads), and are essentially treated as consonances, although they still resolve to pure triads at the end of each phrase. In other contexts, such consecutive half diminished seventh chords can act as prolongations of a single harmony. Hovhaness viewed this chord as the basis of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (the *Tristan* chord is, after all, its enharmonic equivalent), and in conversation once referred to it as a "cupid chord" that he felt he had been "forbidden in [his] earlier days."[394]

Figure 7.11, *Sonata for Piano, "Catamount"* (1980), V. Love Song (partial harmonic reduction)

The complete lack of tonal tension throughout this short piano sonata is highly characteristic of the works of this period. Each movement is in C, and while there are digressions to distantly related harmonies, there is no real modulation to speak of.

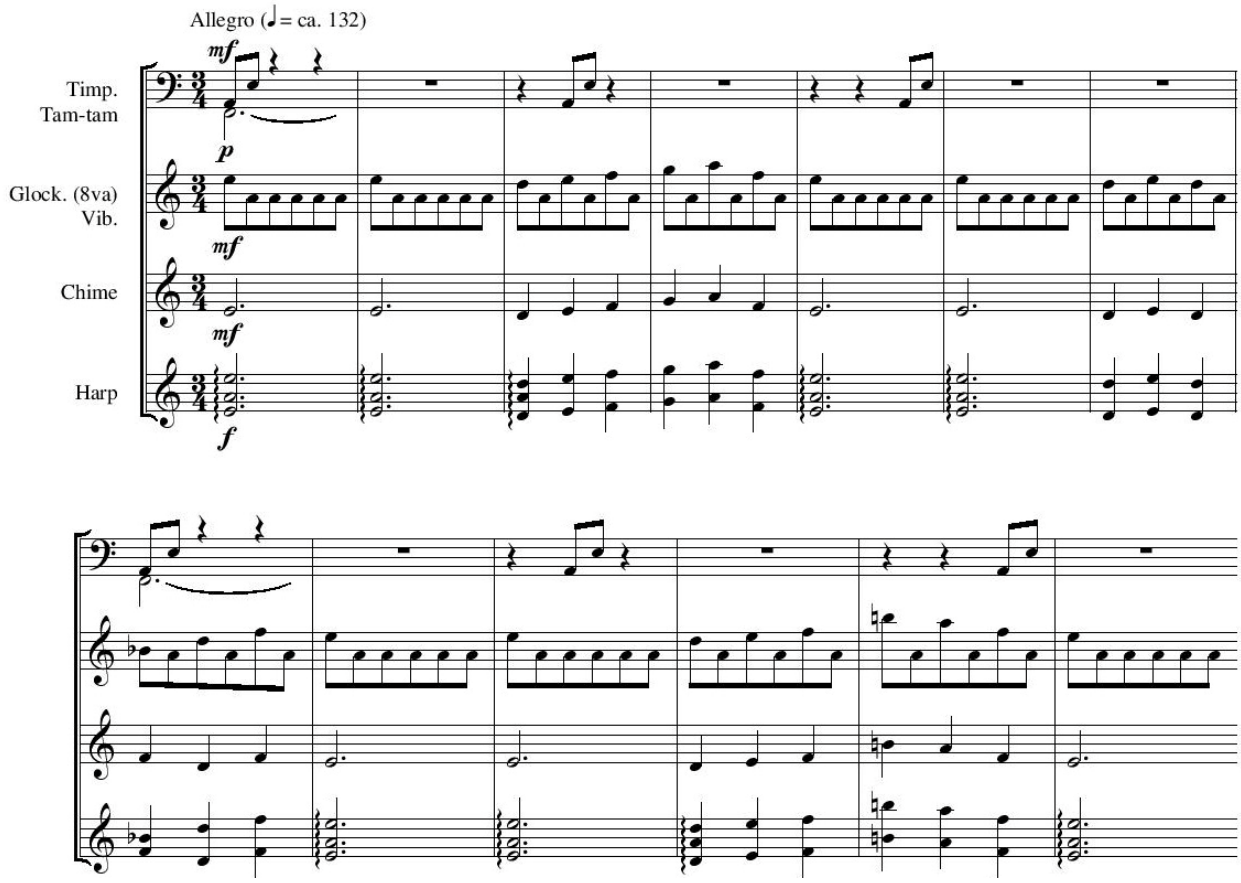
Hovhaness's most important work to be premiered in 1981 was the large-scale oratorio *Revelations of Saint Paul* (a kind of sequel to *The Way of Jesus*), premiered by Musica Sacra at Avery Fischer Hall in New York in January. In August, Hovhaness was a guest at the Cabrillo Festival at the invitation of his old friend Lou Harrison, where several of his works were performed. The next year, Hovhaness wrote what has probably become his best known composition of these final decades, the *Mount Saint Helens Symphony* (his fiftieth). The

[394] Markarian, Shoghere. "Talking to Alan Hovhaness." *Ararat Magazine*, Fall 1977. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

symphony was commissioned by C. F. Peters, and premiered in March of 1984 by the San Jose Symphony conducted by George Cleve. A short documentary for Seattle public television was filmed in conjunction with the premiere.

The second movement of this symphony is one of the few instances in Hovhaness's body of work in which a real influence from gamelan can be discerned (the composer had just written his only work for gamelan ensemble the previous year). Hovhaness never studied gamelan in any depth comparable to that with which he studied the music of India and Japan, but occasionally mentioned it as an influence (for example, in the third movement of the *Symphony No. 17*). The second movement of the *Symphony No. 50*, "Spirit Lake," is cast in a kind of rondo form. In its first section, Hovhaness uses the glockenspiel, vibraphone, and chimes in a combination whose metallic sonority makes unmistakable reference to the Indonesian musical style (Fig. 7.12). The music is essentially monophonic, but its main melodic line is occasionally decorated by light doubling in fourths and fifths in the harp. The soft, periodic tam-tam strokes also recall the effect of the *kenong*, the large gong in the gamelan ensemble which marks long time units. Despite this surface similarity to gamelan, however, there are important differences. Hovhaness's tam-tam part is not "colotomic," but, as is usual in his music, is written in a seven-bar cycle at odds with the eight-bar phrases of the main melodic line rather than reinforcing them. Even more important, the layered rhythmic intensity that is often such a crucial element of gamelan was never really a factor in Hovhaness's music.

Figure 7.12, *Symphony No. 50* (1982), II. Spirit Lake



The *Symphony No. 50* is best remembered for its third movement's vivid representation of the eruption of Mount Saint Helens and its aftermath. This movement is yet another example of Hovhaness's three-part "Introduction, Vision/Surprise, Hymn of Praise" form, tailored to fit the programmatic needs of this particular work. The "surprise" in this case consists of a long sonic depiction of the volcanic eruption. Aside from a few elements of musical onomatopoeia (loud rolls on the timpani and bass drum and the sound of a thundersheet), this depiction is mostly accomplished through a somewhat extreme use of canons at the unison and rhythmic cycles, standard techniques in Hovhaness's compositional arsenal. There is even a roaring *oibuki* of sorts for three trombones. The first half of this "eruption episode" is made up of an ambitious

polymodal canonic structure in three layers (two of which are related by inversion), recalling those found in works of the 1950s such as the *Concerto No. 7* (Fig. 7.13). The euphonious harmonic result (Fig. 7.14) is guaranteed because the constituent melodic elements (with the exception of six beats of sustained Eb in the trumpets' melody) stick exclusively to outlining the tonic triad.

