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Outstanding Azerbaijanis



THE ONE WITHOUT EQUAL

Natavan FAIQ

THE LIFE OF A GENIUS, AS A RULE, IS SHORT AND TRAGIC. MAYBE THIS IS THE REASON WHY THEY ARE SO GENEROUS IN THEIR CREATIVE WORK AND WHY THEY ARE IN SUCH A HURRY TO PASS THE TREASURES OF THEIR SPIRIT TO THEIR OFF-SPRING - TREASURES NOT ALWAYS VALUED IN LIFE. VAGIF MUSTAFAZADEH WAS NOT AN EXCEPTION...



Young Vagif



Vagif Mustafazade and David Koyfman

Recollections of him mix up two feelings - pride and bitterness. Pride in the composer, experimental pianist and musician with a name which critics link in principle to a new direction in jazz based on an Azerbaijani tonal system. But the bitterness does not require deciphering.

News of his demise was heard like thunder from heaven! Vagif, with his unique a little guilty smile and his constant leather jacket adorning the TV evenings of Baku inhabitants (as leader of the, at the time, super-popular vocal ensemble Sevil) - dead?!

And I still recall the article in one of the central newspapers in which I heard that thunder rolled out which rolled across the country then. *Before and After the Obituary* – as it was called. It began with the publication of a statement by Vagif Mustafazadeh containing a request to accept him as a member of the Composers' Union of the Republic. Below, a reference which was in essence a verdict was given: 'The administration of the CU of Azerbaijan abstained from admitting V. Mustafazadeh as a member

of the Union, because he has not completed higher education'...

I remember his smile very well. I remember how he took his daughter to school - this was sometime in the middle of the 70s. It is necessary to see how he said farewell to her - during the whole long day, how he bent down, carefully laced up her boots and adjusted the hair-grip in her hair... Finally, kissed her cheek and moved off repeatedly turning around after her. Reaching the gates of the school, he suddenly called to her: 'And did I forget anything?' – screwing up his eyes – sly person. The daughter shook her head and after that he ran up to her and kissed her again and then left...

It is impossible to say that he was passed over because not a little has been written about him, but mostly - as a pianist and promoter of jazz music. Here is one of the reviews from that year of his solo concert: 'Thanks to brilliant technique and high artistic diapason Mustafazadeh, like a manipulator, moved the audience in the time and space of jazz, from the romantic, covered delicate lyricism

of the world of George Gershwin to the visible urban forms of his composition *Bu gün (Today)*, from the plays by Thelonious Monk to the incomprehensible dept of harmony of *Seven Beauties* by Gara Garayev. In these movements Mustafazadeh trusts in himself: neither in one thing, nor in parts of seconds does he lose the subtle mastery of the improviser, carefully intertwining the originality and freshness of his musical style in the fabric of the classic works of jazz'.

His extravagant performance always caused a storm of delight. The room froze and listened with reverent attention, when he, Vagif, created his in every case inimitable interpretation. For this the depths of the piano seemed to reveal something special, up to now unprecedented, in force of spirit and in force of personality. He, like nobody else was able to subordinate his furious virtuosity, placing it at the service of intellect and energy. This was a genuine musical talent, with an astonishing temperament varying from poetic and lyrical to indomitably explosive.

A star of world jazz... **Was he a star? He absolutely was, but his**

stardom was no match for that of today – who, with the aim of reminding society of themselves, periodically need a sensation and need a scandal – shocking behaviour which attracts attention.

Vagif could do without all of this. But then we, his listeners, could not do without him. Fascinating in his unpretentious simplicity the boy from the Fortress (Icherisheher) - such will he always remain in our memories, modest, passing spiritually undamaged through the temptation of fame... And, indeed, what would it have been – fame?

Originality frightens. People have always treated the unusual and new with suspicion. Incomprehension results in hostility, harsh evaluation, hatred and malice. And individuality - this then is to see differently and that, as is well-known, it is seldom welcomed. And it is only one step from incomprehension to denial...

