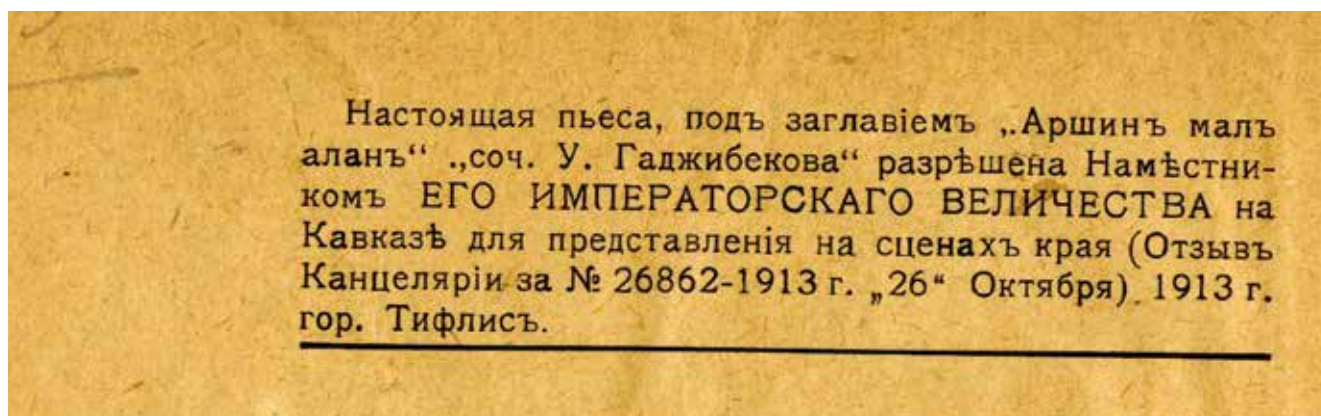


# “ARSHIN MAL ALAN” - 100

IN 2013, BY THE DECISION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO, THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OPERETTA «ARSHIN MAL ALAN» - ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR WORKS OF WORLD MUSIC AND THE FIRST OPERETTA OF THE MUSLIM EAST – IS MARKED ON A GLOBAL SCALE.



