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THE MOST MELODIOUS OF INSTRUMENTS — KAMANCHA



THE ANCIENT AZERBAIJANI STRINGED MUSICAL INSTRUMENT - THE KAMANCHA - HAS AN UNUSUALLY DELICATE, SOFT AND CAPTIVATING SOUND, AND ITS SOUNDS CHARM AND IMMERSE ONE IN THOUGHT. IT IS NO ACCIDENT THAT THE FOUNDER OF AZERBAIJANI PROFESSIONAL MUSIC, UZEYIR HAJIBAYOV, REGARDED THE KAMANCHA AS THE MOST MELODIOUS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

Under this name, the kamancha is known in the Caucasus, Iran and Afghanistan. In Egypt, a similar instrument is called "kamanga", in Turkey - "iklik", and in Central Asia - "gijak" ("gechak"). Interestingly, another stringed instrument is known in Turkey under the name of the "kamancha", and in Central Asia, the bow used to play the gijak is called "kamancha" or, as in Azerbaijan, "kaman". Thus, **the area where the kamancha is common includes Asia Minor, the Caucasus, the Middle East and Central Asia. Any attempt to link its origin to one people is clearly**

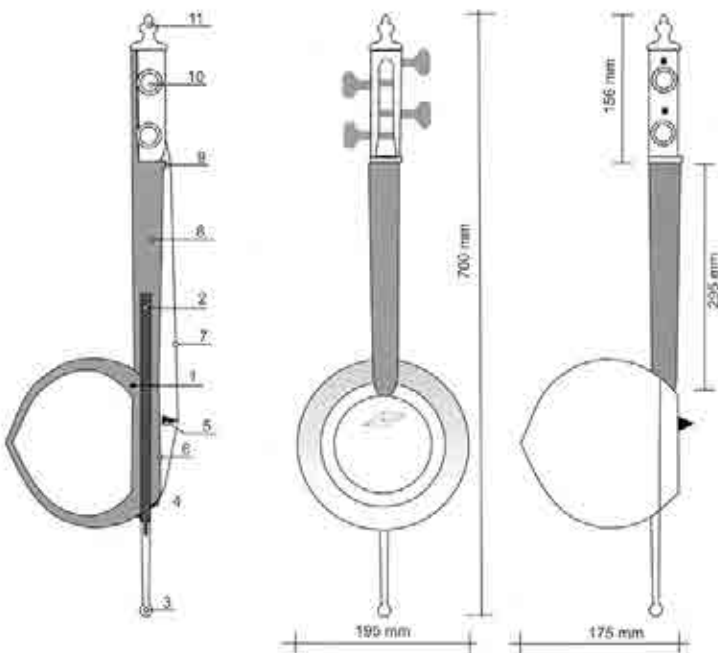
hopeless and unscientific.

The name of the instrument comes from the word "kaman", which means a string, and the ending "cha" is derived from "chal" (play), indicating that it is a bow instrument.

Researchers believe that bow instruments originated from stringed musical instruments played by plucking. A rod or a plectrum was used for playing them instead of the fingers, and its ends were pulled by animal or horsehair tendons like the string of a bow [1]. Experts tend to believe that stringed instruments have ancient Indian or Central Asian origins [2].



"Mugham", Togrul Narimanbayov



1-Body, 2-Pivot, 3-Stand, 4-String holder, 5-Big stand, 6-Back, 7-Strings, 8-Neck, 9-Small stand, 10-Pins, 11-Head



Renowned Azerbaijani kamancha player Habil Aliyev

The kamancha was originally one-stringed, had a relatively small body, a long neck and an elongated tip. The body was made from gourds, coconut shells or hollowed tree, and snake skin was pulled on the open side. Medieval literature suggests **the simultaneous existence of the kamancha and gijak, and when comparing, preference was usually given to the former** [3].

We know about the spread of the kamancha on the territory of Azerbaijan in the Middle Ages from the classics of poetry such as Khagani Shirvani, Nizami Ganjavi, Muhammad Fizuli and book miniatures of Azerbaijani artists, Aga Mirak, Mirsaid Ali and others. According to the prominent Azerbaijani musicologist, Abdulgadir Maragai (1353-1434/35), horse tail hair or silk thread, which ensured the best sound, were used for the manufacture of two strings of the instrument. The film of a bull's heart was pulled on the body. The strings were usually tuned to the fourth, but depending on the tune, other settings were also used.

