

The Musical Art Of Azerbaijani Mugham: Historical Development And Contemporary Stages

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Abstract: This article explores the past and present state of mugham art — the national treasure of Azerbaijan. It provides an overview of the attention given to mugham today and examines the processes of its development.

Keywords: Mugham, heritage, scale, singer, performance, jazz, opera.

Introduction: The Azerbaijani people are known to us for their ancient yet youthful, unique culture and art. Priceless examples of the nation's musical heritage — including mugham, ashug art, and folk music — vividly reflect their cultural identity. In particular, the art and philosophy of mugham, its historical formation, developmental perspectives, and scholarly research have long been studied by musicologists. Unlike many musical genres of the world, mugham represents a limitless national-cultural phenomenon, as its relevance has not diminished to this day. Mugham, one of the classical genres of Azerbaijani folk music, is regarded and studied as a distinct heritage within Eastern musical culture.

Mugham is a genius musical narrative about spiritual existence. It is an eternal, primordial meaning of our cultural essence — a psychological and philosophical ocean shaping our aesthetic worldview. Its music constitutes an essential part of human spirituality.

Mugham is deeply rooted in the blood and soul of the Azerbaijani people. The love and respect shown for its performance traditions, as well as the high esteem in which mugham is held by the nation, are clear proof of its significance. As an important spiritual and cultural nourishment, mugham has also earned recognition among various ethnic groups living in Azerbaijan — such as the Talysh, Mountain Jews, Lezgins, Gurjins, Avars and others. The universality of mugham is astonishing: its melodic secrets, its expressive form, performance interpretation, and philosophical essence never fail to impress.

This heritage reflects the people's history, language,

religion, joys and sorrows, love and emotional experiences.

Mugham is the principal genre of classical (traditional) folk music among Eastern peoples. The word mugham derives from the term maqam used in Persian-Arabic-Turkic languages. In the context of string instruments, maqam refers to a scale or mode.

Every mugham contains a central, foundational tone known as mayə (base pitch). Mugham is not simply a tune or vocal line created by a composer — it is a unique art that imitates human spirituality and influences human psychology in diverse ways. When listening attentively to mughams composed on the poetic foundation of deep philosophical meaning, and contemplating the ghazals of Fuzuli, Nasimi, Seyid Azim Shirvani, Vahid and others, one enters a magical world where emotions are embodied through musical imagery.

The connection between the mugham melody and mugham was also expressed by the great philosopher-poet Nizami Ganjavi in his work *Iqbalnama*:

“Müganni, qədim bir hava çal, muğlar kimi bir muğan havasi çal.”

Meaning: “O singer, play an ancient melody — play the mugham tune as the mughams did.” In the scene depicting Alexander's meeting with the seven philosophers, the poet again refers to the mugham melody as an ancient tune, which confirms this idea. In the 20th century, the first scientific-practical monograph on mugham was written by Uzeyir Hajibeyov (1885–1948) — an eminent figure of Azerbaijani musical culture, composer, dramatist,

musicologist, journalist, and public figure. His monograph "The Principles of Azerbaijani Folk Music" (1944) became a cornerstone of 20th-century mugham studies.

In the historical overview of this book, Hajibeyov discusses Azerbaijani mughams, noting: "Two prominent Azerbaijani scholars and music theorists — Safi-ad-Din Abd al-Mu'min ibn Yusuf al-Urmawi (13th century) and Abd al-Qadir Maraghi (14th century) — occupy an important place in the theoretical and practical development Near Eastern music." Nawwab Mir Mohsun Hajji Seyid Ahmad oghlu Karabagi of Shusha also provided information on ancient Near Eastern music in his work "Vuzuh al-Arqam" ("Explanation of Musical Terms").

Many translated versions of these works assert that Near Eastern musical culture reached its peak in the 14th century, forming a system of twelve modes (maqams) and six auxiliary modes known as avazes.

