Azerbaijani opera music, formed on the basis of folk music, folklore and traditional folk shows, has traveled a long path of evolution and given impetus to the development of a number of other musical genres. The history of Azerbaijani opera originates from the premiere of the play “Layla and Majnun” by Uzeyir Hajibayov held on 25 January 1908 in Baku’s Tagiyev Theater. Thus, Hajibayov became the founder of the opera genre in the Muslim East, opening a new page in the history of Azerbaijani musical culture. “Layla and Majnun” is the first example of an entirely new genre - mugam opera, created as a synthesis of Azerbaijani mugam art and European opera. Given the unwillingness of most of his contemporaries to study opera music, the Azerbaijani composer widely used elements of folk music in the work on the opera, paving a new path for the development of national musical theater.


A new stage in the development of opera art in Azerbaijan was the 1930s. In this period, there was
a question of studying complex forms of opera. An important role in this task was played by Reinhold Gliere's opera "Shah Sanam" in which the author made extensive use of Azerbaijani folk music and successfully synthesized them with traditions of Western European and Russian classical music. In general, this period is characterized by the emergence of new themes and trends in the musical language of Azerbaijani composers. It is during these years that Muslim Magomayev’s opera "Nargiz" (1935) - one of the first Soviet operas on revolutionary themes, and the recognized pearl of Azerbaijani classical opera "Koroglou" by Uzeyir Hajibayov (1937) were created.

In the opera 'Nargiz' dedicated to the 15th anniversary of Soviet rule in Azerbaijan, the author used all elements of the opera genre - aria, ensemble and chorus. With regard to "Koroglou" - the first Azerbaijani classical opera, in this work created on the basis of a national epic, the composer skillfully conveyed the subtleties of Azerbaijani folk music, making creative use of folk songs and dances, mugam and ashug melodies in his work. The opera "Koroglou", an immortal creation of Azerbaijani musical culture, was presented with great success during the 10 days of Azerbaijani culture and art in Moscow in 1938, and in 1940, it was awarded the Stalin Prize.

The Great Patriotic War stimulated the enrichment of the opera genre with new themes. In line with this trend, such works as "The anger of the people" (1941) by Afrasiab Badalbayli and Boris Zeydman, "Signal" by M.Krishtul and M.Vaynshteyn, "Homeland" (1945) by Gara Garayev and Jovdat Hajiyev were created. The heroic and patriotic opera "Homeland" (Libretto by I.Hidayatzadeh and M. Rahim) on the military theme is characterized by the musical style arioso. This work widely used not only folk songs and traditions of ashug performance, but also
mugam melodies. The military theme did not lose its significance in the postwar years either. Zeydman’s operas “The son of the regiment” (1952) and Badalbeyli’s “Willows Do not Cry” (1970) were dedicated to the themes of courage and heroism of the Soviet people in the Great Patriotic War, their patriotism, the valor of Azerbaijani soldiers, as well as the life of the home front.

In the same period, not only Azerbaijan but the entire Soviet Union widely celebrated the 800th anniversary of the great Azerbaijani poet and philosopher Nizami Ganjavi. On the topic of Nizami and his work, such significant works of the opera genre as “Khosrov and Shirin” by Niyazi (1942; libretto by M. Rafili) and “Nizami” by Badalbayli (1947; libretto by M. S. Ordubadi) were written and became iconic in the development of the lyric opera genre.

Such operas as “Azad” by Jahangir Jahangirov (1957), “Vagif” by Ramiz Mustafayev (1960), “Bahadur and Sona” by Suleyman Alasgarov (1961) and, of course, “Sevil” by Fikrat Amirov (1953; fifth edition - 1980) also come with new themes. Of these, the opera “Sevil” was the first
Poster of Azerbaijan’s first opera “Leyli and Majnun”. 1908
work of the lyrical psychological opera genre on the Azerbaijani stage. Among its main features are the rich melodic language, orchestration and purely folk music. Skillfully designing vocals for the opera, Fikrat Amirov skillfully used elements of Azerbaijani folk music. Since its creation, the opera “Sevil” has not left the stage. Today, it is staged in the last edition created in 2000 by composer Farhad Badalbayli.

At the end of the 1950s, J. Jahangirov’s opera “Azad” (libretto by H. Huseynzadeh), composed on the basis of M. Ibrahimov’s novel “The day will come” on the theme of the liberation struggle of the people of South Azerbaijan in the 1940s, was staged. Distinctive features of this opera are the bright melodic language and the skillful show of national colors.


It should be noted that after 1960, operas both on historical and contemporary themes were created in Azerbaijan. At the same time, the classical genre was addressed more often. In Ramiz Mustafayev’s opera “Vagif” (1960, libretto by F. Mehdijev) based on Samad Vurgun’s drama of the same name, the widespread use of folk music, which formed the tonal foundation of the work, draws attention. Suleyman Alasgarov’s opera “Bahadur and Sona” (1962, libretto by A. Badalbayli and Sh. Gurbanova), based on a novel of the same name by Nariman Narimanov, belongs to the lyrical psychological opera genre. Vasif Adigozalov’s opera “The Dead” (1963, libretto by A. Aslanov and F. Mehidijev), based on a comedy of the same name by Jalil Mammadguluzadeh, was the first work of the satirical opera genre in Azerbaijan. On the other hand, Zakir Bagirov’s opera “Aygun” (1972), based on a poem of the same name by Samad Vurgun, tells the story of life in the Soviet period.

Mammad Guliyev’s opera “Deceived Stars” (1977, libretto by V. Pashayev), based on a novel of the same name by Mirza Fatali Akhundov, uses a form of mixed performances in which there are elements of dramatic art and traditions of theatrical folk shows, but the content of the play is presented in symbolic terms.

By the end of the 20th century, new opera works appear in Azerbaijan. Among them is “Firuza” (1997) by Ismayil Hajibayov. It is known that the opera “Firuza” is the last work of this genre by the founder of Azerbaijani classical music Uzeyir Hajibayov. It was not completed, and only one aria from this opera survived. Work on this opera was completed by Ismayil Hajibayov, who himself wrote the libretto for it and composed music on its basis. Unfortunately, the opera “Firuza” has still not been staged.
Vasif Adigozalov’s opera “Natavan” (2003, libretto by N. Ibrahimov) was written for the 170th anniversary of the outstanding Azerbaijani poet Khurshidbanu Natavan. This work uses verses of Natavan herself and other Azerbaijani poets - Ruzgar Afandiyev, Qasim bay Zakir and members of Majlisi-uns, a famous literary circle of the 19th century. This opera has a topical content, and its dramaturgical line is related to the tragic events in the recent history of the Azerbaijani people - the Armenian occupation of Karabakh.

The latter include two works by Firangiz Alizadeh - the rock opera “Legend of the rider on a white horse” and “Anguish” (libretto by N. Pashayeva). Like in “Natavan”, the tragic Karabakh events occupy an important place in the opera “Anguish”. The basis of the storyline here is the confrontation between good and evil, and the outcome of the opera is tragic. This work extols the fight for the homeland and faith in eternal love.

Thus, the Karabakh theme with relevant images is taking shape in the modern opera art of Azerbaijan. The theme defines the genre features of opera works.

Azerbaijani opera has passed a number of stages in its development. At first, in 1908-1919, mugam operas and musical comedies were created, and in the 1920s and 1930s, there appeared operatic works of the classical type. The period from the 1940s and almost to the present day is characterized by the diversity of opera genres. The study of the more than 100 years of the history of Azerbaijani opera gives an idea about the main directions of the development of modern opera.

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