The German naturalist, physician and traveler, Engelbert Kaempfer, who visited Azerbaijan in 1683-1684, put the kamancha in first place among stringed bowed instruments because of its beautiful tone. According to his description, the kamancha had three, sometimes four strings, which were played by a bow from horse tail hair. The lower part of the instrument - the iron tip at a length of half a palm – was placed on the ground. The round body of the kamancha had a diameter the size of a palm and was covered with a leather membrane, on which a leather “bridge” (i.e. support) was placed.

Before the beginning of the 20th century, a three-stringed kamancha was mainly used in Azerbaijan. The strings were made from sheep or cattle intestines. Although, according to museum collections, in this period there were also kamanchas with four, five and even six strings. There were also instruments on whose body skin was pulled from the lower side [4]. It should be noted that in the old copies of the kamancha, the tip is almost twice longer than in modern ones [5].

The main parts of today's kamancha are the body (chanag), which has a spherical shape slightly pointed towards the center, the round neck (gol), the curly head (kalla) with pegs (ashikh) and the straight metal rod. The total length of the instrument is 700-800 mm. The diameter of the open part of the body is 100-110 mm, the diameter of the circle is 180-220 mm and the height is up to 175 mm. It is made primarily of walnut. On the open part of the body (uz, parda), the skin of the chest of a large catfish or bovine bladder is pulled. An arched support (kharak) with a length of 50-60 mm and with

a height of 10-14 mm, made from walnut, is obliquely installed toward the strings on the sounding board closer to the neck. This arrangement of the support allows makes it possible to get stronger and better sound quality in both high and low registers. The neck with a smooth surface with a length of up to 450 mm and without modes tapers towards the bottom. The neck is made of horny plates.

For attaching the neck to the body, a metal rod with a length equal to half the total length of the kamancha is driven into the lower end of the neck, passing through the body. A pin – a support (shish) at a length of 110-120 mm, which slightly tapers toward the bottom and ends with a nodular thickening, is screwed on the tip of the rod that sticks out of the body. In the upper part, the neck turns into a slotted head in the form of a box with a shaped tip (taj). On the sides of the head, spherical or pyramidal pegs made of walnut are inserted into holes.

The kamancha has four steel strings (sim), of which the lower third and fourth ones are wrapped in copper and brass thread. In some cases, the second steel string is replaced by one made from veins to ensure softer sounding. The strings rest on a support located on the sounding board and on a bone threshold at the upper end of the neck. At one end, they are screwed on the pegs, and at the other, they are put on the hooks of the metal support fixed to the top of the strut in the form of hinges.

Sounds on the instrument are produced with a 550-590 mm-long bow (kaman), which is a straight or slightly concave cane (chubug) made of dogwood with a diam-



Well-known kamancha players

eter of 10 mm. By means of loose metal tubes in the form of cartridge cases, a lock of 160-180 horsehairs is pulled on the end. After playing, the tip is unscrewed and placed into a case or bag together with the instrument. The body (especially its upper part), neck, head and pegs are often decorated with inlaid mother of pearl, bone, copper wire and gold thread.

Most often, the performer plays in a seated position and holds the instrument vertically, placing its leg on his left knee. The lower part of the bow is slightly pinched between the thumb and forefinger of the right hand. The tension of the hair is adjusted by pressing the strap with the middle and ring fingers inserted between the shaft and the lock of hair. As a rule, the bow moves on the strings at the site corresponding to the middle of the distance between the lower end of the neck and the support. If you move the bow on the strings near the neck, very soft sounds are produced. The technique of moving the bow on the kamancha is different from playing the violin in that the performer rotates the instrument with his left

hand toward the plane of the movement of the bow.

The attempt to provide the kamancha with a sordino failed, and therefore, in order to mitigate the sound of strings, they use tightly rolled paper, fabric or rubber placed between the sounding board and the strings below the support. The instrument is played by four fingers of the left hand.