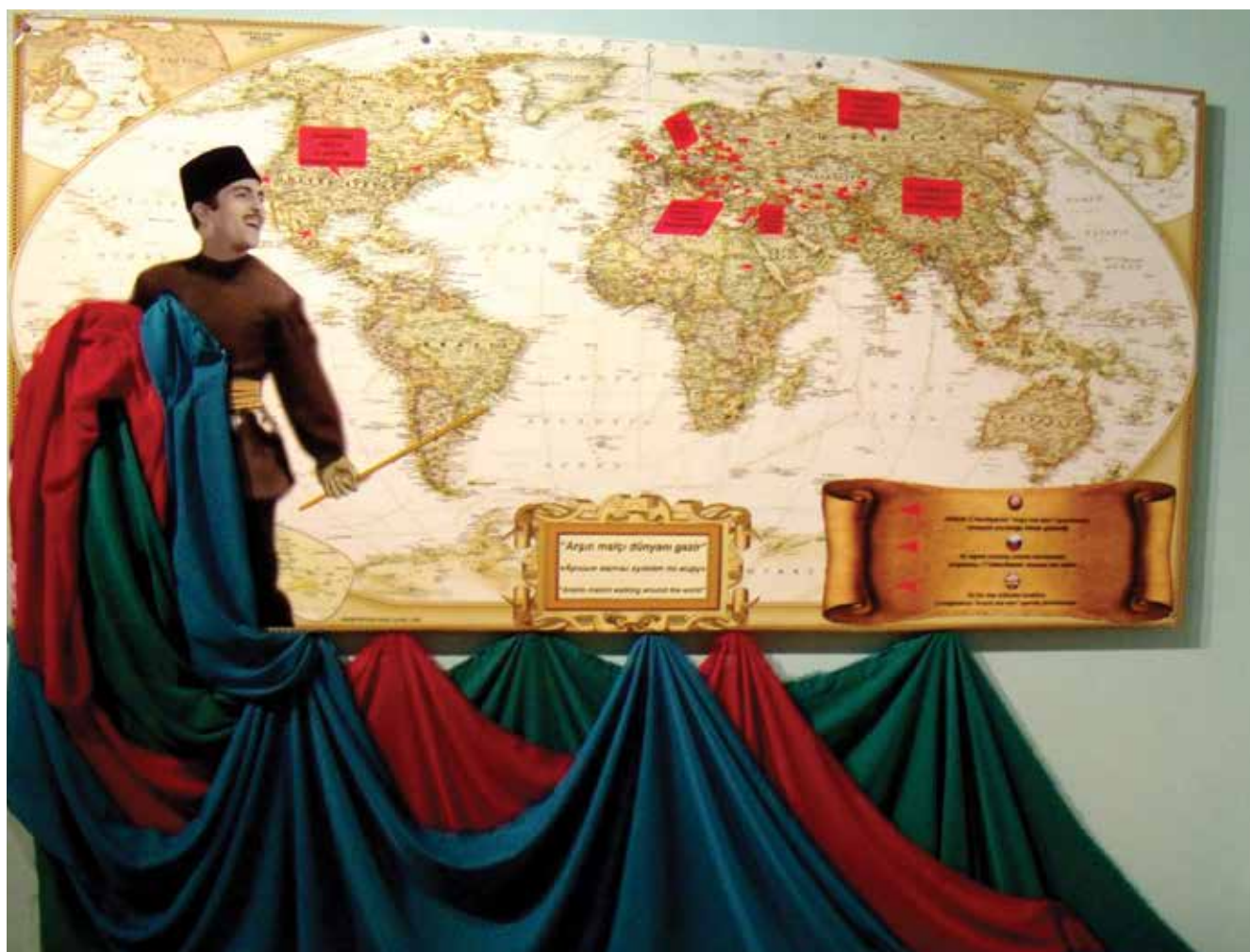
*Permission of the Office of the Governor-General of the Emperor in the Caucasus to stage the operetta issued after the premiere. 26 October 1913. NMHA*

In 2013, by the decision of the General Conference of UNESCO, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the operetta «Arshin Mal Alan» - one of the most popular works of world music and the first operetta of the Muslim East – is marked on a global scale. **The author of the operetta is the prominent Azerbaijani composer, founder of the national composers' school and author of the first opera in the East, Uzeyir Hajibayov** (1885 - 1948). He started working on the operetta in Baku and completed it in the summer of 1913 in St. Petersburg (1). The operetta «Arshin Mal Alan» received its name from the characteristic cry used by

street fabric vendors in Azerbaijan, who measured fabric with an arshin. Interestingly, the name of «Arshin Mal Alan» was rarely translated. Sometimes explanatory inscriptions such as «Recipe for a successful marriage» or «Seller of goods» were given under the title on posters. According to experts, the main artistic and expressive beginning in «Arshin Mal Alan» is the music, while the depth of image content and the scale of development bring the operetta closer to a comic opera. The image of the main protagonist Asgar is generally expressed in the aria, the words of which are taken from a famous ghazal by the great

Azerbaijani poet Fizuli. The arias of the second main character of the operetta – the girl Gulchohra – are imbued with a sense of sadness and anticipation. Musicologists point out that the images of the other characters, as to change the lyrical story to a comic flavor and recreate the spirit of the national lifestyle. The composer widely used the motifs of Azerbaijani folk songs such as «Boynunda Sarilig Var», «Janlar ichinde janim», «Galanin dibinde» and the dance «Tarakama». At the same time, **Hajibayov created a bright, original vocal style that synthesizes folk songs and mugam melodies; here traditions**

*The map «Arshin Malchi travels the world» at the exhibition «Arshin Mal Alan: the era, the people, the characters» indicating the countries where the operetta was produced*



