

BALABAN – A WIND MUSICAL INSTRUMENT OF THE TURKIC WORLD



Musical instruments are an important indicator of the existence of close cultural ties between the peoples of our planet. These ties are primarily reflected in their titles or in their appearance. One of these tools is an ancient wind instrument of the Azerbaijani people - the balaban. The word "balaban" consists of two semantic syllables: "bala" (small) and "ban" (voice), signifying the low voice that matches the timbre of the instrument. The balaban is also known in different parts of Azerbaijan under the names of "Yasti Balaban" (because of the flattened cane), "mey", "balaman" and "duduk". It can be remembered that one of the lines of the epic "Dada Gorgud" mentions the word "duduk" as a musical instrument.

The body of the balaban, which has a flat hollow cylindrical shape, is made from one piece of apricot, walnut, pear and mulberry wood (preference is given to the apricot tree as it does not absorb moisture). The length of the finished barrel is 280-320 mm and the diameter - 20-22 mm. The upper end of the barrel is given

a spherical shape. Then, a sound channel with a diameter of 10 mm is drilled. To extract sounds, they usually open eight holes on the front side of the barrel and one - on the back.

The main difference between the balaban and other types of traditional Azerbaijani national wind instruments such as the "zurna", "ney", "tutak" and "tulum" is the presence of a reed at the bottom of the mouthpiece – a vibrating interrupter that causes the column of air in the channel to produce a sound. The length of the mouthpiece is 90-110 mm and width 20-25 mm in the upper flattened portion. While playing, this end is held between the lips of the performer, and the other round end is put on the trunk of the instrument from the thickened head. To adjust the pitch of the sound, a regulator shaped as a collar is put on the mouthpiece and moved up and down to change the pitch of the instrument. To prevent damage to the cane, a cap is put on it after playing.

While playing, the balaban is kept straight ahead

and slightly tilted, and air is blown into the cane. Pitch is changed by opening or closing holes with the fingers of both hands. The range of the instrument covers half an octave - from G in the low octave to C in the second octave. By changing the degree of compression with their lips, experienced performers produce the sounds D flat, D, E flat and E.

Balabans are played by both amateur musicians and professionals. In solo performances, two performers appear before the audience: one - "usta" (master) – performs a melody and the second one - "damkesh" (assistants) – supports him with a constant low sound of the same height. In this duo, membrane instruments are also often heard - "nagara", "gaval" and "gosha-nagara".

The balaban has great technical and artistic expressive features. Therefore, as the most versatile instrument, it is widely used in various orchestras, ensembles, as well as in solo performances during festivals and weddings. In orchestras of folk instruments, balabans comprise two groups, which in turn are divided into two parties. All kinds of balabans are used - small (jura), alto (solo), tenor (zil) and bass (bam), which differ between themselves with registers.

Solo performances of works of Azerbaijani composers

make a vivid impression on listeners: "The Second Fantasy" by Uzeyir Hajibayli, the suite "In the Fields of Azerbaijan" by Muslim Magomayev, "Sinfonietta" by Haji Khanmammadov, "The Dance Suite" by Khalil Jafarov and the poem "In Memory of the Unknown Soldier" by Ogtay Zulfigarov. These pieces skillfully use balabans in high and low registers, providing a pleasant nuance for the symphony orchestra.

In solo performances of the balaban, all kinds of genres of Azerbaijani music are heard - mugam (especially Shushtar), songs ("Sari Galin", "Apardi Sellar Sarani", "San galmaz oldun", "Dilberim") and dance tunes ("Heyvagulu", "Gochali", "Tarakama"). The performance of Uzeyir Hajibayli's romances "Sevgili Janan" and "Sansiz", Fikrat Amirov's "Gozalim Sansan", Said Rustamov's "Sanindir", Schubert's "Serenade", Cesar Cui "Orientale", Tchaikovsky's "Autumn Song", "The Song about Tbilisi" by R. Logidze makes a great impression on the audience.

The balaban is also included in many ashug ensembles. They use its small type with eight holes, which is tuned to the saz. Its cane is made of a thin reed, which is why it emits a higher sound.

The sound of the balaban is gentle, beautiful, sweet, velvety and soft, penetrating into the human soul. Such





sounding of the instrument is provided by a double reed that vibrates as the performer blows through it. In addition, with the circulation of air drawn into the mouth through the nose and on the contrary, it is possible to blow air into the barrel of the instrument continuously and thus convey the melody more fully and as the performer wishes. Such performance on wind instruments is characteristic only of the balaban

and zurna.

