

**irs** Great people



Jamil AMIROV

# SON OF THE EAST

AWARENESS OF THE IMPORTANCE AND ROLE OF THE ARTIST ALWAYS COMES WITH TIME, WHICH IS THE MOST PERFECT AND FAIR JUDGE ACCURATELY DETERMINING THE TRUE PLACE OF THE CREATOR IN HISTORY. TRUE ARTISTS ARE ALWAYS INNOVATORS, FOR IN THEIR WORK THEY "RUN" AHEAD OF TIME LIKE A CLOCK, THUS "EXPOSING" THE NEW LIMITLESS CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES OF MAN. AN INNOVATOR ARTIST SKILLFULLY OPERATES HIS "TIME MACHINE" AND PRESCIENT, TENDS TO "LOOK" INTO THE FUTURE.

I think all that has been said can be attributed with good reason to the person and work of composer Fikrat Amirov, whose musical fate was decided from birth. **His father, a skilled singer, composer, actor and director Mashadi Jamil Karbalai Mir Aslan oglu (1875-1928) and a virtuoso performer on Azerbaijani folk instruments – the tar, ud and kanon - was from Shusha, this conservatory of the Caucasus.** The capital of the Karabakh khanate, Shusha, has long been known throughout the South Caucasus as an inexhaustible source of national musical talents, giving the world a lot of outstanding musicians.

Mashadi Jamil, who showed musical talent at a very early age, was fond of the tar - this ancient Azerbaijani musical instrument simply fascinated him. Devoting himself to music, he started to perform at music gatherings – “Majlises” and soon gained fame as a virtuoso tar player and skilled singer. In 1907, Mashadi Jamil moved with his family to Ganja, where he also attended musical gatherings and celebrations with luminaries of folk songs, including the well-known singers **Hamid Mugabayli, Musa Shushinski, Asgar, Mashadi Mammad Far-**



*Nationwide leader Heydar Aliyev and his wife Zarifa Aliyeva attend the premiere of F. Amirov’s “1001 Nights” at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses, Moscow, 1983*

**zaliyev, Said Shushinski and Bulbul.**

On his initiative, the first musical band was organized in Ganja in the 1920’s and the first music school opened, where he gave lessons on the tar and basic music skills and led an orchestra of folk instruments. The long-awaited birth of his Fikrat in 1922 resulted in a bright musical celebration: Mashadi Jamil’s friends gathered and held a memorable evening.

Fikrat Amirov formed in such a creative environment where everyone and everything was governed by music, and it could not but contribute to the flourishing of the Musician’s innate talent. The apartment of Mashadi Jamil often hosted mugham evenings with the singer Said Shushinski and contests for the best singer and musician. In addition, his father often took him to numerous performances and musical evenings - all this gradually took root in his young memory, and when he lost his father at six, the decision to become a musician was firm. The composer admitted that *“intuitive attraction to creative work arose in me at an early age - I wanted to sing, play the tar like my father, perform the same complex musical passages and musical constructions - I closed my eyes and listened to my imaginary music ...”*

He entered the Ganja music school founded by his father and after graduating from it as a tar performer, he arrived in Baku in 1938



*Fikrat Amirov and Muslim Magomayev, Baku, 1980*

with a firm intention to become a composer. Here in the music college, **under the vigilant and, as he recalled with excitement, paternal control of a close friend of his father - the great Uzeyir Hajibayov**, he continued his musical education. A year later, he entered the Azerbaijan State Conservatory in the composition class of Professor B. Zeydman, and in his student years, he established himself as a brilliant and original composer, writing his first works - **piano variations, the song "Ulduz", the music to S. Vurgun's play "Khanlar" and the symphonic poem "Nizami"**.

But the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War forced him to stop his hobby: the Voronezh front, getting wounded, hospital and demobilization...

Returning to school in 1943, he wrote a number of works, including **two musicals - "Thieves of Hearts" and "Good News", a double concerto for the violin and piano and a concerto for the piano and the orchestra of folk instruments** (with A. Babayev). This was followed by **the string symphony "In Memory of Nizami"**, performed in Moscow (1947) at the celebrations dedicated to the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great Azerbaijani poet. The USSR State Orchestra under the leadership of Nikolay Anosov was fascinated by the originality and beauty of the symphony, which immediately drew attention to the author: he clearly showed the makings of a Master, who burst into Music with his distinctive musical language and with his huge world.

