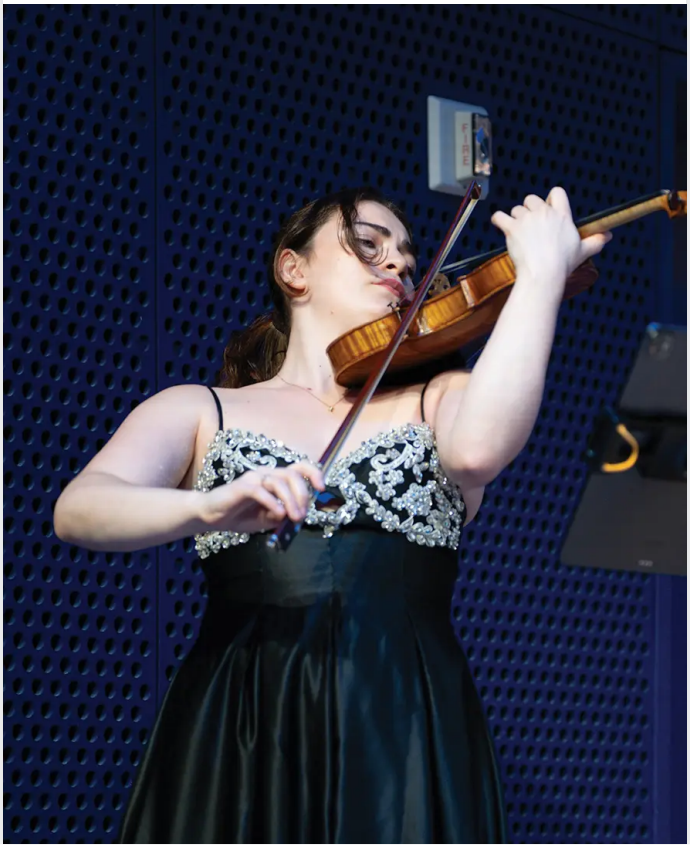
The Concert after the Concert: A Georgian Musical Voice in New York

by **GEORGIA TODAY**

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Georgian violinist Sendi Vartanovi in New York. Source: FB

The classical concert is one of those cultural forms whose rules have become so familiar that we tend to mistake them for something natural. Musicians perform, audiences listen; the stage is separated from the seats; silence is expected; a program is divided into works, with applause marking the spaces between them. Yet the concert hall, like the museum or the theater, is a social invention. Its architecture teaches us how to pay attention.

That architecture is now being quietly reconsidered. In an age when virtually any canonical work can be heard at home, on headphones, through streaming services or recordings of extraordinary technical quality, the live concert has to justify itself in another way. Its value lies increasingly not in access to music, but in the particular circumstances of listening: the presence of performers and audience, the irreversibility of time, and the possibility that music might become part of a larger experience.

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& Bloom, the concert platform founded and artistically directed by Georgian violinist Sendi Vartanovi, is operating in the United States. As the platform enters its second season, its work offers an interesting case study in the changing relationship between classical music, visual culture and audience participation—and in the ways Georgian artists can enter an international cultural conversation without being reduced to representatives of national folklore.

On October 17, Light & Bloom will present TIME at Tenri Cultural Institute in New York City. The project brings together photography, documentary film, live classical performance and audience-created visual art. At its center is the work of Eliso Babuadze, a Georgian musician and photographer based in Finland.

The musical performance brings together Georgian music, including works by Sulkhan Tsintsadze and Vaja Azarashvili, with international classical and contemporary repertoire. Vartanovi will perform with cellist Sandro Sidamonidze and pianist Aleksandr Bolotin. The evening will culminate in Canvas of Sound,

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in which audience members are invited to translate their experience of the music into visual art.

The combination may sound familiar in an era obsessed with “immersive” culture, but the interesting question is not whether a concert contains several art forms. It is whether those forms change the way we perceive one another.

Photography and music have almost opposite relationships with time. A photograph arrests a moment; music exists only through duration. One preserves something that has already happened, while the other disappears as it is being experienced. Documentary film occupies another position, recording and reconstructing time. Audience-created visual art introduces yet another layer: the private memory of an experience becomes a physical object.

Seen this way, TIME is less a multimedia concert than an experiment in memory. Its subject is not simply time as an abstract concept, but the different ways human beings preserve, lose and reconstruct experience. This is where the Georgian component

becomes particularly interesting.

Georgian music is still too often introduced internationally through a limited vocabulary: polyphony, folk tradition, national identity, the Soviet past. None of these associations is irrelevant, but they can become restrictive when they precede the music itself. The more interesting possibility is to place Georgian composers inside an international musical conversation, where they are heard not as cultural exhibits but as composers among other composers.

The inclusion of Sulkhan Tsintsadze and Vaja Azarashvili alongside international repertoire creates precisely that possibility. Tsintsadze's position in Georgian musical culture raises questions that extend far beyond Georgia: how does a composer transform inherited cultural material into contemporary artistic language? How can musical memory survive without becoming a museum piece? These were not uniquely Georgian questions. Throughout the twentieth century, composers repeatedly negotiated the relationship between national musical traditions and modern composition. What matters in an international context is therefore not simply that Georgian music is

present. It is how it is contextualized.