**of European classics and national melodies are combined.** In conjunction with an original, humorous story, this feature of the operetta led to the truly global success of «Arshin Mal Alan». Immediately after its brilliant premiere on 25 October 1913 in Baku, «Arshin Mal Alan» began a triumphal march through the stages of the South Caucasus, Russia, and then the whole world (2). Prophetic words were written by Uzeyir Hajibayov when he was still a student at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, in a letter to his friend, actor Huseyngulu Sarabski, on 30 July 1913: «On the one hand, I am studying here and on the other, I am writing 'Arshin Mal Alan'. It will be a wonderful operetta.

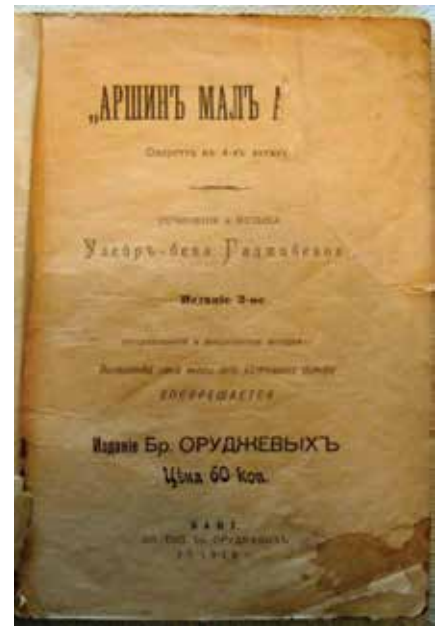
The aim of my work is the desire to put the theatrical business in the future in such a state so we can show performances not only in Baku and in the Caucasus, but in any other place and in every city. However, we must wait a little bit and work. When I was in Baku, I underestimated my work, but here I realized that my work will do a big job in the future.» (3) The director of the first production of the operetta was the prominent Azerbaijani actor and director Huseyn Arablinski. The operetta featured Huseyn Gulu Sarabski (Asgar), Ahmad Agdamski (Gulchohra), Alakbar Huseynzada (Soltan bay), Yeva Olenskaya (Asya), H. Huseynov (Vali), Gulsabah khanum (Jahan khala) - the backbone of the theater

«Troupe of Zulfugar and Uzeyir Hajibayov» (4). The operetta set a number of records in the history of Azerbaijani music culture, **for example, it was translated into nearly 80 languages and staged in 187 theaters in 76 countries around the world.** The operetta set an interesting record in 1915: in Tiflis the operetta was shown on 6 stages and in 6 languages at once on one theater evening: Georgian, Azerbaijani, Russian, Aysor, Hebrew and Armenian. Another «record» of the operetta is connected with Armenian plagiarists: from the moment the operetta was translated into the Armenian language, it was declared a «creation» of a dozen of Armenian figures like Magalyan,

Ghazaryan, Bektabekov and others hundreds of times (5). After learning about the attempts of the Armenian plagiarists to misappropriate his operettas, Hajibayov was forced to publish a newspaper advert in 1916, urging local activists in the Caucasus and Turkestan, Astrakhan and Azerbaijan to cooperate in order to preserve the rights of the creators of the operetta «Arshin Mal Alan». The prominent Azerbaijani composer Muslim Magomayev (grandfather of the world-famous singer Muslim Magomayev) wrote indignantly in Azerbaijan newspaper on 8 February 1919: «... in Vladikavkaz, 'Arshin Mal Alan' was shown on posters without the author's name - Uzeyir bay. One Armenian artist tried to prove to me that 'Arshin Mal Alan' was allegedly written by Armenians in ancient times... Isn't it time to put an end to this disgrace?!» «Arshin Mal Alan» was screened

several times. The most popular on the global scale was the screening of 1945 (USSR, Azerbaijan cinema studio) featuring Rashid Behbudov in the title role. **The film was dubbed into more than 80 languages and shown in more than 150 countries.** Speaking of the first production of «Arshin Mal Alan», one cannot but say a few words about the theater, where the premiere and subsequent performances took place. Thus, the