His, Vagif, brilliant compositions which today provide inspiration for the whole musical world, thus was not permitted across the threshold of the Composers' Union. 'Has not completed higher'... It is possible to think that these words are about a novice in music. At that time he had written not a small number of works, well-known to us in the country and performed in Poland, France and other countries. Only the all-union company Melody had published ten records with him performing his own works. A few weeks before his death his concert for piano and orchestra was presented for the appraisal of the great Azerbaijani conductor Niyazi. He collaborated with theatres and wrote music for documentary films. V. Mustafazadeh's work **Əzizəni gözləyərkən** (Expecting Aziza) was performed for the first time at the VII International Competition for Composers of Jazz Compositions in



Vagif Mustafazade and Tofiq Guliyev

Monaco in 1979. Vagif was the first composer of the Union at that time, conquering a seat in the high place in that imposing forum. No, he was not a novice to music but none the less a place in the directory of the Composers' Union could not be found for him...

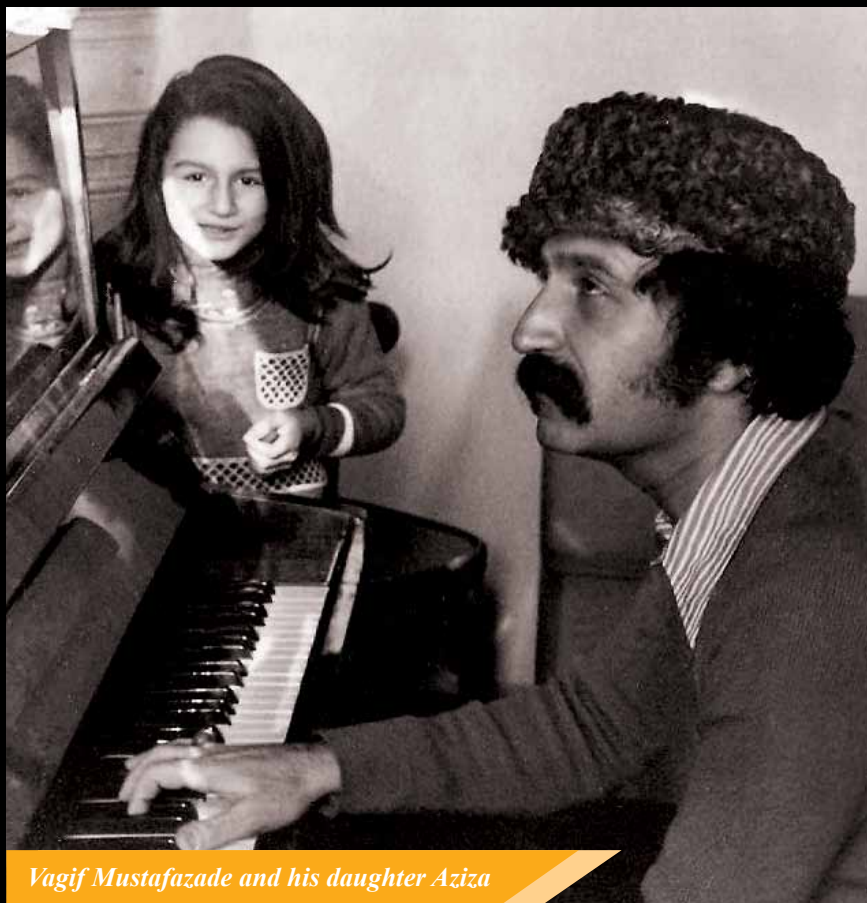
He is today spoken about as an epoch in the cultural life of the people, but in those times as a person with an 'incomplete' education... During that merciless stagnation not only hair-splitting decided the verdict but also number crunching.

But on the other hand, today we rain down grateful wrath on their children who do not wish to return to the homeland. And you see they, the direct witnesses to the Soviet inquisition, have a right to be hurt. They leave, in order not to repeat the bitterness experienced by their parents and to avoid ills caused by no less brilliant envious persons. But not to notice, when it is impossible not to notice - this is not easy! This is also a gift. But how is it possible 'to not notice' the stunningly furious avalanche of passages by Vagif Mustafazadeh?!

Envious people were 'working' indefatigably.

And the children, they leave, driven by the genetic fear of their fate - the fate of children with great parents. Because they remember it - the estrangement zone... They remember this absolute, cosmic, icy solitude. And they do not believe in our repentance. Like they also do not believe in the moving revelations of 'recollecting friends' who alleged that they foretold his greatness during the life of this artist. And 'the revelations' are these - no more than illuminated fantasies.