Figure 7.13, *Symphony No. 50* (1982), III. Volcano, canonic elements

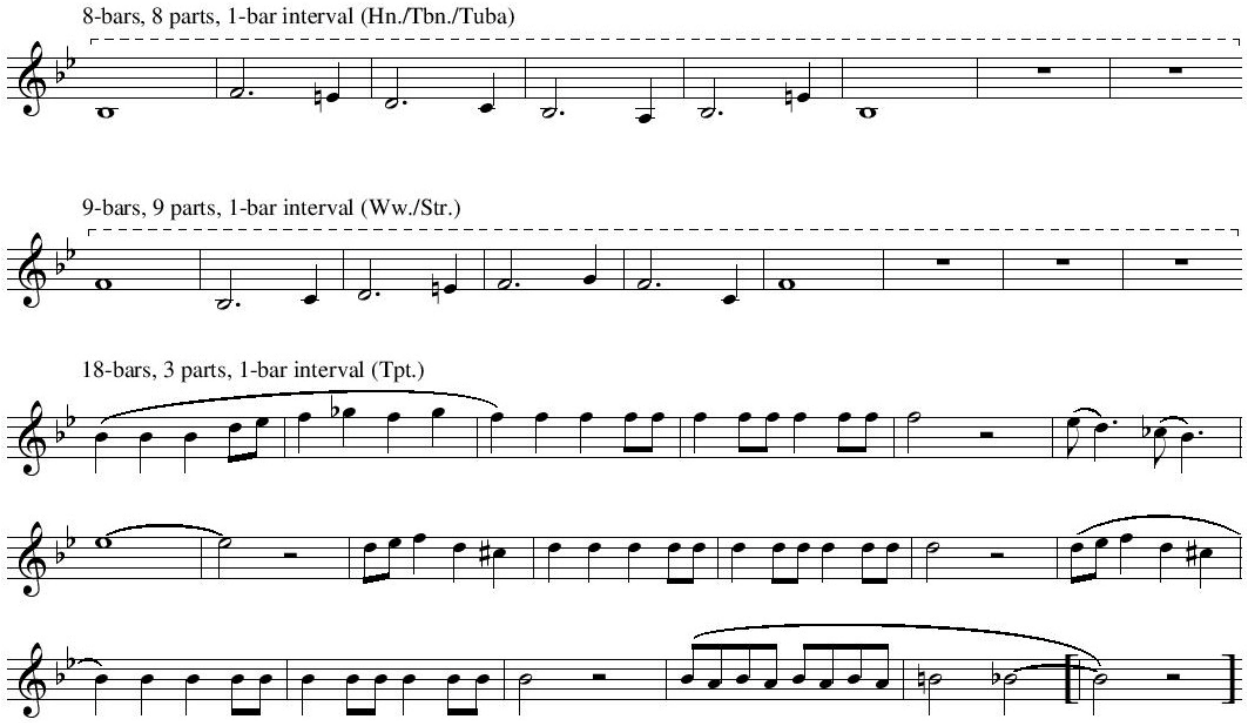
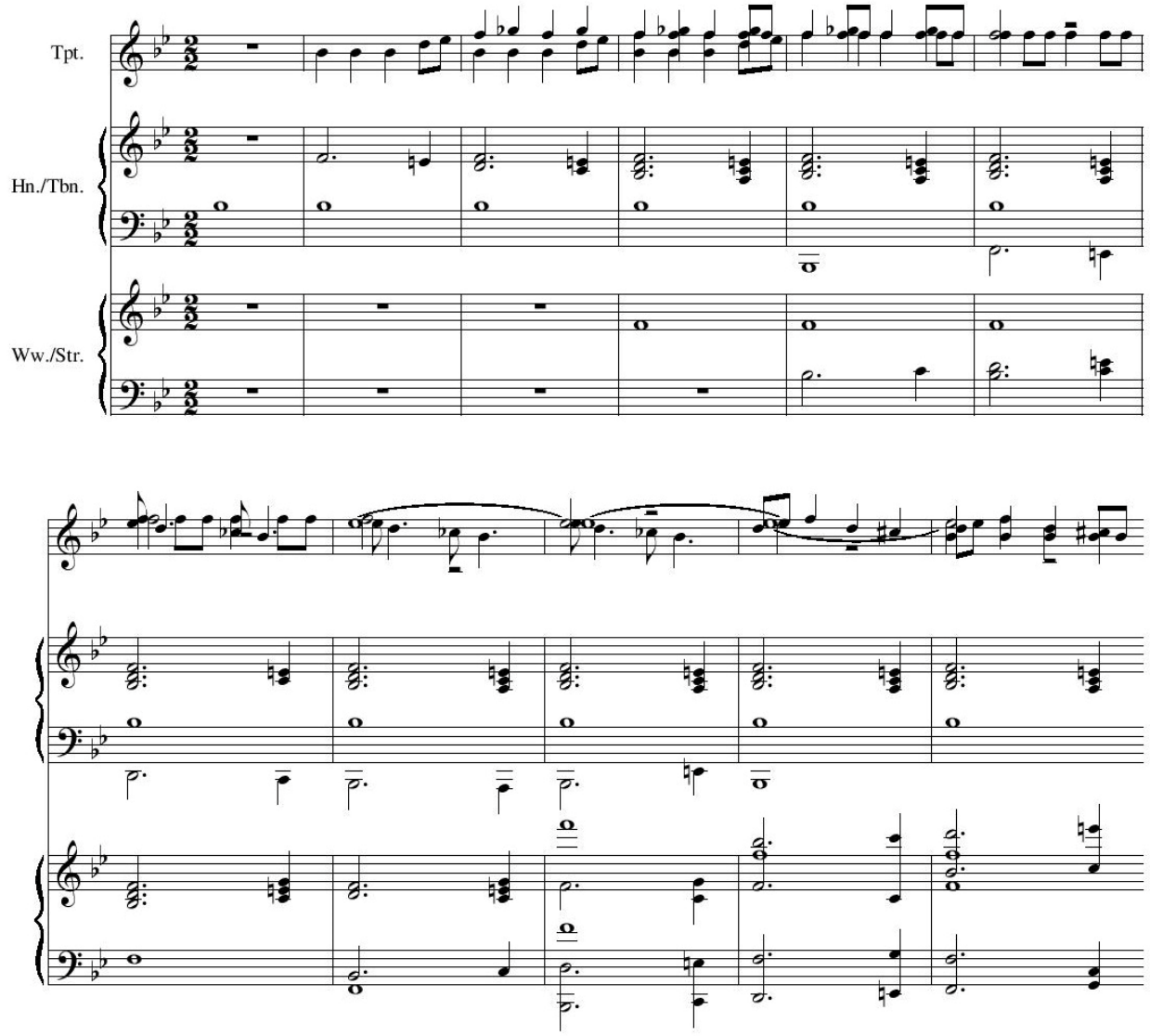


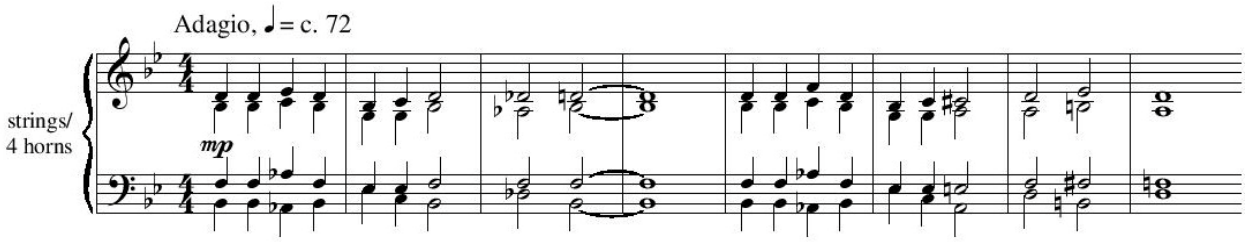
Figure 7.14, *Symphony No. 50* (1982), III. Volcano, canonic complex, harmonic results