"I had the pleasure of conducting the premiere of the string symphony "In memory of Nizami". This composition is certainly an outstanding piece of work, deeply meaningful and expressive. It reveals a high



technical skill of the young author – a student of the Conservatory. I was captivated by the novelty and beauty of the composition: it showed through the makings of a master with his unique language and an immense inner world. It would be extremely interesting to get acquainted with its other, larger works."

Conductor N. Anosov (Russia)

The many years of the persistent creative search resulted in the **symphonic mughams "Shur" and "Kurd-Ovshari"** written in 1948 and awarded the Stalin Prize in 1949. They are, in a sense, one of the peaks of his original creative

work, brought the young composer international fame and became innovative in the field of 20<sup>th</sup> century symphonic music. These symphonic mughams were later clearly noted by musicologists as **Eastern Symphonism**, which the composer himself described as *"a method of symphonic composition in conjunction with techniques, musical material and traditions of Eastern cultures"*. They captivated with the perfect grasp of the vast possibilities of mugham. The works of the 26-year-old 4<sup>th</sup>-year student of the Conservatory stood out for their polished and complete nature, which is why



D. Kobalevskiy, T. Khrennikov, K. Dankevich, F. Amirov, D. Shostakovich, B. Yarustovskiy, USA, 1959

they quickly made their way into the creative "portfolio" of the great conductors of the century - Leopold Stokowski, Charles Munch, Hermann Abendroth, Heshmat Sanjari, Nikolay Anosov, Natan Rakhlin, Yuriy Svetlanov, Gennady Rozhdestvenskiy and Niyazi...

"I have been studying the art of Fikrat Amirov, one of my favorite contemporary composers, for many years. His symphonic mughams "Shur" and "Kurd-Ovshari" have profoundly impressed me and discovered a deep and vivid art of the East for me."

Music critic E. Stal (Denmark)

The composer recalled: "As I listened to and deeply studied mugham, it transpired that the dynamics of its intense and focused modal development bear comparison with the principle of symphonism. And translating it into the language of modern orchestra will not weaken, but rather thicken the stress, and the hard and impregnable canons of mugham are wise and flexible in the hands of someone who, having mastered them, subordinates their imagination to them. It also became clear that, despite the antiquity of origin, mugham is not archaic: it naturally "lies" on the symphonic score, thus confirming its unlimited possibilities."

Fikrat Amirov's unconventional approach to the source material - mugham - infected other composers, leading to the emergence of followers not only in Azerbaijan, but also in Central Asia and in the Middle East.

Another important step and the new peak of the composer's work was the **opera "Sevil"** written in 1953 based on a play by Jafar Jabbarli - the music struck with its melody, brightness of typical images and symphonic sounds of the orchestra. Firangiz Ahmadova (Sevil) and Rashid Behbudov (Balash) are still unsurpassed performers of the main roles in this opera. The idea of Eastern women's fight for their human and civil rights is still topical, and this contributed to the fact that the opera "Sevil" is still not leaving the scene of many theaters.

"I infinitely enjoy the opera "Sevil". It is beautiful music with a very interesting use of mughams and brilliant orchestration. The composition has left an indelible impression - his music is truly inspiring. Thanks to Fikrat Amirov, I began to study mugham and folk music of Azerbaijan."

Music critic E. Stal (Denmark)

Then, there are the **“Concerto for the Piano and Orchestra on Arab Themes” (with E. Nazirova), music for Huseyn Javid’s drama “Sheikh Sanan” and the elegy for the chamber orchestra “In Memory of Uzeyir Hajibayov”**. Continuing the line of “Oriental Symphonism”, the composer creates a number of amazing works, including the **suite “Azerbaijan”, “Azerbaijani Capriccio”, Symphonic Dances, Children’s Album for the Symphony Orchestra, Symphonic Portraits, “The Legend of Nasimi” for the Symphony Orchestra, “Azerbaijani Engravings”** and several others.

Already at this time, the composer shows an interest in the genre of choreography: the one-act **ballet “Shur”, the ballet and choreographic poem “The Legend of Nasimi”** written for the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great Azerbaijani poet and awarded the State Prize of the Azerbaijan SSR, and the **choreographic poem “Conquerors of the Caspian Sea”** dedicated to the heroic work of marine oil workers.