An instrument under the same name is common in Iran. The balaban is structurally similar to the Turkish mey. Unlike the Azerbaijani balaban, Lezgins insert a cylindrical reed tube with a single lanced reed into the upper end of the barrel of the balaban (known as "bumbuti" among Dargins, "lalu" among Avars and "ppelyuti" among Laks). In Kabarda-Balkaria (balaban or kamyI) and in Uzbekistan

and Tajikistan (balaban, bulaman, balabon), instruments of the same type are also provided with a single lanced reed. In the Turkmen "gamysh balaban", one end of the barrel is closed and a reed mouthpiece is inserted into the "agaj balaban".

In Armenia, an instrument of the same type is called a duduk and in Georgia – a duduki. Although it is widespread, the Georgian duduki is considered to be borrowed from Eastern countries and has been used since the 17th century (<http://www.hangebi.ge/rus/duduki.html>). In Armenia, they believe that the birthplace of this instrument is ancient Armenia (<http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Дудук>). The argument for this conclusion is the Latin name of the apricot tree *Armeniaca* (according to the conclusion of a prominent Russian botanist and academician, P. M. Zhukovskiy, this name is incorrect), which is used for making the barrel of the instrument. But despite this, China is unconditionally recognized as the birthplace of this tree in the world. We should also recall another important fact. As noted above, in a duo of balabanists, two people perform – the usta and the damkesh. These words have also been used in Georgia and Armenia. If in Georgia the concept of "usta" and "damkesh" are found nowadays in everyday life and published works, in books and websites in Armenia they avoid these terms, which have taken root in everyday life in Armenia, because they are "alien" for them.

Instruments related to the balaban are also common in China, Korea and Japan. In China guangji (guang) is considered an instrument borrowed from the Uighurs (<http://russian.china.org.cn/russian/275961.htm>), and in Korea, huanpiri and in Japan, hichikari (hichiriki) – from the Chinese (<http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Хитирики>), i.e. the birthplace of these instruments is the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China inhabited by one of the ancient peoples of the Turkic group.

All these facts indicate broader cultural ties between peoples inhabiting the vast area from Asia Minor to the Far East. So the Armenian duduk, which is recognized as a masterpiece of the World Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO, was invented in the area inhabited by Turks.

Given the technical possibilities of the instrument, Azerbaijani composers often include it in the scores of their major works. They have also written special music for this instrument. Among them are "Khayala Dalarkan" (Meditation) for the balaban accompanied by Suleyman Alasgarov's orchestra of folk instruments, the "Play" for four balabans by Aydin Azimov, a cycle of pieces for the tar-solo, balaban and kamancha "Colors of the Motherland"

by Hasan Adigozalzada, "Mugam and Dialogue" for the organ and the balaban by Rufat Ramazanov, "Yalli" for 10 instruments (8 balabans, tutak and gosha-nagara) by Jalal Abbasov.

It is encouraging that since 2003, the Azerbaijan State National Conservatoire has operated classes of wing instruments. It has set up a group of balabanists, which includes all types of the instrument. This group performs complex works written by classics of world musical culture.

The famous performer Alikhan Samadov has compiled a book called "Methodology of the Balaban" and released seven albums under the name "Balaban". Azerbaijani melodies performed by him are heard in films made at Hollywood and in European countries.

In Azerbaijan, there are many well-known virtuoso performers such as Hasan Aliyev, Ali Karimov, Shahali Ismayilov, Mehdi Nazarli, Hasan Bakhshali oglu, Museyib Abbasov, Hasrat Huseynov, Alish Gaytaranoglu, Shahmurad Tahirov, Izzatali Zulfugarov, Nasanpasha Rahmanov, Bahruz Zeynalov, Agasi Agasizada, Maharram Movsumov, Manaf Mammadov, Agasafa Seyidov, Alafsar Rahimov, Alakbar Asgarov, Hasan Maharramov, Alijavad Javadov, Ashraf Ashrafzada, Mubariz Atayev, etc. In recent years girls have shown interest in this instrument.

As we know, televised mugam contests conducted with the support of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation as part of the project of the Azerbaijani Culture Foundation have played a major role in its development and in identifying talented performers. Of course, holding a special competition of balaban performers will lead to its wider popularization among the growing generation of young performers. 🌸

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