For the rest, the movement is a representative example of a "hymn and fugue" pairing, a formal device which, although the earliest examples date back to early period, had by this time become another stock element of the late period style. The gentle chorale which opens the movement (Fig. 7.15) is, after its theme receives an extended fugal treatment, triumphantly restated at the close. This "optimistic" take on what was for most a spectacular natural disaster is a reflection of Hovhaness's spiritual convictions. He viewed the eruption as an expression of

"the life giving forces that are building the mountains that pierce the clouds of heaven."[395] His correspondence from the time described the event as "grand and awesome."[396] In his article "Writing the Blast," O. Alan Weltzien has compared Hovhaness's interpretation of the eruption to that of the environmentalist poet Gary Snyder, christening them both "rhapsodists of deep time" who were able to view destruction in the natural world in the context of a cycle of continuous renewal.[397]

Figure 7.15, *Symphony No. 50* (1982), III. Volcano, opening



Honors of various kinds continued to grace Hovhaness in his old age. In 1985, his birthday was declared "Alan Hovhaness day" in his hometown of Arlington, Massachusetts.[398] In 1986, a 75th birthday concert was given for Hovhaness in Boston's Jordan Hall (the location of some of his earliest premieres).[399] In 1988, the 77-year-old composer recorded an album of his own piano pieces released under the title "Shalimar." Although it is probably safe to assume that this is not a record of Hovhaness's playing in its prime, this recording nevertheless constitutes one of the few surviving documents of the composer's own interpretation of his work at the keyboard.

---

[395] Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."
[396] Hovhaness, Alan to Hovhaness, Serafina, July 7, 1980.
[397] Weltzien, O. Alan. "Gary Snyder, Alan Hovhaness, and Writing the Blast." *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, no. 4 (2009): 779–806.
[398] "Proclamation." Town of Arlington, March 11, 1985. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.
[399] Gregory, interview.

One of the most successful chamber works from the late period is *Lake Samish*, a trio for violin, clarinet, and piano. Its six movements contain examples of many of the important elements of Hovhaness's late style at their musical best. The first movement is a prelude and four-voice "vibration fugue," in which the two voices played by the piano are made to match the sostenuto of the violin and clarinet through the use of "vibrating" repeating tones (a technique going back to the piano works of the 1940s). The second movement, a "St. Vartan style" canon in three parts, is reminiscent of the canons found in the *Symphony No. 9*, with the addition of a coda in which "star-like" sounds in the piano's upper register float weightlessly over the final statement of the subject.

The third movement is in ternary form, with two triadic hymn-like outer sections surrounding a central "aria" for solo violin. The melody of these outer sections is set strictly in the 27th *Melakarta* raga, (Fig. 7.16) and the accompanying harmony is in fact quite formulaic. Despite the "neo-Romantic" style of Hovhaness's late period works, among them are some of his most systematic compositions. In an interview about this particular work filmed for a documentary on the Verdher Trio, the composer described this movement as follows: "the hymn has endings on different notes of the scale, which I like to do in hymn-like melodies so as to make it more interesting."[400] An examination of all of the cadential points throughout the outer sections of this movement reveal that each note of the raga is used as a root at least once, with the fifth degree doubled and the tonic tripled (Fig. 7.17). Triads built on some of these scale degrees, however, result in notes outside the mode. This is one technique for introducing some degree of chromatic variety while still ensuring that the harmony remained grounded in the modal material of the melody.

---

[400] *The Verdehr Trio, Making of a Medium Video Series Part I.*

Figure 7.16, *Lake Samish* (1988), third movement, melody and mode

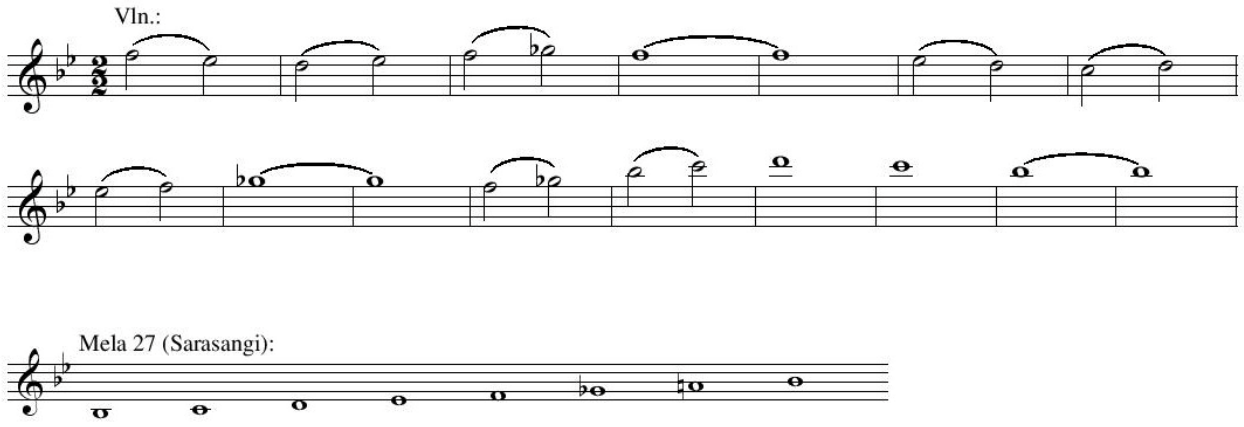
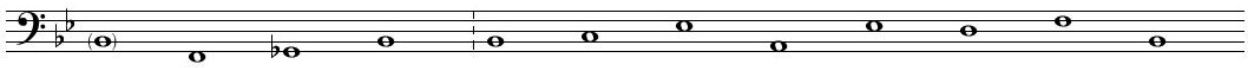
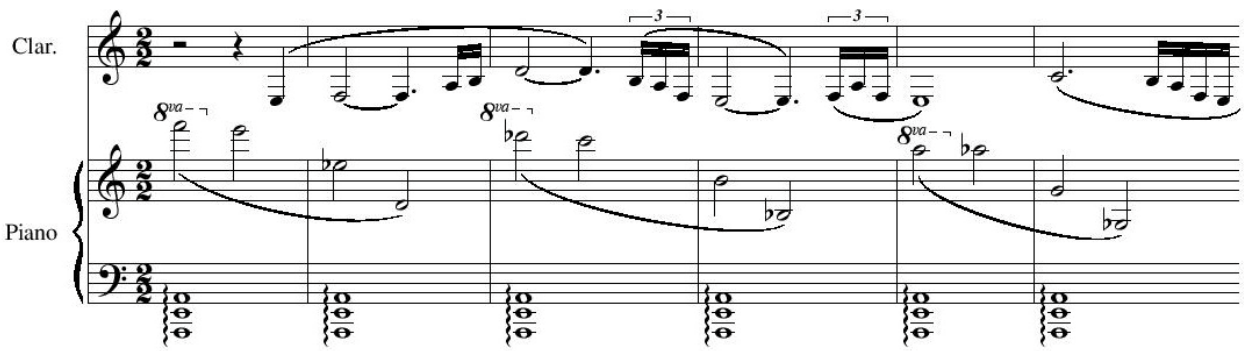