*The program of the operetta's production on 19 January 1919 in the State Theatre in Baku. NMHA*

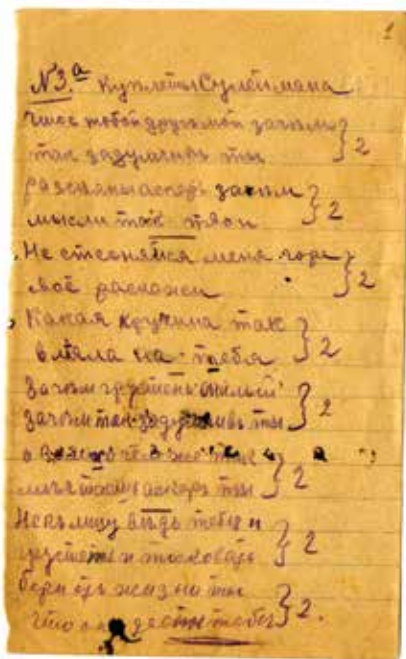


*Attempts of Armenian authors to present «Arshin Mal Alan» as their own work with big distortions forced Hajibayov to issue the libretto of the operetta as a book with the reference «Staging the play without the permission of the author is prohibited.» 1916. NMHA*



premiere of the operetta took place in Tagiyev's theater. **Not every city of the Russian empire and even Europe, not to mention the countries of the East, could boast of a special theater building. In Baku there was such a building since 1883** (6). The construction and opening of the first special theater in Baku is related to the name of the famous entrepreneur and philanthropist Haji Zeynalabdin Tagiyev. The draft of the building was prepared by architect Kognovitskiy, and the construction work, which was fully financed by Tagiyev, was

carried out by engineer F. Lemkul. The building of the theater immediately became a landmark in the city. The presence of a special theater building prompted professional theaters from the central provinces of Russia to visit Baku and accelerated the process of creating new national professional theater companies. In 1893, the theater was rebuilt due to the increasing demand. Initially, only men went to the theater, and only in 1906, were special boxes, draped in curtains, opened for women. It was here that Uzeyir Hajibayov's opera «Layla and Majnun» - the first opera in the Muslim world - was staged on 25 January 1908. In Soviet times, the building was also used as a theater; in 1922 – the 1960's as the building of the Azerbaijan State Drama Theater, and in 1960-1990's as the building of the



*The first version of the operetta. A page from the student notebook of U. Hajibayov. 1913, summer. National Museum of History of Azerbaijan*

*The stage of Haji Zeynalabdin Tagiyev's theater where the operetta premiered.*

*Photo of 1908. NMHA*



Azerbaijan State Musical Comedy Theater. In 1990, the dilapidated building was demolished due to the threat of collapse, but it was re-built later and **2013 saw the opening of the new building, and externally the building of the modern theater recreates the look of Tagiyev's musical comedy theater (7)**. As part of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the operetta, dozens of events are held in Azerbaijan and abroad, and new, original productions of the operetta are staged almost in all the districts of Azerbaijan. The anniversary activities involve the Azerbaijan State Museum of Musical Culture and the Azerbaijan State Museum of the History of Theater. The National Museum of History of Azerbaijan has a large collection of exhibits relating to the history of the operetta (8). From 12 March to 19 May, the exhibition «Arşin Mal Alan: the era, the people, the characters» was highly

successful (Director - Academician N. Valikhanli, author and curator - S. Ahmadov) with a demonstration of 230 exhibits on the history of the operetta, and most of the exhibits were displayed for the first time (9). The charge of love, optimism and love of life laid in the operetta «Arşin Mal Alan» by Uzeyir Hajibayov 100 years ago ensures its triumphal march around the world. This march is continuing! 🌟

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