

ENCHANTING SOUNDS OF BALABAN

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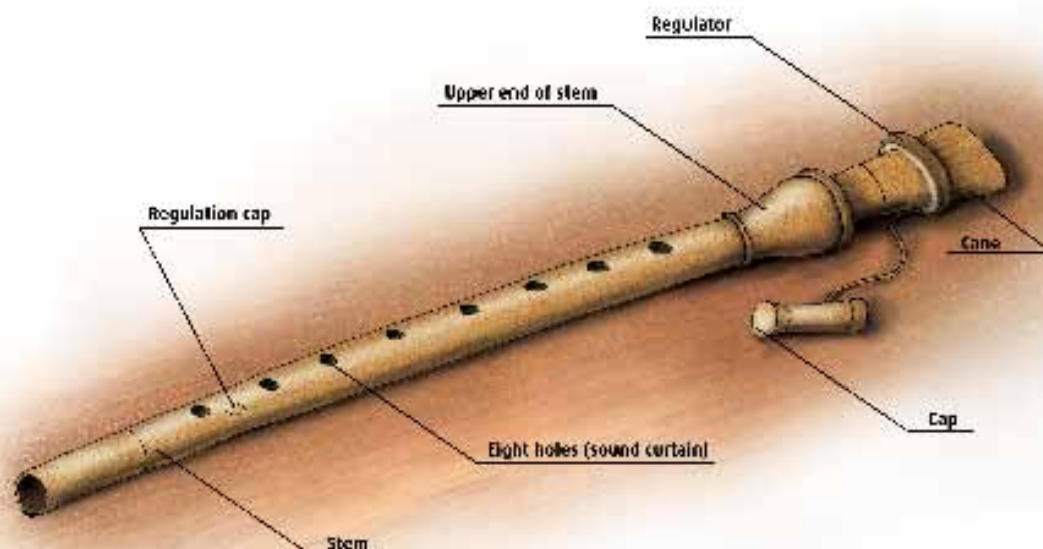
ACCORDING TO WRITTEN SOURCES IN THE TERRITORY OF AZERBAIJAN THERE USED TO BE MORE THAN 20 WIND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS DIFFERING FROM EACH OTHER ON CONSTRUCTION, MEANS OF SOUND EXTRACTION AND SOUNDING. ACCORDING TO MODERN CLASSIFICATION THEY REFERRED TO LIP (NEY, KSUL, YAN-TUTEK, NAY, MUSIGAR, KELENAY, MIZMAR, TUTEK, BURBUG), UVULAR (SUMSU, SUMSU-BALABAN, TULUM, SHAPBIR-BALABAN, BALABAN, ZURNA, ARGAN) AND MOUTHPIECE (BUG, BURGU, GAVDUM, KARANAY, NEFIR, SHAKH-NEFIR, SHEYPUR) TYPES OF WIND INSTRUMENTS.

Less than the half of musical instruments mentioned above are used today, but widely spread among them are balaban, zurna, tutek, ney and tulum. Among the last ones, balaban is the one with

the most delicate, velvet, extraordinarily lyrical and singing sound, often it is yasti-balaban because of its flattening cane. In Nakhchivan, Ganja-Gazakh and Karabag zones of Azerbaijan it is famous under the

names "balaman", "mey", or "duduk".

Balaban is one of the ancient wind instruments of Azerbaijani people. Its name is mentioned in the epos of "Kitabi Dede Gorgud", in the verses of classics of Azerbaijani poetry.



Balaban consists of stem, cane, regulator and cap.

Stem is a hollow cylindrical pipe with the length of 280-320mm, made of (the process is called "to draw balaban") apricot (advantageously), nuts, pear, mulberry, cornel, cheery-plum (wild) trees as well as of unabi.

The upper end of the stem (bash, kup) is given a ball form and the lower end (ayag) is a bit sharpened. Sound channel (perde) with the diameter of 10mm is bored with drill. On the face part there eight bored holes (ses perdesi). Museum copies of this instrument witness that in the past their number reached up to 6-7. On the body part, in the point, corresponding to the half of the distance between first and the second holes of the face side, one more hole is opened.

With the purpose of improvement of row and timbre of instrument sounding, sometimes on the face side in the lower end additional holes are bored which is called a regulating hole (nizam perdesi).

Names of the play holes reflect

the functional (bash perde – first shah perde – fourth open perde, sixth foot perde, - eighth, back perde – face), intonational (segah perde – second and fifth mahur perde, - seventh and others) and acoustic (nizam perdesi) features of the instrument.