Figure 7.16, *Lake Samish* (1988), third movement, cadential points



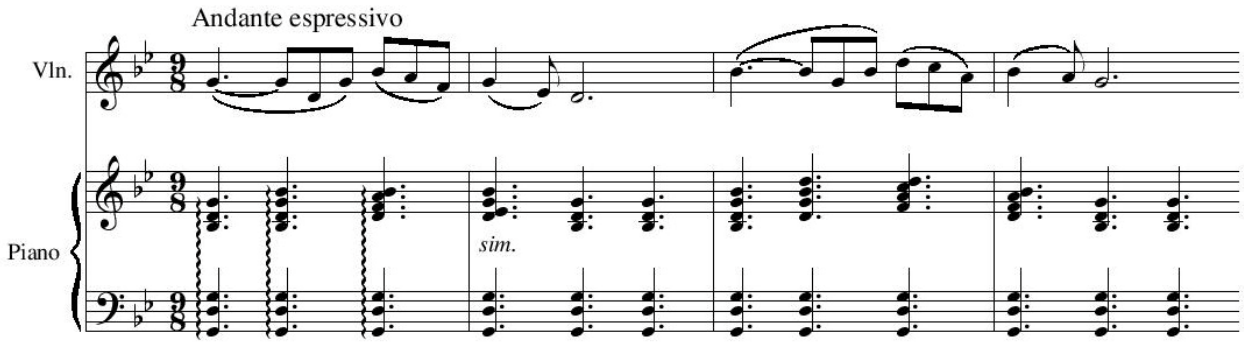
The fourth movement of *Lake Samish* is another "aria" of sorts, this time for solo clarinet, followed by a brief fugue in two parts unfolding over a drone in the piano. An examination of the aria portion shows that the three-part texture that had characterized so much of Hovhaness's music from the 1950s was at this time still occasionally in use. (Fig. 7.17) The background cycle which colors the clarinet's melody consists of a descending chromatic scale displaced in register (technically another twelve-tone row) repeating in a six-bar cycle.

Figure 7.17, *Lake Samish* (1988), fourth movement



The trio's final movement is cast in two parts. The first, yet another "aria" for violin and piano, features a harp-like accompaniment in the piano emblematic of long stretches of music from the late period. The figuration of this accompaniment creates the illusion of constant harmonic motion, but in fact the whole section is set almost entirely over a tonic and dominant drone. The non-functional harmonic changes floating above are a natural outgrowth of the progression of the violin melody rather than the result of any real harmonic movement (Fig. 7.18). The second half of this final movement features the *jhala* texture applied to a vigorous three-part canon, with a "timpani-style" tonic-dominant figure in the lower register of the piano punctuating the texture in seven-beat cycles.

Figure 7.18, *Lake Samish* (1988), fifth movement, opening

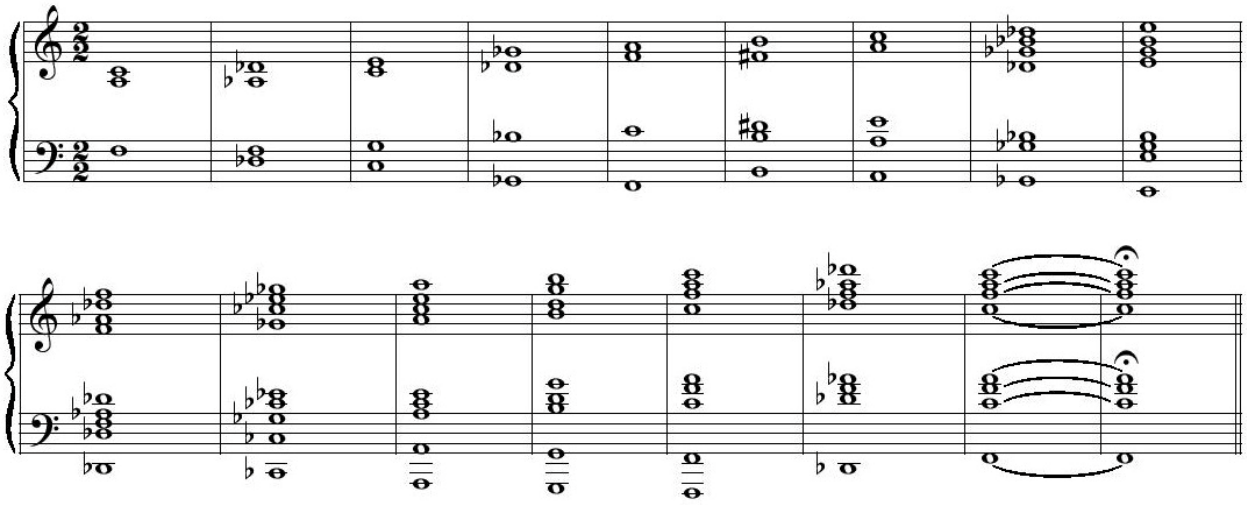


In 1989, the jazz pianist Keith Jarret recorded *Lousadzak*, yet another sign of Hovhaness's continuing "crossover" appeal. Around 1990, his output finally began to slow. On October 6, 1991, Hovhaness was honored with an 80th birthday concert in Carnegie Hall sponsored by the Armenian Apostolic Church of America. The composer Karel Husa and Hovhaness himself conducted the American Composer's Orchestra in performances that included the premiere of the *Symphony No. 65*, commissioned in celebration of Armenia's

independence from the collapsing Soviet Union, as well as works from earlier periods.[401] The elderly John Cage was in attendance.

Hovhaness composed his penultimate symphony *Hymn to Glacier Peak* (No. 66) during the same year. It was commissioned by the Seattle Youth Symphony, which gave the premiere in May of 1992. Its first movement contains one passage, an exclusively triadic transition, which may hold the key to much of the harmony of Hovhaness's late music. As the texture thickens, the upper voice of the chorale texture voice rises up two octaves through a six-note mode (a subset of the 53rd *Melakarta* raga), surely a "mountainous" gesture if there ever was one. This mode, however, is harmonized in two different ways (Fig. 7.19).

Figure 7.19, *Symphony No. 66* (1991), first movement, two harmonizations of a six-note mode

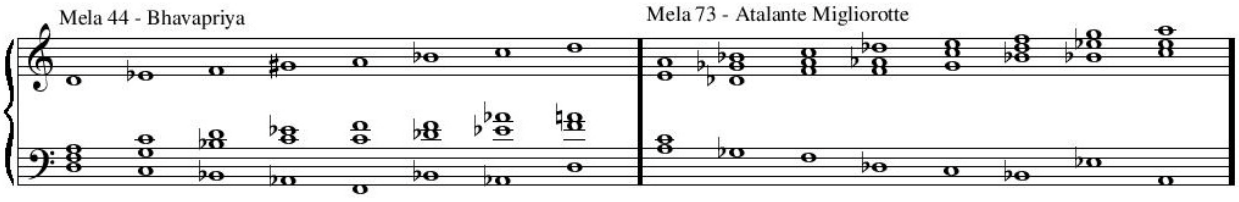


Hovhaness's late sketchbooks are full of similar figures, indicating that experiments in the harmonization of "exotic" modes were likely an important generator of harmonic progression in the works of this final style period. In one instance Hovhaness even provided a harmonization for an imaginary "73rd mela" which he named after "Atalante Migliorotte," the Florentine

[401] Kohanov, "The Muse on the Mountain."

