

# Discovering Avet Terterian Armenian Vernacular Instruments and Their Role in Forming Temporality in Third Symphony

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## Soviet Post-Avant-Garde Symphonic Form

Avet Terterian composed his eight symphonies (1969-89) during the time when the existence of the symphonic form was questioned. Previously recognized by Prokofiev and Shostakovich as a vessel for addressing cultural and political concerns, the traditionally designed symphonic form seemed obsolete in the social context of the Brezhnev Stagnation (1964-85).

Nevertheless, not only did it survive, but a new understanding of its developmental potential and formal possibilities was found by the young generation of composers that constituted Soviet Post-avant-garde: Ustvolskaya (1919-2006), Schnittke (1934-98), Gubaidulina (b 1931), Kancheli (b 1935), Pärt (b 1935), Silvestrov (b 1937), and Terterian (1929-94).



*"I have never been a Soviet composer because I could never understand the meaning of "Soviet music" or "Soviet composer". I know and have always known that there is a Composer and there is Music. Schnittke, Sonya Gubaidulina,*

*Kancheli, Silvestrov, ...wherever they live and whatever their citizenship status is, they are my friends."*  
-- Avet Terterian

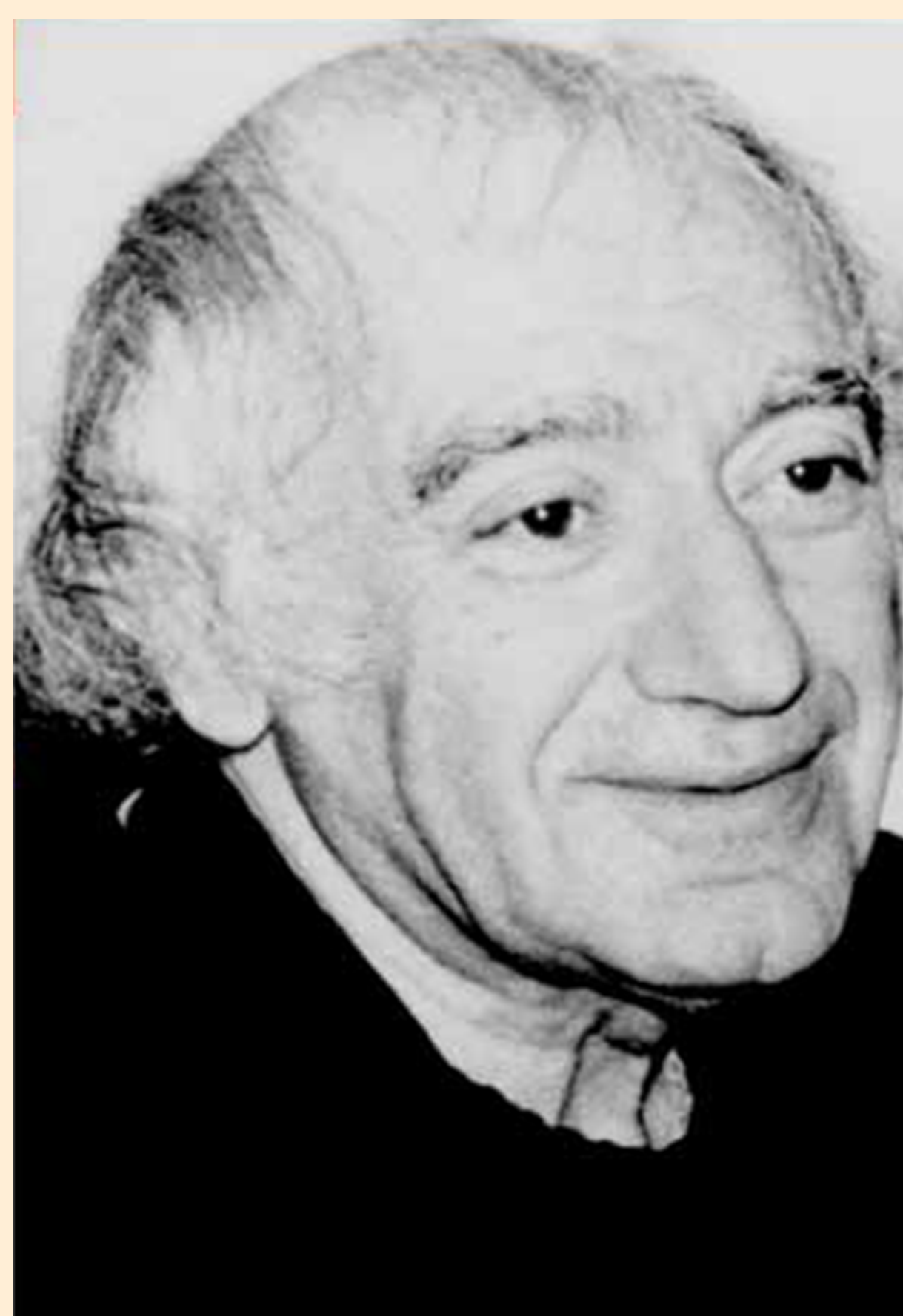
## What Makes Terterian Unique?