The upper part of the stem is put a cane (gamish, gargi, dil) which is made of cane, growing in waterless places. These canes don't absorb the humidity. Cane from the side of cleaned external layer is flat, forming the double uvula of plain form and this part is worn of a regulator in the shape of ring. The other end of the cane is put a wooden pivot with the diameter of 7-12 mm. A bit lower from the knot, the end is drawn and covered with thread. It is done in order to allow the free movement of the regulator down and not let the cane to become flat. It is covered with vegetable oil and burnt on a coal or a lamp.

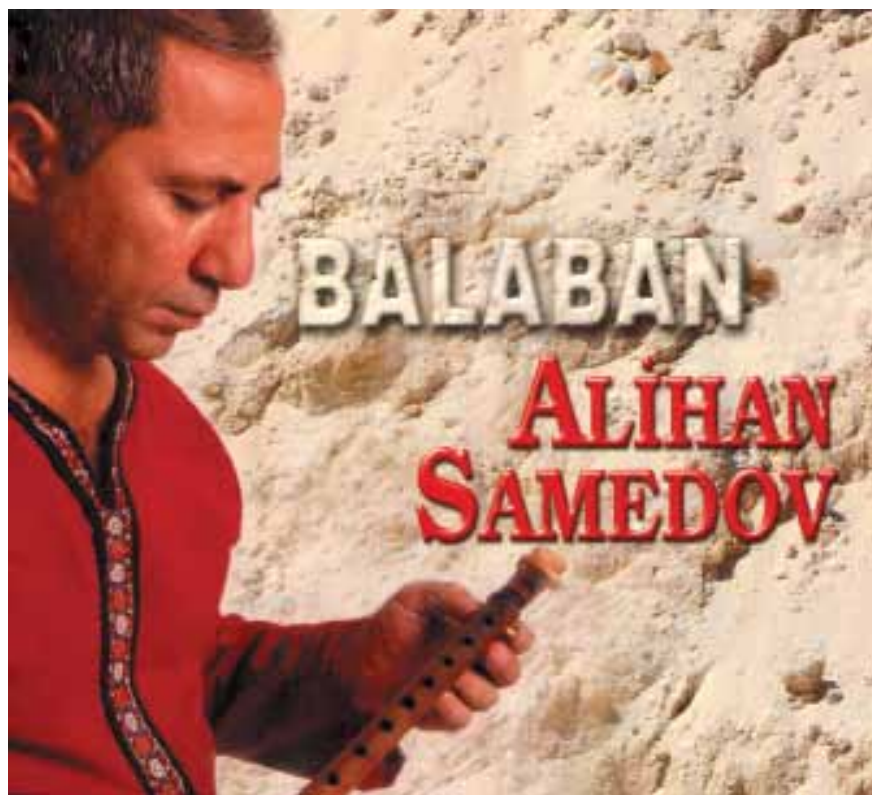
Regulator (kherek, bogazlig, boyundurug, ulama, ekme) is made of willow or of vineyard branch with the length of 60mm and the width

of 10mm. The wooden branch is cut on longitudinal direction into two parts. After polishing and softening in boiled water bent ends of the tree are joined between each other with threads and are worn approximately to the mid of the cane.

During the movement of it up and down around the mouthpiece, they change the length of its vibrating part and by it they change the order of instrument – in the upper position it is lowered and in the lower it is increased.

For the protection of the cane from damage, after playing it is covered with wooden cap-clip (gapag, agizlig, kip, bend, yashmag, sikhmag, gapanja, gisgach) of willow, nut, cornel or mulberry tree. To avoid the loss, it is joined with thread to regulator.

During the play balaban is kept right in front of you in a bit bent position and the air is blown into cane of the instrument. Under the influence of the blown air, fragile cane plates vibrate and cause the sound. At the same time the sound doesn't cease even then when musician gets



air into his lungs. The height of the sound is changed by means of closing and opening of playing holes by fingers of both hands.

Order of the instrument is regulated by means of regulator, widening of sound holes and movement of mouthpiece down or up. In order to lessen the order of the instrument to half tone or a tone, the mouthpiece is moved back or up to the corps of which they wear "clip" – yedenek, drawing the length of stem to 8-10mm.

Half tone is made by closing or opening the play holes to half. For example, for receiving the sound "sol diez" it is important to open the half of the hole which makes the sound "lya". For receiving the sound "sol bemol" it is important to open back hole in half.

Half closed holes on the face side of the stem are opened or closed from side part. And back hole are opened from bottom to up and in

opposite direction, that is from top to bottom is how it is closed. In order to receive clean half tone sounds, it is important to place middle parts of fingers on holes.