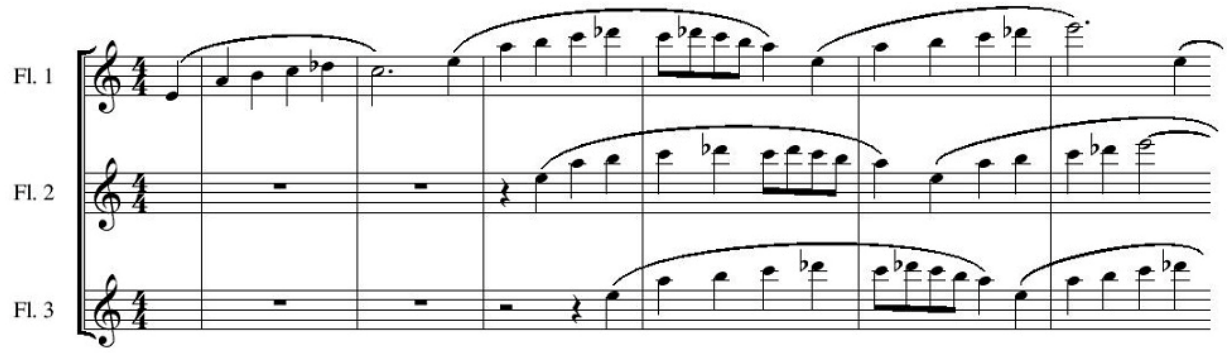
musician of whom he believed he was a reincarnation (Fig. 7.20). Although works from this period are for the most part characterized by very "Western" harmony, the Indian modes which Hovhaness had made his own over the years never ceased to be an important part of his musical language, although these ragas now appeared in a harmonic treatment that no Indian musician would likely recognize.

Figure 7.20, selected "raga harmonizations" from Hovhaness's sketchbooks (1989)



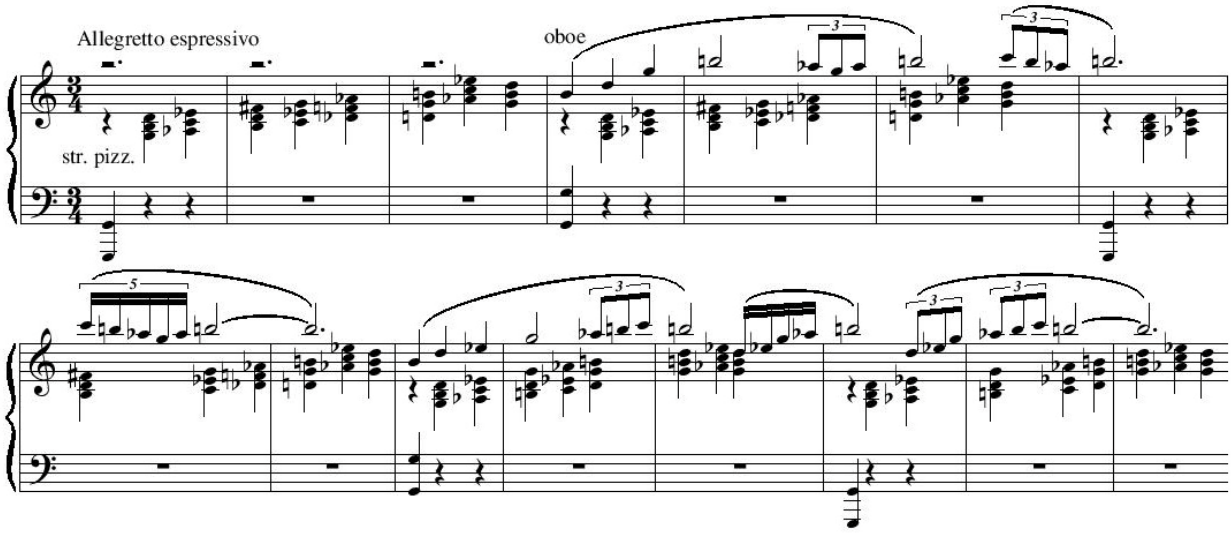
An *oibuki* for three flutes appearing later in the movement is another indicator of the persistent influence of non-Western music in Hovhaness's so called "neo-Romantic" late style (Fig. 7.21). It is based on a melody composed in a six-note subset of the sixth Armenian church mode (*keem genz*). That Hovhaness now employs bar lines in such passages might be taken as evidence of a "more Western" approach. *Senza misura* effects were on the whole relatively rare in Hovhaness's late music, although they do occur occasionally.

Figure 7.21, *Symphony No. 66* (1991), first movement, "measured *oibuki*"



This symphony's short second movement, a "love song" for the composer's wife, is another example of the sort of music from this period that creates the illusion of harmonic motion while remaining essentially static (Fig. 7.22). Although in the middle ground the harmony changes on each beat, a glance at the bass reveals that there are only a handful of "real" harmonic motions throughout the entire movement (in this case to the subdominant and back). The oboe's melody (whose high register was likely a reference to Hovhaness's wife's coloratura voice) is composed strictly in a hexatonic mode which could be classified as a subset of either the 14th or 15th *Melakarta* ragas (it lacks the 7th degree which would have served to distinguish between the two, but the 15th was a favorite of the composer). The pitch material of the harmonic changes in the pizzicato accompaniment is not confined to this mode, but that of its upper voice is, ensuring both some chromatic interest as well as a euphonious combination with the melody.

Figure 7.22, *Symphony No. 66* (1991), second movement opening



In 1994 Hovhaness gave his last interview, together with his friend Lou Harrison, on National Public Radio. They reminisced about the events surrounding the premiere of *Lousadzak* fifty years before. In 1995, due to ill health (a combination of Alzheimer's and various physical ailments), Hovhaness finally ceased composing. His last piece was an organ work, *Habakkuk*,

catalogued as opus 434. He had been composing for over seventy years. Hovhaness was cared for over his final years of illness by his wife, and died in Seattle on June 21, 2000 at the age of 89.

Over the years since his death, Hovhaness has been cited as a forerunner of several recent musical movements, including minimalism, and "holy minimalism" (Pärt, Tavener, etc.) in particular.[402] It might even be possible to view Hovhaness's work as a precursor to new-age music (his album of solo piano works was released, after all, on Fortuna Records, a "new-age" label). Because of some superficial similarities with such musical styles predicated on a radical dilation of musical time, critics such as Arnold Rosner have tended to overstate the importance of "stasis," the most stereotypical "Eastern" aesthetic principle, in Hovhaness's music. The lack of functional harmonic motion in no way implies a lack of motion altogether. Hovhaness insisted on the element of rhythmic drive in his music, writing that "it is only through the physical that one can attain the super-physical," and sometimes complaining that conductors took his music too slowly.[403]

The case has also been made for Hovhaness as a "father of the world music movement," an accurate enough assessment considering the impact of non-Western music on his style.[404] In an interview given in conjunction with Hovhaness's memorial concert in Seattle, the conductor Gerard Schwarz said that "Hovhaness's music may have been too idiosyncratic for others to copy, but his embrace of other cultures has been influential in general."[405] The composer's obituary in the *New York Times* speculated that "Hovhaness's most lasting legacy may not be in

---

[402] Randall, "A Composer Who Took as Many Knocks as Bows."
Kastendieck, "Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, Fifth Edition."
[403] "Discussion of 'Saturn' with Alan Hovhaness."
[404] Gregory, interview.
Sobol, interview.
[405] Rother, "A Composer Echoes in Unexpected Places."

the realm of symphonic music but in the sphere of popular music, particularly jazz and what has come to be known as 'world music.'"[406] Although Keith Jarret and Carlos Santana paid him homage, and he taught several important jazz musicians during his stint at the Boston Conservatory in the 1940s, the connections between Hovhaness and these musicians working in other genres will probably prove to have been more a product of the (counter)cultural currents that tied them together rather than of any legacy on Hovhaness's part that will extend into the future.

Hovhaness has also been described as a forerunner of experiments in "chance" music which later became widespread: "his use of '*senza misura*' or free-rhythm passages, in which each member of the ensemble plays a pattern at any speed without reference to the other players, prefigured the more adventurous aleatoric or chance-music experiments of Cage and his followers."[407] The connection between Hovhaness's "spirit murmur" technique and Cage's subsequent experiments in true aleatoricism is in fact an extremely tenuous one. The two are completely different in both their methods and their effect (Hovhaness himself was careful to downplay the "random" element in his music).[408] The kinship between this aspect of Hovhaness's musical style and the more limited "chance" element in the music of composers like Lutosławski is much closer. Although it is unlikely Lutosławski knew his music, Hovhaness's first experiments in free-rhythm textures predate the Polish composer's by more than a decade. Nevertheless, to argue for Hovhaness's significance in this way (relying as it does on a kind of "race-to-the-patent-office-modernism") would be to miss the point of his anti-modernist artistic approach.