### • Musical Expression of Meditation

Terterian's concept of *Submergence in Sound* is expressed through interpretation of sound as the leading structural and compositional force in building of the symphonic form. This deep-rooted in Eastern philosophical and religious traditions concept is a musical expression of meditation that characterizes the quintessence of Terterian's aesthetic platform.

### • Manifestation of National Identification

Terterian's compositions produce a unique sonority with special sonic attributes by incorporating Armenian vernacular instruments, *duduk*, *zurna*, *kyamancha*, *burvar* and *dap*, into the orchestral timbre as an integral part of the compositional and artistic concept.



## Avet Terterian (1929-1994)

### Phenomenon of Sound

*"Sound, itself, is very meaningful to me. ...even taken out of any connection with others, a single sound is polysemantic and polyphonic. It leads you into different states of consciousness, and one can see the whole universe in the microcosm of its structure. Sound is the entire symphony. I want to focus attention of the audience on the sound and, along with the listeners, penetrate its mystery."*  
-- Avet Terterian

### Expanding Sound into Symphonic Form

- Sound is a source of the potential growth for all elements of the composition, thematic, motivic, rhythmic, or sonic ones.
- Terterian understands his own role as of a decoder who unfolds a message compressed in a single sound, into symphonic form.

### Temporal Organization of Symphonic Form

shows the result of Terterian's interpretation of sound as a dominating force in constructing a complex interactive system of sub-temporalities that are defined by sonic sources.

### Sonority vs. Temporality

#### • Orchestral Sonorities/Linear Temporality

Sound blocks are individualized by their contrasts in texture, timbre, figuration, or register. Linear temporality is realized through progression of nonpitch parameters towards large-scale structural goals.

#### • Folk Instruments/Circular Temporality

Use of the folk instruments emphasizes Terterian's engagement with the Eastern concept of time. Circular temporality realizes through non-contrast continuity of pure sonority, avoidance of changes of tension, and absence of motion towards structural goals.

## Correlation Between Sound and Temporality in Third Symphony



• According to the Terterian's concept of *Submergence in Sound*, the timbres of the *duduk*s and *zurnas* become an active factor in differentiating their temporal characteristics.

• The emergence of the *duduk*s transforms temporality into that of non-measured, relatively metrical, *ad libitum* type (see an episode before m. 54 and further; m. 88; and m. 90).

• The appearance of the *zurnas* restores the dominance of the measured, metrically organized temporality (see m. 90 and further, in this fragment).

## First Time in History of Symphonic Form

Armenian folk instruments, *duduk* and *zurna*, are implemented into the score of Terterian's Third Symphony.

*"I use folk instruments alongside a large symphony orchestra only when it is extremely necessary. A composer who works in the technique and vocabulary of the late 20<sup>th</sup>-century music should use the phenomenon of the past as a symbol. To me, bringing folk instruments into a symphonic score is similar to appealing to such a symbol."*

-- Avet Terterian

### Duduk

An Armenian woodwind instrument with warm velvety tone and rich dynamic nuances, used in *մորթիւմ* (mourning songs, *Arm.*) during funeral ceremonies, and in accompanying the singing of an *'āshuq* (poet-singer).



### Zurna

A woodwind instrument with piercing, nasal and raspy tone, used in outdoor events, almost always accompanied by drums and played by members of the lowest social classes.



**Drawing on the symbolic meaning represented through the timbre, Terterian transforms vernacular instruments into sonic vehicles endowed with uncanny ability to traverse a looped route of Present and Past by awakening national genetic memory.**

## Conclusions

• Symbolic interpretation of the *duduk* and *zurna* results in distinctive types of temporality associated with the instruments throughout the progress of the symphonic form.

• The vernacular instruments' temporalities become an active force in building symphonic form.

• Inclusion of folk instruments transforms interpretation of Terterian's Third Symphony into inquiry of Armenian national identity.