Arthur Kestler said - 'The more original the discovery, the more obvious it appears afterwards'. The example of Vagif Mustafazadeh confirms this. It appears to us, who have already got used to the fact that there is such a thing as Azerbaijani jazz, as if it has always existed. We completely forget that for long years not one of the non-American performers could really declare themselves, to say something fundamentally new in jazz. In a word, the elite forefathers of the genre appeared to be inacces-



Vagif Mustafazade and his daughter Aziza

sible bastions. This today, thanks to the work of V. Mustafazadeh, exists and the term Azerbaijani jazz is officially included in musical catalogues. It is exactly him, Vagif, that we are indebted to for this phenomenon.

We only realised the large scale of the losses a year after his death – I remember that National TV prepared a transmission dedicated to the anniversary of his death. No, of course he knew success in life. Success accompanied his every appearance. His popularity grew astonishingly quickly in the former USSR, as well as outside it. His improvisations, which were drawn from luxurious national melos, were heard on radio and TV. But only after his death did he appear before us in full creative greatness – strictly, genuine recognition began with the posthumous transmission about him. He began to be called ‘the founder of Azerbaijani jazz’ and to

repeat the expressions used by masters of world jazz music about him. In the course of one evening a metamorphosis in peoples’ perception took place: the Honoured Art Worker of the Republic V. Mustafazadeh suddenly grew into a phenomenon of world significance. Thus the fellow countrymen learnt the true value of their contemporary.

The famous American musician and critic V. Conover wrote about him ‘Mustafazadeh is a first rate pianist, to whom it is difficult to find an equal in lyrical jazz’. He is the most lyrical pianist that I have ever heard’. And this is what the Swedish jazz pianist B. Johansson said about Vagif’s compositions: ‘His music is surprisingly modern but at the same time it conveys the secrets of ancient Caucasian melodies, extolled poets not of a single generation. This is the tale which Sheherezade told on the 1002 night!’

He was a titan of creativity and completely helpless against that which is called life. Like all God-given talents he was not practical and sometimes so completely helpless in decisions of the most elementary of life problems. Vulnerable chronic everyday despondency brought inner discomfort and he searched for work inwardly with that, in order to refine a notorious piece... And life within the limit of nervous tension – it is inevitably doomed to a dramatic interruption.

Vagif died in Tashkent. Straight on the stage, at the piano. **Əzizəni gözləyərkən** (*Expecting Aziza*) – that was the name of his parting composition – dedicated to his daughter.

‘Art does not have a result but the act of creation itself’ – say the French. Thinking about that already distant concert, you understand the undoubted truth of these words.

In the event, with Vagif the act of creation was an act of sacrifice, when the stage becomes a battle arena – life and death... alas!

It is already almost a quarter of a century without him with us – in 1980 the heart of this original and tragic person stopped. The Master, in whose virtuoso improvisations mugham has received a new continuation and new life, is no more. He died at the time of the highest blossoming of his exceptional talent. He was then nearly 40...

Baku always distinguished itself for its responsiveness to jazz culture. And today many musicians are still working in this fading genre. There are among them real masters of their art and their jazz is of a high standard and not lacking in creative imagination. But I think that they do not carry – only V. Mustafazadeh set the bar so incredibly high that to hear them, even the very talented, is not enough. It is that special an individu-



ality and genuine artistry. It can – because jazz is perhaps not a product of mass production created for the gratification of the average man. We saw a different jazz and another jazzman, a person who was inflamed by jazz and burned himself out – utterly! And works in a jazz-style (or pseudojazz) - are different from the first

bars. Because the artistic skill is not the Inspiration.

He enclosed many hypostases in his art - composer, arranger, performer and improviser. But I think that his most important contribution is that he was the image of the Azerbaijani jazzman!

Years have passed. But every time

I pass the Bulbul Music School where someone is taught, a scene springs up again and again before my eyes like a miraculous mirage - Vagif hurrying to the lesson with his little daughter in the second class.. And a little later - smiling and addressing his daughter: 'Did I forget anything?'