---

[406] Ibid.
[407] Randall, "A Composer Who Took as Many Knocks as Bows."
[408] Hovhaness, interview, October 1983.

At the end of his 1972 dissertation, Arnold Rosner tried to sum up Hovhaness's position vis-à-vis the current and future state of contemporary music, writing that:

> Certainly Hovhaness's ideals of direct communication and religious uplift are hardly considered desirable these days. Many suggest that musical evolution is due to swing back towards more human values, albeit with modern techniques. Whether this will actually occur hardly seems clear, but if the musical attitudes of the future ever do move away from purely technical innovations towards deeper and more expansive emotional matters then Hovhaness may well be considered one of the most prominent figures of this century.[409]

The first part, at least, of Rosner's forecast has come true with a vengeance. As Lou Harrison remarked following Hovhaness's death, "When he first came along, there were the 12-toners, and there were the Americanists, and neither camp knew what to make of him. But now there's a resurgence of interest in the kind of qualities that characterize his music: melody, discipline, beauty."[410] It seems unlikely, however, that Hovhaness's stock will be bolstered by the fact he prefigured this trend in modern music. Hovhaness was in fact no "precursor" at all of the neo-Romantic movement or the turn back to tonality. He lived through the very height of modernism's prestige and (in stark contrast to composers like Copland and Stravinsky), remained largely impervious to its influence, unwavering in his deeply held artistic ideals. There was no turning back (à la George Rochberg) to be done.

If Hovhaness's best works remain in the repertoire it will because of something harder to describe in an academic dissertation than his relationship to various historical trends, but nevertheless undeniable: the individuality of his musical voice, palpable even in some of the works from his childhood. This individuality was the result not of a modernist quest for

[409] Rosner, Arnold, "An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness," 345.
[410] Randall, "A Composer Who Took as Many Knocks as Bows."

innovation, but of the strength of Hovhaness's artistic personality and the uniqueness of his outlook on the world, both of which shone through as he remained true to his own voice. Numerous critical assessments attest to the uniqueness and recongnizability of Hovhaness's musical language. Richard Kostelanetz (nephew of the conductor) wrote that "Among American composers, only Aaron Copland has created so much uniquely identifiable music."[411] The billing of Hovhaness with his "nemesis" on the American musical scene is ironic, but justified. As original a composer as Henry Cowell wrote of Hovhaness's work that it "sounds like the music of nobody else at all."[412] As early as 1964, Miles Kastendieck was able to perceive that "in the present world of musical sophistication with its ivory-towered aloofness, its serial techniques, and its exploitation of atonality, Hovhaness has ventured alone and dared to be himself … Untouched by the currents of his time, he has pursued a single-minded course."[413]

No human being, of course, is truly "untouched by the currents of [their] time" (a fact to which the intermittent twelve-tone rows in Hovhaness's music of the 1950s attest). In actively resisting prevailing modernist trends, Hovhaness was participating just as vigorously in the cultural life of his age as was Pierre Boulez. Nevertheless, insofar as such isolation is really possible, Hovhaness was remarkably free of the influence of other contemporary composers. He was not even in favor of fraternizing between composers, remarking that "I think there's too much of it. I'm not one for going to the MacDowell Colony, or any of those places where the composers go … [One needs] to find out what the truth is within oneself, because we're all tiny universes, related to the great universe."[414] Hovhaness's development of musical style and technique "from the ground up" (insofar as this as possible) made his music intensely individual,

---

[411] Kostelanetz, Richard, *On Innovative Musicians*, 95.
[412] "Alan Hovhaness." Broadcast Music, Inc., n.d. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.
[413] Michaelyan, "An Interview with Alan Hovhaness."
[414] Hovhaness, interview, 1985.

and the constituent elements of his "personal common practice" remarkably distinctive and communicative. When asked what contemporary composers he admired, his answer was a mixed bag of artists whose work reflected various facets of his own artistic inclinations (symphonic composition, microtonality, non-Western music, etc.) but had little real connection with his own compositional style.[415]

Man of Two Worlds, the title of the CBS documentary on Jawaharlal Nehru for which Hovhaness provided the score (mentioned in conjunction with the *Symphony No. 19*), also describes Hovhaness himself with uncanny aptness. Although he came at it from the other side of the planet, Hovhaness, like Nehru, saw the assimilation of ideas from other cultures as critical to the enrichment of his own society. His "maverick" individualism, on the other hand, is a quality which is often thought of as distinctly American (in a deeper sense, perhaps, than the Copland "Rodeo" one). Although he struggled to find recognition for his work as a young composer, Hovhaness did for a time find wide acceptance in the American musical establishment. The "melting pot" of influences that was his musical style may not have been possible anywhere else, and certainly would not have been feasible under the political conditions of Soviet Armenia.

Hovhaness was also a "man of two worlds" in a more profound sense: he lived and composed as though he had one foot on a higher plane. His music was the expression of a spirituality that was both sincere and unselfconscious, although far from conforming to the doctrines of any specific faith. Hovhaness once referred to "the Angelic World, where music comes from, where those better than we reside," as the true source of his artistic inspiration.[416] He felt deeply that the "walls between the worlds" of spirit and music were thin indeed. For Hovhaness, this angelic world could, like music, be a part of everyday life, accessible to anyone

[415] Ibid.
[416] Walkinshaw, "Alan Hovhaness."

willing to embrace it regardless of their cultural background. He found resonance with the ancient Chinese concept that the musician served to build a bridge between the terrestrial and celestial realms, weaving threads connecting the heavens and the human sphere.[417] For Hovhaness, the composer's role was to facilitate the meeting of these two worlds, like a mountain reaching up towards the firmament, striving to know the divine.

[417] Hovhaness, interview, August 1971.

WORKS CITED

Ajemian, Maro, Anahid Ajemian, Carlos Surinach, and MGM Studio Orchestra. *Alan Hovhaness, Lousadzak*. MGM Records, 1958.

Alajaji, Sylvia. "Diasporic Communities and Negotiated Identities: Alan Hovhaness's Recovery of the Armenian Folk Music Idiom," n.d.

———. "Diasporic Communities and Negotiated Identities: Trauma, Recovery, and the Search for the Armenian Musical Voice." Eastman School of Music, 2009.

"Alan Hovhaness." Broadcast Music, Inc., n.d. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

Amirkhanian, Charles. "Interview with Maro Ajemian." *Ode to Gravity*. KPFA Berkley, August 26, 1970.

Argento, Dominick. *Catalogue Raisonné as Memoir*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

"Arlington Musician Asks Change in Name." *The Boston Globe*, October 19, 1932.

"Armenian Play to Be Given." *The New York Times*, October 18, 1946.

"Armenia to America." *Newsweek*, March 19, 1951.

Arzuni, Sahan. "Alan Hovhaness: The Wellspring of His Music." *Journal of Armenian Studies* 3, no. 1–2 (87 1986): 157–60.

Atayan, Robert. *The Armenian Neume System of Notation: Study and Analysis*. Translated by Vrej N. Nersessian. Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1999.

Atayan, Robert, and Aram Kerovpyan. "Vartaped, Komitas." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press. Accessed February 19, 2016. http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51868.

Berry, Wallace. “Review: Symphony No. 6 (Celestial Gate), Op. 173 by Alan Hovhaness.” *Notes, Second Series* 19, no. 4 (September 1962): 701–2.

———. *Notes, Second Series*, n.d.

