

AZERBAIJAN – LAND OF MUSIC FESTIVALS

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THE LAND OF FIRE... AZERBAIJAN HAS BEEN KNOWN AS SUCH FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL, AND THERE ARE MANY REASONS FOR THAT. BUT WE WILL TALK ABOUT A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FAME THAT THIS DEVELOPING AND FASCINATING LAND IS GRADUALLY EARNING ITSELF. THE LAND OF MUSIC FESTIVALS - THIS IS HOW AZERBAIJAN'S CURRENT MUSICAL AND CULTURAL REALITIES CAN BE DESCRIBED IF WE WERE TO PARAPHRASE THE WELL-KNOWN PHRASE.

At least one traditional music festival is conducted in Azerbaijan every season. The participants and guests of the **second "Space of Mugham" international festival, held over the spring holidays of Novruz** (the first was held in 2009), are convinced that it was one of the most successful international projects on the traditional music of the East. This has largely been possible thanks to the initiator and main sponsor of the festival, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation led by its President, the Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO and ISESCO, Mehriban Aliyeva. As was the case during the first festival, the





capital Baku became a venue for a record number of music events for the eight days (14-21 March) of the festival. Art enthusiasts had the opportunity to see the **world's first Mugham operas by Uzeyir Hajibayov, "Leyli and Majnun" and "Asli and Kerem", as well as "Shah Ismayil" by Muslim Magomayev.** Khanende (vocal performers of Mugham) performed **all seven main Azerbaijani Mughams** (Rast, Shur, Segah, Chargah, Bayati-Shiraz, Khumayun and Shushter). Also participating in the festival were foreign representatives of performing arts featuring traditional music, modern compositions by Azerbaijani and Middle Eastern composers, including even Jazz-Mugham. Thus, the artistic concept of the festival, carefully developed by the project's art director, **the chairman of the Union of Composers of Azerbaijan and the UNESCO Artist of Peace, Firangiz Alizade,** embodied the amazing diversity of Mugham.

The festival was joined by vocalists and instrumentalists from Azerbaijan and foreign countries, including the USA, Canada, France, Peru, Ecuador, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, India and China. Another **scientific symposium under the auspices of UNESCO, as well as the second international contest of young performers of the traditional music of the East, were also held within the festival framework.** In other words, the festival program was unprecedentedly extensive, as each day saw four to five different events. **Open master-classes from outstanding performers, Azerbaijani khanende Alim Gasimov and Egyptian percussionist Habib Yammini,** were a novelty of the festival. It is worth indicating that this year's festival was held during the Novruz holidays, while the festival's culminating point, the final concert at the Heydar Aliyev Palace, was held on the day of vernal equinox which symbolizes not only renewal of

the energy of life, but also the blossom of art and creative inspiration.

The upcoming summer season is promising to be no less interesting in terms of music events. The resort city of Gabala, once the capital of the Caucasian Albania, one of the oldest culture centers of the Caucasus located in a fascinating mountainous terrain full of historical sites and fashionable hotels, will be entertaining guests from around the world for the third time this year. **It is no coincidence that this city, a center of a multiethnic region symbolizing an intercultural dialogue, has been selected by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation as a venue for a major festival joined by the already prominent and young musicians from many countries.** A contest of young pianists held within the framework of the first festival in 2009 revealed a number of young and talented musicians. The concerts of symphonic and chamber music of two festivals in Gabala have featured



such celebrities as the London Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Israeli Symphonic Orchestra, the Azerbaijan State Symphonic Orchestra, as well as renowned musicians such as Yuri Bashmet, Dmitri Yablonskiy, Farhad Badalbeyli, Boris Berezovskiy, Rauf Abdullayev, Emilio Pons, Chloe Hanslip, Oksana Yablonskaya, Murad Adigezalzade, etc. Classical music of U. Hajibayov, P. Tchaikovsky, G. Bizet, S. Rahmaninov, G. Verdi, F. Amirov, E.