The range of instrument is from "sol" of minor octave to "do" of second octave. Venerable musicians by means of pressuring the muscles of lips (dodag sikhma) and the effort of the blown cane of the air also attract the sounds "do diez", "re" and "mi bemol" of the second octave. Another playing manner (bogaz vurma) is used for receiving an interrupted sound.

In the low (bem) registry of sound of balaban, it is a vague, ringing, in the medium (orta) registry, it is a soft, lyrical and in the high (zil) registry, it is fragile and clear. Balaban players by means of regulating the blowing of air with half-closed or open holes, by changing the level of pressing the cane with their lips in medium or in high registries were

able to receive cheomatic sounds.

There is also a constructed alto part, tenor and bass types of balaban.

Azerbaijan used to have venerable balaban players. Among them are Ali Kerimov, Shahkhali Ismayilov, Hasan Bakhshali oglu, Alish Gaytaranoglu, Museyib Abbasov, Shahmurad Tahirov, Bahruz Zeynalov, Hasrat Huseynov, Izzatali Zulfugarov, Jennetali Hajiyeve, Agasafa Seyidov, Hasan Maharramov, Alihan Samedov, Alijavad Javadov and Farhad Huseynov.

The most famous at that time were the duets of musicians (a pair of balabans): one of them being master plays the main melody and another – demkesh, zuytutan, zuychu (student) accompanies that melody upstart on one and the same low sound on height. In the accompaniment of this duet they play songs, dances and instrumental pieces.

During the weddings, holidays and celebrations as well as in accompaniment of dances this duet is joined with musicians that play on gaval, nagara or pair-nagara. The ensemble, including two balaban players and one percussion instrument was famous among people under the name "group of balaban players".

Additionally, as an applied destination on it, it also plays shepherd melodies ("Choban bayatisi", "Goyun ovshari") and mourning melodies ("Matem avazlari" – mourning verses). As it is mentioned in his memories, Azerbaijani singer, producer and pedagogue Huseyngulu Sarabski (1879-1945), balaban was used also by hunters for enticing female quails into the trap.

Balaban is also used in Ashug ensembles. In this case very often they use its rare type (jura), which is tuned for saz. In ashug ensembles they double the melody of singing or in the background of melody.



During instrumental introductions to the singing of ashug, balaban player plays the main melody and ashug in his turn on his saz accompanies him with harmonic sounds. Sometimes balaban player while accompanying the song of the ashug also dances in parallel.

Timbre and dynamic capacities of the instrument are clearly shown in solo singing of mugham with the duet of balaban players despite the fact that its sound order doesn't allow to play all its melody parts. This is why usually mugham dastgahs are played by balaban players in shortened form.

At the same time, taking into account the range of instrument different tones are selected that are specific to mughams and its divisions. The role of balaban master in vocal-instrumental version of playing for mugham, often varies and changes. In some cases he plays only in the background as secondary sound, in others especially during a big pause in vocal party, it plays an active role

in the introduction of melody or in switching in suitable moment to the playing of mugham parts.

In the orchestra of folk instruments in solo playing of balabans, it is this instrument that is given melodic phrases as an accompanying instrument used for playing harmonic accords and burdon sounds.

Balaban, as solo instrument sounds very well in the plays, such as "Second fantasy" of Uzeyir Hajibayov, "In the fields of Azerbaijan" of Muslim Magomayev, "Dancing suite" of Khalil Jafarov. These plays masterly use balabans in high and low registries.

Musical and technical capacity of balaban (especially when playing the accords) are clearly demonstrated in the piece called "While dreaming" of Suleyman Alasgarov, for the first time composed for balaban and the orchestra of folk instruments and in the piece for four balabans of Nazim Azimov.

In the poem "In the memory of unknown soldier" of Ogtay Zulfugarov, the sounding of bala-

bans provides a pleasant timbre colour for symphonic orchestra.

In 1950s, playing balaban was included into the system of professional musical education, studied in methodical way in music schools". It was also taught in National Conservatorium.

Balaban or flat balaban is also famous under the same name in Iran and Dagestan, as mey in Turkey, duduki or duduk in Georgia, Kabardino-Balkaria, guan among uygurs. It is interesting to note that under the name balaban (bulaman, bulamon) or balabon in Kabardino-Balkaria, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan was widely used quite other wind instrument of different construction. They remind the ancestor of balaban, which is sumsu-balaban, that existed in Azerbaijan in very old, ancient times.

Melodies sounded with balaban brightly reflect all beauties and wonders of our musical culture. Therefore this musical instrument is one of the most favourite ones in Azerbaijan. ✨

