

HE WHO WROTE HIS NAME ON THE GOLDEN TABLETS OF ETERNAL ART...





He was born in the turbulent and horrific year of 1915, which became a harbinger of irreversible changes in the entire previous world order. Empires collapsed, disappearing into oblivion, epidemics swept over countries, mowing down people by the millions, two world wars swept the old world to its very foundations. Meanwhile this man was destined, having passed all the tests of strength, to sing of this contradictory world in different languages, delighting everyone with his timbre, charisma and unbridled love of life.

Rashid Majid oğlu Behbudov was born in the city of Tiflis of the Russian Empire (later - Tbilisi, Georgia) on December 14, 1915. He was the third child in the family of Firuza Vakilova and Majid Behbudali-oğlu. The mother of the future singer came from the noble Azerbaijani family of the Vakilovs, her father Abbasgulu was a general in the Russian army. Firuza khanum, a graduate of the St. Nino Girls' Gymnasium, spoke several European languages and was involved in teaching and educational activities. She was one of the initiators of the creation of a Muslim women's society in Tiflis. Rashid Behbudov's father Majid, a famous Karabakh khanende of that time, was from Shusha. He performed in Karabakh and Ganja, then moved to Tiflis, where he owned a small kelaghayi





(national Azerbaijani silk scarf) factory. In 1910, the Gramophone Company invited him to Riga to record his performance of folk songs, mughams and tesnifs. He was accompanied on the tar by outstanding master Mashadi Jamil Amirov himself, the father of Azerbaijan's national pride, composer Fikret Amirov. Incidentally, it is known that Majid Behbudov was known in musical circles not only as a virtuoso performer of mugham music, but also as a performer of songs in the languages of the peoples of the Caucasus. In addition, taking an active part in the development of the Azerbaijani opera theater, he performed in a number of mugham operettas created in the 1910s. This is evidenced by the posters and newspapers of the time. There is also information that Majid-bey went on tour to Iran as one of the soloists in the production of Mashadi Jamil Amirov's opera "Seyfal-Mulk". M. Behbudov lived most of his life in Tiflis, where he was well known as a khanende and remembered by mugham lovers for the amazing timbre of his voice.

Such facts from the biography of Rashid Behbudov's father help us understand how, in addition to a genetic predisposition to music, his upbringing was also influenced by the atmosphere in the family, in which art played a leading role. Perhaps this was the best and most correct formation of musical taste, which served as the tuning fork thanks to which the phenomenon of the singer's performing talent was formed later.

After finishing school, in 1933, young Rashid, at the insistence of his parents, became a student at the railway technical school. But even in such a seemingly distant place from musical art he initiated the creation of the student band "Teo-jazz". After being called up for military service upon receiving his diploma, the talented singer was appointed a soloist of the army band. After being discharged, Rashid joined the variety group of the city of Tbilisi, but not for long. Soon he continued his career at the Yerevan Philharmonic Hall, then began performing in the State Jazz Orchestra of Armenia under the direction of composer Artemy Ayvazyan. At the same time, he performed solo at the Alexander Spendiaryan Opera Theater. In 1939, he performed in Moscow for the first time – as part of "Days of Armenian Art".

During World War II, the musician's talent was in great demand - he and a group of other performers gave concerts on the Crimean front. Sometimes he had to sing without accompaniment, in dugouts, hastily knocked together barracks, field hospitals, and sometimes under fire and bombing.



Shortly before the end of the war, in 1944, Behbudov became a soloist of the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic Hall. A year before, Rashid's vocal abilities attracted the director of the film "Arshin Mal Alan" ("The Cloth Peddler"), Rza Tahmasib, who decided to involve the talented performer in one of the main roles – the merchant Asgar. The film turned out to be so colorful and filled with good music that it enjoyed success not only in the Soviet Union, but also far beyond its borders. The film, based on the operetta "Arshin Mal Alan" by Uzeyir Hajibayov, was so popular with millions of viewers it made not only the members of the film crew famous, but also promoted Azerbaijani art as a whole, becoming its visiting card. All the actors woke up famous and were showered with nationwide love and glory they could not even dream of.

"Arshin Mal Alan" is the first occasion in the history of Soviet cinema when deeply national art received such wide international acclaim. The film was dubbed into 86 languages, having been shown in almost 140 countries. In the USSR, 16 million viewers watched it in the first six weeks of distribution. The budget of the Azerbaijani and Russian versions was 5 million 807 thousand Soviet rubles, and in the first two years of distribution alone the film fetched the country 5 billion rubles in profit. In 1947 prices, this money was enough to purchase equipment abroad to launch a metallurgical plant. In addition, "Arshin Mal Alan" brought huge foreign exchange revenues to the Soviet budget for many years as a result of its distribution abroad. In Europe, the film was such a success that Soviet cinema became a reference point for the rapidly growing film schools of Poland, East Germany, Romania and Hungary. In China, "Arshin Mal Alan" fetched such huge profits that Mao Zedong ordered to film a local version of the Azerbaijani operetta, which was called "Love under the Blanket": the Chinese called the veil a blanket. Later, Georgian filmmakers talked about the enormous influence of the films "Arshin Mal Alan" and especially "If Not That One, Then This One" on the founders of the Georgian national film comedy.

Such success of the film was quite natural – the world had grown tired of the horrors of war and bloodshed. Here they saw a love story of two young people unfolding on the screen, in which, to the amazingly melodic and captivating music of Uzeyir Hajibayov and against the background of beautiful scenery and bright national costumes, the main characters show their love and ordeals, joke and play tricks on a gullible father who does not want to marry his daughter off to an imaginary







street cloth peddler. The film gave people that very lightness, beauty and confidence that everything in life must have a happy ending that was missing in their day-to-day reality.