Grieg, M. Falla, F. Mendelson, K. Saint-Saens, F. Shubert, N. Rimsky-Korsakov, G. Garayev, M. Magomayev, etc. could be heard at the foot of the mountain every morning. The crystal-clear air and the natural acoustics became a wonderful background to this realm of music on the unforgettable days of the festival.

Not far from Gabala there Sheki, one of the most ancient cities of the Great Silk Way where centuries-old se-

crets of natural silk production are still cherished. It was in this truly Oriental city with a magnificent Palace of Sheki Khans that the **first international music festival with the symbolic name of "Silk Way" was held from 27 June to 1 July 2010.** Organized by the Union of Composers of Azerbaijan, the festival was joined by the best musicians from Azerbaijan, Korea, Norway, Finland and Canada. The various musical compositions played in places that are considered historical monuments created a very special atmosphere around the festival. Such places included the picturesque park of the Palace of Sheki Khans with centennial plane-trees, the caravansary architectural complex, the ancient Alban church in the mountainous village Kish, etc.

Speaking about Azerbaijan's music festivals, it is worth indicating that the **opening of the concert season on 18 September every year, on the birthday of prominent classic of Azerbaijani music Uzeyir Hajibayov which is traditionally marked as a nationwide holiday, the Day of Music,** is in itself the beginning of a major music festival. In 2010, this festival was held internationally because it overlapped with Uzeyir Hajibayov's 125th birthday anniversary. The program of the 10-day festival included various stage shows, concerts of orchestra music, band and solo performances by Azerbaijani and foreign artists held in the best concert halls of Baku, Sumgayit and Agjabadi, the great composer's home town. The festival was joined by numerous foreign guests, including the "Orfeon" chamber chorus (Turkey), the "Tang" quartet (Singapore), the "Amaltea" band (Switzerland), the CIS youth symphonic orchestra led by V. Spivakov, as well as soloists A. Gindin, S. Kudryakov, A. Saykin (Russia), D. Liveli, G. Veen (Holland), N. Reksrot (Germany), A. Bankas, N. Cogan (Canada), conduc-



tors A. Markin (Russia) and I. Gadjiyev (Canada).

The biggest event of the autumn music season in Baku is certainly **the traditional jazz festival**. It would be no exaggeration to say that jazz festivals have a special holiday atmosphere about them. The level of contact established between those on the stage and the audience at jazz concerts is not observed in any other art form. There is a true holiday of engagement and involvement, discovery of new names and styles. **The history of Baku jazz festivals dates back to the 1960s, while the first festival was held in 1967.** The latest festival, conducted on 16-30 October 2010, will be remembered by a whole constellation of well-known names. Concerts were held at the best halls of the capital – the Heydar Aliyev Palace, the Baku Mugham Center, the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic Hall named after M. Magomayev and the Baku Jazz Center. The list of festival



participants included the “Shakatak” jazz band (United Kingdom), the “Jazzamor” band, the “Vijay Iyer” trio (USA), the “Arena” jazz orchestra (Azerbaijan), soloists Diana Rives (USA), guitarist Al Di Meola (USA), Matt Bianco (United Kingdom), Aziza Mustafazade (Azerbaijan), pianists Keiko Matsui (Japan),

Artur Dutkievich (Poland) and Alexander Montti (Jamaica), Omar (United Kingdom), trumpeter Eric Vloemans (Holland), as well as Azerbaijani jazzmen Rain Sultanov (saxophone), Salman Gambarov, Jamil Amirov, Emil Afrasiyab oglu, Isfar Sarabski (piano).

Every winter, in mid-December,

leading musicians of the world descend on Baku to revere the memory of outstanding maestro Mstislav Rostropovich in his native country. **The traditional Rostropovich music festival** is considered one of the most prestigious events very much looked forward to by the people of Baku and visitors of the Azerbaijani capital alike. It is worth pointing out that the initiative of conducting such festivals in Baku was made by **maestro himself. It was on his suggestion that the 100th birthday anniversary of the outstanding 20th century composer and a great friend of Azerbaijani music, Dmitri Shostakovich, was marked by a major international festival in Baku in 2006.** A year later, the world celebrated the 80th jubilee of Rostropovich himself. Unfortunately, the remarkable musician did not live to see this date and in 2007 a festival in memory of Rostropovich was held in Azerbaijan with support from the Heydar Aliyev Foundation.