Oriental themes are a constant and rich spiritual food for the composer, and over the years, he became increasingly interested not only in the music of the East, but also in its poetry, literature, philosophy and architecture. He admitted: “The world of the East never lured me with exoticism - for me it is, above all, a world of the greatest spiritual values, monuments of architecture, a world of harmony, beauty and intelligence.” He visited many countries of the East, became acquainted with its musical culture, introducing the musicians and performers of these countries to the works of Azerbaijani classical and contemporary composers, gave lectures and acquainted people

with samples of Azerbaijani folk music. From trips to Eastern countries, the composer always returned with musical sketches written down on a napkin that happened to be within reach or a sheet of paper torn from a hotel notepad. All this became the basis for the composition **“Suite on Albanian Themes”, Concerto for the Piano and Orchestra on Arab Themes, and the symphonic mugham “Gulistan Bayati-Shiraz”**, which was dedicated to the great poets of the East - Hafiz and Sa’adi.

“My meetings with Azerbaijani music, of which I am a true fan, are always a holiday for me, but today I have a double joy. I was present at the birth of a new composition of my Azerbaijani friend, wonderful composer Fikrat Amirov. I am also happy that the first performance of a new symphonic mugham “Gulistan Bayati-Shiraz” was entrusted to me.”

Conductor G. Rozhdstvenskiy

The creative Everest, the crown of the persistent quest and the culmination of years of expeditions was the **ballet “1001 Nights”**, based on famous Arabian tales, which was

awarded the USSR State Prize in 1980. The ballet “1001 Nights” appeared as an original, beautiful and mosaic canvas, a true feast of music, choreography and painting, where colorful orchestration flowed into a powerful shaft in a single stream. Sounds, rhythms, movements, colors and paints - all this very truthfully reproduced the poetic spirit of the ancient tales of the East.

“Music is a universal and international language of culture, and a meeting with the magical and original music of Fikrat Amirov has enriched our inner world – the world of touch with the true art.”

Composer A. Fennish (Morocco)

A creative person is always keen on his vocation and burns himself with the all-absorbing fire of discoveries. Life made a complete revolution, and the Creator entered the territory of Eternity. The **ballet “Nizami”** (1984) ended his life and career sprint in Infinity. The image of the great compatriot - Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi always worried the composer, and there is something momentous and symbolic about

*Rehearsal of the symphonic mugham “Gulistan Bayati-Shiraz”.  
Fikrat Amirov, Tamara Bushuyeva and Gennadiy Rozhdstvenskiy,  
Moscow, 1971*





the fact that his first and last work is thematically and musically related to the image and creative work of the great poet of the East. With a string symphony, he burst into the world of music, and with the ballet "Nizami", he turned over the last page of life in the world of Magic. These works, like two points in a line, absorbed the deep, wise, rich, multi-faceted and high-minded world and the image of the great poet of the medieval East, Nizami Ganjavi.

Unfortunately, the sudden death at incomplete 62 prevented Fikrat Amirov from implementing his creative plans, of which he told in his last interview: *"In the near future, I plan to start a new work – a mugham concerto for the violin and orchestra. I want to use the modal system characteristic of Azerbaijani folk music in it. Its great connoisseur was the founder of the Azerbaijani professional school of composers and one of my favorite teachers, the great Uzeyir Hajibayov - I dedicate the mugham concerto to him*

*and hope to complete this work by the days when the 100th anniversary of the birth of the great artist will be solemnly celebrated at the suggestion of UNESCO..."*

It is totally clear that **the creative work of Fikrat Amirov proceeded under the strong influence of Western musical culture and the music of the East and Azerbaijani folklore.** In the works of the Master, everything bears the stamp of a powerful and original talent that thrills hearts in different parts of the world.

November 22, 2012, the people of Azerbaijan will celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Fikrat Amirov – a composer that left us a wonderful world of colors, feelings, experiences, discoveries, and endless love for his people and homeland. His rich musical heritage and personal archive require ordering in the form of an anthology of compositions, monographs, photo albums, etc.

In an interview, he admitted: *"I've always dreamed, and still dream, of*

*Azerbaijani music being performed in all corners of the world so that everyone is aware of it and it becomes the original visit card of the Azerbaijani people - in fact, a people is often judged by its music. And if I have been able to at least partially fulfill my dream - the dream of my life - I'm happy!"*

The composer often recalled with pleasure the words of his friend, a prominent Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet: "I admire the culture of Europe, but I am proud that I am a son of the East!"

I think that it is appropriate to recall the ancient legend about Antea, who was undefeated until he clung to Mother Earth. It is important for everyone, especially for a creative person.

Truly, the works of a real Artist live completely on their own after his death - this is the good fate of all the genuine works of Man, thus establishing the Creator in immortality and reflected in the hearts and memory of the grateful admirers of his Muse and Talent. ✨