The strings of the instrument are adjusted in the range of the fourth and the fifth. But for solo and vocal-instrumental performances of mugams, the second, third and fourth strings are tuned according to the modal basis of the music performed, and the first one remains unchanged. **The kamancha has a range from la in the small octave to la in the third octave. While performing certain works, mi in the fourth octave is used.** The low, wheezing, matte register come out on the 4th and 3rd strings, medium (mild, clear, velvet) - on the 2nd and high (soft and silver ringing) - on the 1st. The most heavily sounding middle register has a clear tone – it is the most common one.

While playing the kamancha,





“The Mugham philosophy”, Matanat Aslanova



they normally use various combinations of bow and finger strokes, the alternation and interrelation of which are dictated by the content and emotional structure of the piece, and they are chosen by the performer in accordance with his skill and artistic taste.

The kamancha is the most “melodious” of Azerbaijani national musical instruments. For its melisma, flexibility, dynamics and nuances, the kamancha is not inferior even to the tar, and surpasses it in the cantilena. It is no accident that the many terms and epithets, reflecting different dynamic nuances in Azerbaijani folk performances, were developed pre-

cisely on the kamancha.

The masterly performance of a kamanchist is particularly evident in the instrumental solo performance of mugams (especially “Shushtar”, “Shur” and “Bayati-Shiraz”). This is where they use all the strokes and fingers inherent in the kamancha, as well as hidden two-voice polyphony and bourdon open strings. The proximity of its sound to the vocal line of the singer is especially felt in an ensemble of saz performers, when the kamanchist accompanies the tarist along with the singer. At times, as a performer on the leading instrument, he undertakes the function of the tar or begins to play the tune a bit later than the tar player.

In the episodes, the kamanchist often uses simulation, i.e. if the tarist imitates the singer, then the kamanchist imitates the tarist. In this case, something like a three-sound canonical imitation comes out. It is no accident that the kamancha is called "a companion of the tar". The music library of the Azerbaijan Broadcasting Company keeps a recording of the rhythmic mugam "Mansuriya" sung by the famous singer Jabbar Garyagdioglu to the accompaniment of the kamancha.

Apart from mugams, instrumental versions of folk songs, dances and plays occupy an important place in the repertoire of the kamancha.

From the second half of the last century, the kamancha, like the tar, became one of the leading instruments in the orchestras of folk instruments and various ensembles as a solo or accompanying instrument. The kamancha is also played in solo performances in pop music. During the performances of the people's artist of Azerbaijan, Habil Aliyev, he is successfully accompanied by balaban and gaval performers. It is largely thanks to this wonderful performer that the world learned not only about the beauty of Azerbaijani folk music, but also the unlimited possibilities of the instrument.

The kamancha plays an important role in the development of Azerbaijan's modern professional music. Based on the technical capabilities of the instrument, such famous works as concerts for the kamancha with a symphony (Zakir Bagirov, Haji Khanmammadov and Tofiq Bakikhanov) and chamber orchestra (Adviya Rahmatova), "Scherzo", "Tarantella" and "Dance Suite" (Suleyman Alasgarov), "Melodic Etudes" (Said Rustamov), a play for the ka-



mancha for the Orchestra of Folk Instruments (Nazim Guliyev) and a monologue for the kamancha and piano (Ramiz Zohrabov) were created. Undoubtedly, Azerbaijan composers will continue to please fans of music with new works written for

this wonderful musical instrument. References 1. Modr A. Musical Instruments. M., Muzgiz, 1959, p. 15.2. Bakhman B. Central Asian Sources on the Homeland of Stringed Instruments // Music of Asia and Africa, edition 2. M., Soviet Composer, 1973, p. 349-373.3. Maragali A. Music Instruments and Their Types // Gobustan, 1977, № 1, p. 77.4. Abdullayev S. Folk Musical Instruments of Azerbaijan. Baku, Elm, 2000, p. 79.5. Bakikhanov A. The Yellow String of Life, Baku, Ishig, 1985, p. 16. ❁



"The Mugham evening", Fakhtiyya Khalafova