This is how Azerbaijani poet Vladimir Gafarov recalled those times: “The end of that great war, which ended with the defeat of German fascism, was marked for us, Baku residents and all people of Azerbaijan, by two, albeit unequal, celebrations: the Victory salute and the release of the film “Arshin Mal Alan” – so cheerful, sparkling and truly festive. Of course, Asgar, played by young Rashid Behbudov, immediately became the idol of all the boys. Later, in my mature years, I was more than once delighted: what a unique constellation of performers this film brought together! It was a galaxy of luminaries! But back, a fourth-grader in Baku, I almost never saw anyone except for Asgar and Gulchohra.”

In 1946, Uzeyir Hajibayov, Rza Tahmasib, Rashid Behbudov, Leyla Javanshirova (Badirbayli), Alakpar Huseynzada, Munavar Kalantarli and Lutfali Abdullayev received the Stalin Prize for their participation in the cre-

ation of the film “Arshin Mal Alan”. Since then, phenomenal success and public recognition invariably accompanied Rashid Behbudov in his performances both at home and on numerous foreign stages. The geography of these concerts was so vast that it is simply impossible to list them in one article! From India and China to Iran, Afghanistan, East European countries, the states of Benelux, England, Germany, Finland, Africa and America. Once, on a tour of Latin America, he gave exactly 85 performances in three months! And at each of his concerts, Rashid Behbudov sang songs in the language of the country he was visiting. He scrupulously checked his pronunciation, delving into the meaning of words, carefully thought out mise-en-scènes in advance, scrutinizing them literally step by step. His exactingness towards himself was legendary among musicians.

Thanks to his work, he united countries and continents, always finding a way to the hearts of listeners, and it did not matter whether they were simple workers of factories and plants, diplomatic workers, shahs, presidents or kings. At one of the concerts, which took



place in Finland, the president of the country, having heard Rashid singing in Finnish, exclaimed: "You are a Finn!" In India, there was an even more paradoxical reaction of a certain rajah, who after the concert, in a fit of admiration and gratitude, presented the singer with a herd of elephants. In the same India, there was another illustrative situation: a night train was carrying a delegation of Soviet performers to a concert, when the lights in the carriage went out. Plisetskaya, Turgunbayeva,

Mikhaylov, Maslennikova, Behbudov and others were already getting ready to go to bed. Suddenly the train stopped. From the carriage, one could hear the vague hum of the crowd outside growing... The voices sounded more distinct, merging into a friendly chant: "Rashid Behbudov! Rashid Behbudov!" Residents of surrounding villages, having learned that Rashid Behbudov was coming, blocked the train's path. They wanted to see and hear the singer who had become their own thanks to the art of cinematography. And he sang to them – right from the steps of the carriage – Azerbaijani and Indian songs in Hindi...

He was greeted like that everywhere, from Latvia to China, from Moscow to Latin America. Winning over hearts, he brought home many awards. Everyone loved him. He had fans everywhere. Once, on tour in England, during a concert, a small incident occurred – the microphone went out. Rashid Behbudov did not lose his head and signaled to his musicians not to stop. His beautiful and strong voice could be heard even in the last row of the huge auditorium. The audience was delighted and gave him a standing ovation.

At one of his concerts in Finland, Rashid Behbudov met the outstanding Italian singer Beniamino Gigli. It was a landmark meeting in the full sense of the word, as the two exchanged professional secrets of vocal technique. Later, Gigli recalled with surprise and admiration that Rashid Be-





Behbudov, possessing a unique voice (high tenor-altino with a gentle and warm timbre of a wide range), could combine European vocal production with a guttural Eastern manner of singing, while masterfully combining grace and melismatics characteristic of mugham and Azerbaijani folk songs. Therefore, technically, he had access to a very wide range of works – from Neapolitan songs to Azerbaijani mughams.



Rashid Behbudov considered the Song Theater he had created in 1966 to be his main achievement and brainchild. This was the first such project in the USSR, which involved staging musicals, music videos, etc. The Song Theatre was to become a center, a kind of creative laboratory where the song would be given its due place. For Rashid Behbudov a song was always a living substance filled with the deepest meaning, requiring a very careful attitude towards itself. Here is what he himself said about the song: "I hold it in my hands like a precious stone, like a horn of old wine filled to the brim when I touch upon a folk song. My spirit is taken away by happiness, by the power contained in it, and delight is replaced by fear: not to break it, not to spill it, to bring it to people, every drop of it, to turn it so that the sun is reflected in each of its facets" ("Rashid Behbudov, People's Artist of the USSR" - "Bakinsky Rabochy" newspaper, November 1, 1961). In his theater, Behbudov himself drew sketches for concerts, came up with decorations and costumes, and wrote scripts. His brainchild is alive to this day and bears his name, but at that time the idea of creating a theater of song was far ahead of its time.

Music has a universal and unifying origin – it knows no boundaries or languages, it finds a way to the soul of every person. If, of course, it is performed by a person with extraordinary talent, who is also capable of sharing his soul from the stage, devoting himself entirely to serving the great Muse, who elevates us to the transcendental heights of immortal art. "Vita brevis, ars longa" - "Life is short, art is eternal", the famous Hippocrates once said. Life dedicated to serving eternal art is akin to communion with an immortal drink, ambrosia, which gives eternal life to the name of a selfless servant who has inscribed his name on its golden tablets. And one of these many happy names is Rashid Majid oglu Behbudov... ✨

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