

ARAM KHACHATURIAN

(1903-1978)

Highlighted works

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INTRODUCTION

“My aim in music is to show the melodic and rhythmical richness of Armenian music using European compositional technique.”

Aram Khachaturian

Aram Khachaturian wrote in the late 1920s of his hopes as a young composer. Inevitably these aspirations to a large extend determined his compositional development. His music, especially his spicily harmonized yet melodically attractive early works, reflects his experiences growing up in Tiflis, exposed as he was to street-performing musicians whose dances and songs were built from ornamented melodies of a modal or folk character and usually ‘developed’ through improvisatory means rather than in the manner of a classical sonata.

“He ploughed up new, hitherto untouched layers of the musical folklore of the Caucasus and, using the traditions of folk and professional music, created works of inimitable originality, thoroughly modern and permeated with traits of genuine innovation.”

Dmitri Shostakovich



BIOGRAPHY

Aram Khachaturian (1903–1978), born in Tiflis (now Tbilisi, Georgia) and relocated to Moscow in 1921, began his formal musical education relatively late. He studied the cello and composition at the Gnesin Institute and subsequently at the Moscow Conservatory, where he was a pupil of Nikolai Myaskovsky. Khachaturian's style rapidly developed, characterized by lush and an elemental rhythmic drive, positioning him as one of the most successful Soviet composers of his generation, alongside Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev.



His mature compositional output prominently features major concertos, notably the *Piano Concerto* (1936) and the *Violin Concerto* (1940), which are distinguished by their technical virtuosity and brilliant harmonic palette.

Khachaturian's international renown is primarily derived from his substantial ballet scores. The ballet *Gayaneh*, set on a collective farm, yielded the universally famous *Sabre Dance*.

His final and most expansive ballet, *Spartacus*, is regarded as a masterpiece, particularly for the enduring popularity of its *Adagio of Spartacus and Phrygia*. A highly prominent figure in the Soviet musical establishment, Khachaturian served in key administrative roles.

Despite receiving official censure for "formalism" in 1948 alongside Prokofiev and Shostakovich, a decree he later publicly condemned, he continued to enjoy state accolades, serving as a professor at both the Moscow Conservatory and the Gnesin Institute and conducting widely. His work remains a testament to the successful integration of regional folk traditions into the global classical repertoire.



KEY WORKS

BALLET & SUITES

⌚ [Gayaneh](#) (1942) 3 hr | Ballet in 4 acts

3.3.3.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/2hp.pn.cel/str

Khachaturian's Armenian ballet, is famous not only for the once ubiquitous *Sabre Dance*, but also for the haunting *Adagio*, made famous by Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey* and much cribbed since by leading Hollywood composers. The much-encored *Lezghinka* with its boisterous melody and virtuosic drumming is another thrilling highlight.

⌚ [Gayaneh: Suite n°1](#) (1943) 30 mins |

2+pic.2+ca.2+bcl.asx.2+cbn/4.3(cnt).3.1/timp.perc/hp.cel.str

⌚ [Gayaneh: Suite n°2](#) (1943) 30 mins |

2+pic.2+ca.1+2bcl.2/4.3(cnt).3.1/timp.perc/str

⌚ [Gayaneh: Suite n°3](#) (1943) 28 mins |

2+pic.2+ca.2+bcl.asx.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/str

⌚ [Spartacus](#) (1950 - 1954) 3 hr 30 mins | Ballet in 4 acts

3(pic).2+ca.2+bcl.asx.2/4.4.3.1/timp.perc/2hp.pf.cel/str

Chorus: SATB

The *Adagio* from this ballet has been a hit since being used as the theme tune to TV's *Onedin Line*. Khachaturian made four suites in all from this, his most ambitious stage work: the *Adagio* appears in *Suite No. 2*, but is often excerpted to accompany the hedonistic pleasures found in *Suite No. 1* which culminates in *Dance of the Gaditanian Maidens and Victory of Spartacus*.

⌚ [Spartacus: Suite n°1](#) (1955) 25 mins |

3(pic)2+ca.2+bcl.2/4.4.3.1/timp.perc/hp.pf.cel/str

⌚ [Spartacus: Suite n°2](#) (1955) 21 mins |

3(pic).2+ca.2+bcl.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/hp.pf.cel/str

⌚ [Spartacus: Suite n°3](#) (1955) 18 mins |

3(pic).2+ca.2+bcl.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/hp.pf.cel/str

⌚ [Spartacus: Suite n°4](#) (1958) 19 mins |

3(pic).2+ca.2+bcl.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/hp.pf.cel/str

⌚ [Masquerade Suite](#) (1944) 17 mins |

2(pic).2.2.2/4.2.3.1/timp.perc/str

Aram Khachaturian's *Masquerade Suite* is a vibrant orchestral work adapted from his incidental music for Mikhail Lermontov's four-act drama. The original music premiered on June 21, 1941, at the Vakhtangov State Dramatic Theatre in Moscow. It is best known for its melancholic yet captivating *Waltz*. The Waltz's description as "melancholic" reflects its dual nature, capturing the danceable passion and romantic drama of Lermontov's tragic play, while hinting at the underlying sadness and tension of the plot.