Bomhard, Moritz. Letter to Alan Hovhaness, September 16, 1954. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.

“Boom for U.S. Composers.” *Life*, May 21, 1956.

Briggs, John. “AIDING THE COMPOSER; Original Musical Scores Are Obtained For ‘Twentieth Century’ Series.” *The New York Times*, April 12, 1959.

Cage, John. “The East in the West.” *Asian Music* 1, no. 1 (1969 1968): 15–18.

Chakmakjian, H. H. *A Comprehensive Dictionary: English - Armenian*. Boston: E. A. Yeran, 1922.

Chou, Wen-chung. “Asian Concepts and Twentieth-Century Western Composers.” *The Musical Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (April 1971): 211–29.

Clayton, Martin. *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

“COMPOSER ALAN HOVHANESS DIES AT 89.” *New Music Box*, July 1, 2000. http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/Composer-Alan-Hovhaness-Dies-at-89/.

Cook, Lisa. “Living in Northwest Asia: Transculturation and Postwar Art Music.” University of Colorado, 2009.

Corbett, John. “Experimental Oriental: New Music and Its Other Others.” In *Western Music and Its Others*, 163–86. Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000.

Cowell, John, and David Badagnani, June 10, 2005. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

Daniel, Oliver. “Alan Hovhaness.” *American Composers Alliance Bulletin* II, no. 3 (October 1952): 3–7.

———. “Alan Hovhaness to Conduct Major Japanese Orchestras.” Broadcast Music, Inc., 1960. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

———. “Hovhaness: In and Out of Our Time.” *The Saturday Review*, February 22, 1958. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.

———. Broadcast Music, Inc., April 1960. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.

Dikijian, Armine. “Alan Hovhaness: Passage to India.” *Ararat Magazine*, Fall 1960.

“Discussion of ‘Saturn’ with Alan Hovhaness.” WQXR, November 5, 1971.

Doris, Hubert. “Reviewed Works.” *The Musical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (July 1957): 416–18.

Downes, Olin. “Hovhaness Offers Own Compositions.” *The New York Times*, February 8, 1947.

Elie, Rudolph. *The Boston Herald*, January 25, 1958.

Evett, Robert. “Music of Alan Hovhaness.” *Notes, Second Series* 16, no. 2 (March 1959): 323–24.

———. “Review of: Music of Alan Hovhaness.” *Notes, Second Series* 16, no. 2 (March 1959): 323–24.

“Found: Composer Who Writes Music.” *Cleveland News*, December 30, 1957.

Fujihara, Hinako, Walla Walla Symphony, and R. Lee Fiese. *Symphony No. 47, Opus 348 : Walla Walla, Land of Many Waters*. Seattle, Washington: Fujihara Record Co., 1982.

Gagne, Cole. In *Soundpieces 2: Interviews with American Composers*, 117–29. Metuchen, New Jersey; London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1993.

Gerbrandt, Carl. Letter to David Badagnani. “A Story - Alan Hovhaness - from Carl Gerbrandt,” April 26, 2005. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

Gregory, Elizabeth. Interview by Berkofsky, Martin, May 21, 2005.

Guthrie, Woody. "Letter to the Disc Company of America, Re: Cage and Hovhaness Record," July 10, 1947.

Hanson, Howard, and Eastman-Rochester Symphony Orchestra. *Music for Quiet Listening*. Mercury Records, 1959.

Harrison, Lou. "Alan Hovhaness Offers Original Compositions." *New York Herald Tribune*, June 18, 1945.

Henahan, Donald. "Concert: Musica Sacra Presents Hovhaness 'St. Paul' Premiere." *The New York Times*, January 29, 1981.

"Hermon Di Giovanno 1901-1969, Memorial Exhibition," 1971. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

Holland, Bernard. "Classical Music in Review." *The New York Times*, October 8, 1991.

Hopkins, Antony. *Talking About Music*. BBC Radio 3, March 3, 1981. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.

Hovhaness, Alan. "Alan Hovhaness Flies Over Old Armenia." *Hairenik Weekly*, December 17, 1959.

———. Alan Hovhaness interviewed by Jackie Abramian. Interview by Jackie Abramian, 1987. http://hovhaness.com/Interview_Abramian.html.

———. "Concert of Orchestral Compositions," February 7, 1947. George Avakian and Anahid Ajemian Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

———. "Concert of Original Compositions," March 10, 1946. George Avakian and Anahid Ajemian Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

———. From Mountain Climbing to Composing. Interview by Vance Wolverton, October 1993. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Wolverton.html.

———. “Giant Melody in Nature and Art.” Elmira College, February 14, 1967.

———. “Korean Music Is the Most Expressive, Sublime and Free in the World.” *Korea Journal* 3, no. 3 (March 1963): 29, 32.

———. “Letter to the Editor.” *Baconiana, the Journal of the Francis Bacon Society*, 1970, 89–90.

———. *Sheperd of Israel*. Tel Aviv: Israeli Music Publications, 1953.

———. “Shostakovich and His Seventh Symphony,” October 1942. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

———. *Symphony No. 8, “Arjuna.”* New York: C. F. Peters, 1960.

———. *Symphony No. 13*. New York: C. F. Peters, 1960.

———. “The Story of the Past and Future of Our Solar System.” *The Menotomy Beacon*, 1926.

———. Letter to Sibelius, Jean, 1938. The Papers of Jean Sibelius and His Family in the National Archives of Finland.

———. Letter to Maro Ajemian, Spring 1942. George Avakian and Anahid Ajemian Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

———. Letter to William Saroyan, 1942. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

———. Letter to Sibelius, Jean, Jauary 1946. The Papers of Jean Sibelius and His Family in the National Archives of Finland.

———. Letter to Judith Malina, 1959 1953. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

———. Letter to Judith Malina, August 31, 1953. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

———. Letter to Judith Malina, October 2, 1955. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

———. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, June 25, 1956.

———. Letter to Judith Malina, December 14, 1956. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

———. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, June 27, 1958.

———. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, July 7, 1959.

———. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, February 15, 1960.

———. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, November 8, 1962.

———. Letter to Walter Simmons, July 2, 1965. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

———. Letter to Serafina Ferrante Hovhaness, October 20, 1970.

———. Interview by Walter Simmons, August 1971.

———. Interview by Charles Amirkhanian, October 1975. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Amirkhanian_1.html.

———. Letter to Cohen, June 16, 1976.

———. Interview by Oliver Daniel, September 28, 1977. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

———. Letter to Howard, Richard, October 26, 1979.

———. Interview by Richard Howard, October 1983. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Howard.html.

———. Interview by Johnston, Lynn, March 1984. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.

———. Interview by Bruce Duffie, 1985. http://www.bruceduffie.com/hovx.html.

Hovhaness, Alan, and Dennis Russell Davies. Interview by Charles Amirkhanian, August 28, 1981. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Amirkhanian_2.html.

Hovhaness, Alan, North Jersey Wind Symphony, and Sevan Philharmonic. *Music of Alan Hovhaness*. Crystal Records, 1990.

Hovhaness Speaks on "Khaldis," 1972. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.

"Hovhaness Works Played Often." *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, February 11, 1963.

Imbrie, Andrew. "Review." *Notes, Second Series* 10, no. 1 (December 1952): 150–51.

Ingraham, James Leslie. "An Analytic Investigation of Four Works by Alan Hovhaness with Emphasis on His Mysterious Mountain (Symphony No. 2)." The Ohio State University, 1973.

Isaac, Cecil. "Symphony No. 4 for Wind Orchestra, Op. 165 by Alan Hovhaness; Symphony No. 7 (Nanga Parvat) for Wind Orchestra, Op. 178 by Alan Hovhaness; Symphony of Winds for Narrator and Wind Orchestra by George Kleinsinger." *Notes, Second Series* 19, no. 2 (March 1962): 329–30.