Light & Bloom's approach is to put Georgian repertoire into the same artistic space as music from elsewhere rather than constructing a separate national showcase. That is a subtle but important distinction. Cultural exchange becomes more convincing when an audience is allowed to encounter a work before being asked to interpret it as a statement about where it came from.

Vartanovi's own position gives the project another dimension. She describes Light & Bloom as a continuation of the musical foundation she received in Georgia and as a way of creating opportunities for Georgian music and artists to reach wider audiences in the United States. She began her musical education in Tbilisi, later continued her studies and professional career in the United States, and won First Prize at the VII Georgian National Competition. The platform she has founded therefore emerges from a distinctly contemporary form of cultural mobility: an artist carries one musical culture into another professional environment and begins building connections between them.

This is increasingly important for smaller cultural ecosystems. International cultural exchange used to be dominated by institutions—ministries, embassies, festivals, orchestras and cultural centers. Today, some of the most interesting connections are made by individuals who move between countries and understand the artistic languages of both. A musician becomes a curator; a performer becomes a producer; a diaspora artist becomes a cultural intermediary.

Light & Bloom is built around that model. Its mission is not limited to presenting classical repertoire. The platform currently works across three formats: curated classical programs, cinematic concerts featuring music from iconic films, and interdisciplinary projects connecting live music with other forms of art.

The second New York event, on November 8 at Opera America's Scorca Hall, extends this philosophy into the cinematic realm. Music that audiences normally encounter as part of a film will instead be presented through live instrumental and vocal performance. That shift changes the hierarchy between

image and sound. In cinema, music usually serves a narrative constructed by editing, dialogue, acting and image. In the concert setting, the music becomes the narrative's primary object. Again, the point is not simply novelty. It is recontextualization.

Classical music has always depended on context. The same composition can sound different in a cathedral, a nineteenth-century concert hall, a small chamber space or an outdoor festival. The contemporary question is whether the context can become part of the artistic argument without overwhelming the music itself.

This is where Canvas of Sound becomes particularly revealing. The traditional concert establishes a strict division between performer and audience. The musician interprets; the audience receives. Participation is usually limited to the highly codified act of applause.

Inviting listeners to create visual responses introduces another idea: that listening itself produces something. Every person carries an individual history into a concert. A melody may trigger a memory, an image, a place, a person, or simply a physical sensation. Most of that response disappears.

Canvas of Sound attempts to give it a form.

There is an interesting parallel here with contemporary museum practice, which increasingly treats visitors not simply as consumers of information but as participants in the production of meaning. The artwork remains the artwork; the audience does not replace the artist. But the institution acknowledges that reception is itself part of cultural experience. For a concert platform, this is a significant proposition. It suggests that the end of the final piece does not necessarily have to mean the end of the artistic event.

That idea may be particularly relevant in New York, where independent artistic platforms have long operated between established disciplines and institutions. Light & Bloom is not attempting to reproduce the scale or function of a major orchestra or opera company. Its potential lies elsewhere: in the freedom to construct smaller, more focused encounters between artists and audiences.

The challenge, of course, is that interdisciplinary programming has become fashionable enough to generate its own clichés.

Photography, film, projections, audience participation and unusual spaces do not automatically make an artistic experience deeper. The additional elements matter only when they reveal something that the individual disciplines could not communicate as effectively on their own.

TIME has the potential to do that because its different components share a genuine conceptual problem: what happens to an experience once it has passed? Photography preserves it. Film reconstructs it. Music lets it disappear. Memory carries it forward. The audience's visual response gives it another material form. And Georgian music enters this structure not as decoration, but as part of the larger question of how cultural memory travels.

This may ultimately be the most interesting aspect of Light & Bloom's project. Georgian culture does not have to arrive in New York as a finished package labeled "Georgian." It can arrive through artists, relationships and individual works; through a violinist who studied in Tbilisi and built a career in the United States; through a Georgian photographer working in Finland; through

Tsintsadze and Azarashvili appearing alongside an international repertoire.

The culture travels through people rather than through slogans. For Georgia, that is potentially a more durable model of international cultural presence. It moves away from the familiar logic of the national showcase and toward participation in a broader artistic ecosystem. And for classical music, the question is equally fundamental. When music itself is available everywhere, the concert must offer something that cannot be streamed: not spectacle for its own sake, but a shared experience of time.

That is ultimately what Light & Bloom is testing. Can a concert become more than the sequence of works printed on a program? Can photography alter the way we hear? Can music change the way we look? Can an audience leave something behind? The answer will depend on the experience itself. But the questions are already more interesting than the conventional question of how to “attract new audiences.” Perhaps the future of the classical concert lies not in making people listen to music differently by changing the music, but by changing the

conditions in which listening takes place.

By Ivan Nechaev

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