KEY WORKS

SYMPHONIES & CONCERTOS

Aram Khachaturian left an indelible mark on the concerto and symphony genres, beautifully integrating Armenian melodies into classical structures. His *Piano Concerto* (1936) and *Violin Concerto* (1940) are masterpieces of virtuosity. The slow movement of the *Piano Concerto* is notable for its atmospheric use of the rare instrument known as the flexatone. His *Symphony No. 2* (1943) on the theme of war, reflect a dramatic national context.

Symphonies

➡ **Symphony No. 1** (1934) 42 mins |  2+pic.2+ca.2.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/hp.pf/str

➡ **Symphony No. 2 (" Symphony with Bells")** (1943-1944) 50 mins |  2+pic.2+ca.3+bcl.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/2hp.pf/str

➡ **Symphony No. 3 ("Symphony-Poem")** (1947) 25 mins |  2+pic.2+ca.2.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/hp/str
Soloists: Organ, 15 solo trumpets

Concertos

➡ **Concerto-Rhapsody for Violin and Orchestra (B-flat Minor)** (1961) 23 mins |  2+pic.2.2.2/4.2.0.0/timp.perc/hp/str
Soloist: Violin

➡ **Concerto-Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra** (1963) 25 mins |  2.2.2.2/4.2.0.0/timp.perc.xyl.hp/str
Soloist: Cello

➡ **Concerto-Rhapsody for Piano and Orchestra** (1967) 21 mins |  1+pic.2.2.2/4.2.0.0/timp.perc/hp/str
Soloist: Piano

➡ **Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (D-flat Major)** (1936) 32 mins |  1+pic.2.2+bcl.2/4.2.3.1/timp.perc/str
Soloist: Piano

➡ **Concerto for Violin and Orchestra (D Minor)** (1940) 35 mins |  2+pic.2+ca.2.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/hp/str
Soloist: Violin

➡ **Concerto for Flute and Orchestra (Arrangement of Violin Concerto)** (1968) 36 mins |  3.3.2.2/4.3.3.1/timp.perc/hp/str
Soloist: Flute
Arrangement for flute and orchestra by Jean-Pierre Rampal

KEY WORKS

SOLO & CHAMBER MUSIC

Aram Khachaturian's solo and chamber works are essential to understanding his early style, providing intimate showcases for his integration of folk material. For solo piano, the *Toccata* (1932), though originally the first movement of a little-known suite, became an immediate and enduring favourite among pianists. It is a brilliant, percussive showpiece that effectively merges Baroque structure with the driving rhythms and modal flavours of Armenian folk music. In the realm of chamber music, his early works also garnered attention, notably the *Trio for clarinet, violin and piano* (1932), which drew the admiration of Sergei Prokofiev. Khachaturian's later works for solo instruments, such as the contemplative *Sonata-Monologue for Violin Solo* (1975), demonstrate a lifelong commitment to showcasing the improvisational expressiveness and unique temperament of Armenian melodies in smaller settings.

Solo

➡ **Children's Album : Pictures of Childhood vol.1** (1947) 30 mins | 
for piano

➡ **Children's Album : Sounds of Childhood vol.2** (1965) 25 mins | 
for piano

➡ **Sonata-Monologue for violin solo** (1975) 16 mins
for violin

➡ **Sonatina in C Major** (1958) 7 mins
for violin

➡ **Toccata in E-flat Minor** (1932) 5 mins | 
for piano

➡ **Works for piano**
Valse caprice (1926) & *Danse* (1925), *Poème* (1927), *Vocalise* (1978)
for piano

Chamber Music

➡ **Concerto for Violin** (1940) 35 mins
Reduction for violin and piano

➡ **Concerto for Cello** (1946) 25 mins
Reduction for cello and piano

➡ **Concerto for Piano** (1936) 43 mins
Reduction for two pianos

➡ **Berceuse for Violin, Cello and Piano** (1926) 6 mins
for violin, cello and piano

➡ **Trio (C Minor) clarinet, violin and piano** (1932) 14 mins | 
for clarinet, violin and piano



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