

Giya Kancheli

- Biography -

Giya Kancheli was born in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, on 10 August 1935. As a child he had piano lessons at the music school of his native city, and from 1959 to 1963 studied composition with I. I. Tuskiya at the Tbilisi Conservatory.

After graduating he worked as a freelance composer, which was rather unusual in the former Soviet Union. He later collaborated with the director Robert Sturua, and this inspired him to write a great deal of music for films, and for a number of plays. In 1971, Kancheli was appointed Director of Music at the Rustaveli Theatre in Tbilisi, where he wrote the incidental music for many of Sturua's productions.

In the 1960s Kancheli was hailed as a member of the 'Soviet avantgarde', though he subsequently dedicated himself to the development of a wholly personal musical style based on simple formulas which occur in the music of many different epochs, in ancient folk songs, and in certain kinds of contemporary popular music. Kancheli uses these formulas to create each work without reference to existing formal patterns. As he composes, he is concerned to allow the music to come into being like a living organism. Paradoxically, modern and archaic traits exist side by side in his music, as do elements which are familiar because they remind us of what we have often heard before, and those which are wholly original. In addition to numerous other works, Kancheli has composed seven symphonies (1967 to 1986), and an opera, 'Music for the Living', which he wrote together with Robert Sturua. The first performance was given at the Paliashvili Theatre in Tbilisi on 28 April 1984.

Kancheli left Georgia in 1991, and has lived in western Europe ever since. He and his family first went to live in Berlin, where he received a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service. In 1995-96 he was composer-in-residence at the Royal Flemish Philharmonic Orchestra in Antwerp, where he continues to live and work.