As expected, it has also become traditional, as **prominent musicians from different countries have been**

coming to Baku on New Year's eve for four years now. Over this period the festival has featured such foreign artists as the Moscow chamber orchestra "New Russia", the chamber band "Soloists of Moscow" conducted by Yuri Bashmet, the Israeli philharmonic orchestra conducted by Zubin Mehta, the British chamber orchestra conducted by Christian Badea, Eugene Kohn, Maxim Vengerov, violinists Pinchas Zukerman, Sergey Krylov, Andres Mustonen, Yuri Revich, Ray Chen, cellists Natalia Gutman, Denis Shapovalov, David Geringas, Xavier Philips, Amanda Foresight, pianists Eliso Virsaladze, Alexander Korsantia, Mikhail Lidskiy, Rudolph Buchbinder, Philip Kopachevskiy, singers Boris Maysuradze, Silvio Zanon, Doina Dimitriu, S. Leyferkus, Hibla Gerzmava, Elena Manistina, Sergey Plyusnin, Oksana Dika, etc.

The **house museum of Leopold and Mstislav Rostropoviches, which cherishes everything that linked the family to Azerbaijan,** hospitably opens its doors to visitors on the days of the festival. Young and

talented musicians awarded with scholarships of the Rostropovich Foundation show their skill as well.

Also within the said festivals the Galina Vishnevskaya Opera Center conducts performances at the Azerbaijan Academic Opera and Ballet Theater. As part of the latest Rostropovich festival, the Center performed Bizet's famous "Carmen" opera much to the delight of the audience.

Yet another festival of modern music dedicated to outstanding Azerbaijani composer Gara Garayev started in Baku on 2 April 2011...

The article dwells upon international music festivals held in Azerbaijan every spring, summer, autumn and winter and joined by renowned musicians from across the globe. These are the "Space of Mugham" festival held during the Novruz holidays, the festival of modern music in memory of Gara Garayev, the Gabala festival of well-known and young performers, the "Silk Way" festival in Sheki, the international festival on the Day of Music, the traditional autumn jazz festival in Baku and the Rostropovich festival.

EUROVISION

SONG CONTEST

BAKU TO PLAY HOST TO EUROVISION-2012

Azerbaijan's Nigar Jamal and Eldar Gasimov have won the Eurovision-2011 Song Contest.

A total of 43 countries participated in the song contest in Dusseldorf, including those from Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, Lithuania, Hungary, Ireland, Sweden, Estonia, Greece, France, Italy, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Moldova, Germany, Romania, Austria, Azerbaijan, Slovenia, Iceland, Spain, Ukraine, Serbia and Georgia. The Eurovision Song Contest has been conducted annually since 1956. Each country nominates one representative – a solo singer or a group of no more than six people. Songs should last no longer than three minutes. The use of audio records in Eurovision is prohibited, but this applies only to the vocal part. Since 1999, songs

can be performed in any language. Earlier the requirement was to sing songs only in the language of the host country.

Developments at Eurovision-2011 were unfolding as dramatically as in the world cup in football. The song contest was watched by 35,000 happy spectators and another 120 million TV viewers, not to mention the armada of journalists, photographers and critics each of which had “an undoubted winner” in their minds. As a matter of fact, Azerbaijan was not among favorites to win the contest. Its representatives have been participating in the prestigious contest only since 2008 and their best performance was in 2009 when an Azerbaijani duo won third place. But all the expectations were overturned by TV viewers



who ranked the Azerbaijani duo as the best. The song sung by Eldar Gasimov and Nigar Jamal, Running Scared, got the highest score and won the main prize of the contest – the Crystal Microphone.

According to the rules of Eurovision, the next contest will be held in the winning country, Azerbaijan. ❖