

Azerbaijani cinema... and our moral values

Musa MARJANLI
Editor-in-Chief

Azerbaijani cinema celebrates a landmark anniversary this year. For the last 120 years, Azerbaijani cinema has covered a long road full of remarkable events and contributed a great deal to the cultural and moral values of the Azerbaijani people. Cinema is about memory. It is about history. After all, it is films that will talk about the present-day history of our country a hundred years later.

Cinema appeared in Azerbaijan for the first time in the Caucasus in 1896. Only foreign films were demonstrated in Baku at the time. On August 2, 1898, two years after the first film demonstration in France, first documentaries by publisher and photographer Alexander Mishon "Fire at the oil gusher in Bibi-Heybat", "Caucasus dance", "Oil gusher in Balakhany", as well as a feature film "Got you!", were shown in Baku. This date is now regarded as the birthday of Azerbaijani cinema.

The first films laid the groundwork for cinematography in the entire East. In 1915, a joint-stock company of the Pirone brothers started the shooting of Azerbaijan's first feature film "In the kingdom of oil and millions" based on a novel by Ibrahim Musabayov. A year later, in 1916, the first Azerbaijani comedy based on Uzeyir Hajibayov's "Arshin mal alan" operetta was released. The shooting of the full-length film "Celebration of Azerbaijan's Independence" was completed in 1919.

Therefore, cinema always tried to follow historic events. Interestingly, although the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which turns 100 this year, only existed for 23 months, it introduced state protection of cinema workers.

Demonstrations of documentary films about the national army, the arrival of Turkish troops in Azerbaijan and the government's overall activities were organized in "Express", "Record" and "Forum" cinemas in Baku. Conceived at a time when oil production had just started in Baku, Azerbaijani cinematography covered a glorious path and earned tremendous respect in society.

Films describing various spheres of life have been shot over the years. Azerbaijani films have always enjoyed great popularity as they described real life, highlighted national identity and had interesting story lines. Of course, many of us have seen some movies so many times we have almost memorized them, but we still can't help watching them over and over again.

I have no intention of talking too much about Azerbaijani cinema, especially since you will find a story on the subject in this edition. However, I do want to highlight one important fact. Curiously enough, although the first parliament, the first opera, the first ballet, the first cinema and many other firsts of the Muslim East appeared in a place called Azerbaijan, most people around the world were completely unaware of that, while those who have recently discovered Azerbaijan have very little knowledge of these historic facts.

This is exactly why we at *IRS-Heritage* are dedicating this issue of the magazine to the areas of Azerbaijan's material culture, history and ethnography that are little known to the broader audience. Enjoy!