Israel, Brian. "Form, Texture, and Process in the Symphonies for Wind Ensembles by Alan Hovhaness." Cornell University, 1975.

Johnson, Brett. "Hovhaness: Symphony No.50, Mount St Helens, Op.360; Symphony No.22, City of Light, Op.236 by Seattle Symphony." *Tempo, New Series*, no. 188 (March 1994): 49–50.

Johnson, Wayne. “A Study of the Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness.” University of Cincinnati, 1987.

Johnston, Jack. Interview by Berkofsky, Martin, August 1, 2008. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.

Kastendieck, Miles. “Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, Fifth Edition,” 1046–48. G. Schirmer, 1964.

Kelly, John Jerome. “The Musical Style of Alan Hovhaness.” University of Iowa, 1965.

Khachikyan, Garik. *A Tribute to Alan Hovhaness*. Alan Hovhaness International Research Centre, 2006.

Kinnear, Tyler. “Alan Hovhaness and the Creation of the ‘Modern Free Noh Play.’” University of Oregon, 2009.

Kohanov, Linda. “The Muse on the Mountain.” *Outreach*, September 1991.

Komitas. *Armenian Sacred and Folk Music*. Translated by Edward Gulbekian. Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1998.

Kostelanetz, Richard. *On Innovative Musicians*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1989.

Malina, Judith. *The Diaries of Judith Malina, 1947-1957*. New York, NY: Grove Press, Inc., 1983.

———. Letter to Moritz Bomhard, July 30, 1954. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.

Malm, William. *Traditional Japanese Music and Musical Instruments*. Tokyo ; New York: Kodansha International, 2000.

“Manuscript of Hovhannes’s New 40th Symphony Stolen.” *The New York Times*, January 25, 1979.

Markarian, Shoghere. “Talking to Alan Hovhaness.” *Ararat Magazine*, Fall 1977. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

McCollum, Jonathan. “Analysis of Notation in Music Historiography: Armenian Neumatic Khaz from the Ninth through Early Twentieth Centuries.” In *Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology*, edited by Jonathan McCollum and David Hebert, 197–256. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman Littlefield/Lexington Books, 2014.

Michaelyan, Julia. “An Interview with Alan Hovhaness.” *Ararat: A Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1971): 19–31.

Mordden, Ethan. *A Guide to Orchestral Music*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Music, David W. “The Larger Sacred Choral Works of Alan Hovhaness.” *The Choral Journal* 44, no. 4 (November 2003): 9–21.

Nandi, Jean. *Unconventional Wisdom: A Memoir*, 2000. http://www.elverhoj.org/archives/nandi.html.

Nicholls, David. “Reaching Beyond the West: Asian Resonances in American Radicalism.” *American Music* 17, no. 2 (1999): 125–28.

Parmenter, Ross. “ALAN HOVHANESS POPULAR IN JAPAN; U.S. Composer Conducts the Philharmonic in Telecast of Two of His Works.” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1960.

“Proclamation.” Town of Arlington, March 11, 1985. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

Randall, Marc. “A Composer Who Took as Many Knocks as Bows.” *The New York Times*, May 20, 2001.

Rivers, Sam. Interview by David Badagnani, March 9, 2005. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

Rose, and Kapuscinski. “String Orchestration.” *Stanford Gagaku Project*. Accessed February 19, 2016. https://ccrma.stanford.edu/groups/gagaku/combinations/mixstg-en.html.

Rosner, Arnold. “An Analytical Survey of the Music of Alan Hovhaness.” State University of New York at Buffalo, 1972.

Ross, Alex. *The Rest Is Noise*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.

Rother, Larry. “A Composer Echoes in Unexpected Places.” *The New York Times*, November 4, 2011.

Roussel, Hubert. *The Houston Post*, December 16, 1956.

Roy, Dulal, and Sandip Bhattacharya. *Jaltarang & Santur*. Papyros, 1998.

Schorr, Burt. “Hovhaness’s ‘Ad Lyram’ Inspiring Work.” *The Houston Press*, March 13, 1957.

Schwarz, Robert K. “A Chance to Meet Some American Composers.” *The New York Times*, December 10, 1989.

Shankar, Ravi, Chatur Lal, and N. C. Mullick. *The Sounds of India*. Columbia, 1958.

Shapero, Harold. “Review, Shepherd of Israel. Cantata for Cantor, Recorder (Or Flute), String Quartet (Or String Orchestra) and Trumpet Ad Libitum by Alan Hovhaness.” *Notes, Second Series* 10, no. 4 (September 1953): 681.

Sheppard, Anthony. “Continuity in Composing the American Cross-Cultural: Eichheim, Cowell, and Japan.” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 61, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 465–540.

Shirodkar, Marco. “Alan Hovhaness Biographical Summary.” Accessed February 15, 2016. http://www.hovhaness.com/hovhaness-biography.html.

———. “Alan Hovhaness Symphonies - Part 2 : Symphonies 1 - 14.” Accessed February 19, 2016. http://www.hovhaness.com/Sym_01_14.html.

———. “Who Was Alan Hovhaness?” Accessed February 20, 2016. http://www.hovhaness.com/Hovhaness.html.

Silver, Brian. “Henry Cowell and Alan Hovhaness: Responses to the Music of India.” *Contributions to Asian Studies* 12 (1978): 54–79.

Simmons, Walter. “Fanfare Reviews Alan Hovhaness: Exile Symphony.” *Fanfare*, June 7, 2012. http://www.bmop.org/news-press/fanfare-reviews-alan-hovhaness-exile-symphony.

———. “HOVHANESS Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra. Lousadzak. Mihr. Vijag. Ko-Ola-U,” 2006. http://www.walter-simmons.com/articles/342.htm.

Skaggs, Hazel. “How a Composer Revises His Work: A Rewritten Piece by Alan Hovhaness.” *Clavier*, June 1971.

Sobol, Lawrence. Interview by Berkofsky, Martin, June 20, 2007. Armenian Cultural Foundation Archives, Arlington, MA.

Stephan, R. “The Three Magi of Contemporary Music: The Second Magician.” *The Tiger’s Eye* III (1949 1947): 59–65.

Taruskin, Richard. “Chapter 7 Self and Other.” In *The Oxford History of Western Music, Music in the Nineteenth Century*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.

The Verdehr Trio, Making of a Medium Video Series Part I. WKAR TV, 1990.

Thomson, Virgil. “Near East via Boston.” *New York Herald Tribune*, 1947. University of Washington Ethnomusicology Archive.

Wade, James. “Hovhaness Shows Trend Towards Musical Assimilation.” *Korea Journal* 3, no. 3 (March 1963): 28.

Walkinshaw, Jean. “Alan Hovhaness.” Seattle: KCTS, June 10, 1984.

Weltzien, O. Alan. “Gary Snyder, Alan Hovhaness, and Writing the Blast.” *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16, no. 4 (2009): 779–806.

Westbrook, Peter. “Hovhaness Interview: Angelic Cycles.” *Downbeat*, March 1982. http://www.hovhaness.com/Interview_Westbrook.html.

Whitney, Robert. Letter to Alan Hovhaness, December 15, 1953. Louisville Philharmonic Archive.

Winnard, Dorothy Jane. “The Ethnomusicological Influences on the Performance and Teaching of Selected Piano Works of Alan Hovhaness.” San Diego State University, 1997.

Winters, Lee. “Wind Drum’s Premiere Excites Interest.” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, May 30, 1962.

“Yenovk Der Hagopian.” Accessed May 1, 2016. http://www.armenianmusicpreservation.org/artists/yenovk-der-hagopian.