The Twelve Principal Mughams:

1. Ushshaq
2. Nava
3. Busalik
4. Rast
5. Iraq
6. Isfahan
7. Zirafkand
8. Buzurk
9. Zangula
10. Rahavi
11. Husayni
12. Hijaz

Six Avazes:

1. Shahnaz
2. Maya
3. Selmak
4. Nowruz
5. Gardaniya
6. Guvash

Due to socio-economic and political changes at the end of the 14th century, this unique heritage suffered decline, and the names of many mughams underwent major transformations.

According to Hajibeyov, the only mugham preserved unchanged despite historical turmoil is "Rast," meaning "right" or "true." Ancient scholars called Rast "the mother of mughams." Its modal structure aligns with maqams across all Eastern cultures.

Today Azerbaijani folk music is based on seven main and three auxiliary mughams. The main mughams are Rast, Shur, Segah, Chahargah, Bayati-Shiraz, Shushtar, and Humayun; the auxiliary ones are Shahnaz, Sarenj, and Second Chahargah.

Hajibeyov described their emotional qualities as follows:

Rast — courage and joy

Shur — cheerful, lyrical mood

Segah — love and affection

Shushtar — deep sorrow

Chahargah — excitement and passion

Bayati-Shiraz — sadness

Humayun — profound grief

Azerbaijan has produced many prominent mugham performers. Among the masters of the early 20th century were Jabbar Garyagdioghlu, Mashadi Jamil Amirov, Seyid Shushinski, Kechachioghlu Muhammad, Mashadi Mammad Farzaliyev, Islam Abdullayev and others. Today, notable mugham performers include Alim Gasimov, Mansum Ibrahimov, Ilkin Ahmadov, Zabit Nabizade, Babek Niftaliev, Nazakat Teymurova, Aygun Bayramova and others.

By the 20th century, Azerbaijani mugham maintained its classical form while also serving as a source for new musical genres such as mugham-opera, mugham-jazz, symphonic mugham, and mugham-poetry. Uzeyir Hajibeyov pioneered the mugham-opera genre with "Leyli and Majnun" (1908), followed by "Sheikh Sanan" (1909), "Rustam and Sohrab" (1910), "Shah Abbas and Khurshidbanu" (1912), "Asli and Karam" (1912), and "Harun and Leyla" (1915). The musical comedy "Arshin Mal Alan" (1912) also exemplifies this synthesis. Regarding "Leyli and Majnun," the composer stated: "I intended to use mughams — the classical samples of folk creativity — as musical material. My task was to express the dramatic development of events through the poetic content of Fuzuli's work using the rich mugham melodies." Later composers continued this tradition:

Z. Hajibeyov's "Ashig Garib" (1916), M. Magomayev's "Shah Ismayil" (1916), and, in the second half of the 20th century, operas by Sh. Akhundova, J. Jahangirov, R. Mustafayev, and V. Adigozalov.

The symphonic mugham genre was founded by Fikrat Amirov in 1948, building on the foundations laid by Hajibeyov's mugham-operas. Amirov's works "Kurd-Ovshari," "Gulistan Bayati-Shiraz," and "Shur," as well as symphonic mughams by Niyazi, S. Alekserov, T. Bakikhanov, V. Adigozalov, and E. Mansurov, greatly enriched this field.

The mugham-poetry genre is reflected in the works of Abbas Sahhat, Abbasgulu Agha Bakikhanov, Bakhtiyar Vahabzade, Aliahgha Vahid and others.

Mugham-jazz, created by blending Azerbaijani mugham with classical American jazz, is a new direction within world music. Vagif Mustafazade's mugham-jazz compositions — such as his "Mugham" Symphony, "Mugham" composition, and "Bayati-Shiraz" — hold a distinguished place in global music culture. Today his traditions are continued by S. Qambarov, R. Sultanov, A. Mustafazade, Sh. Novrasli and others.

In the 20th century, mugham began to be recorded using modern equipment — gramophone records, vinyl, and later CDs, VCDs and DVDs.

The Azerbaijan State Sound Archive and the Azerbaijan Museum of Musical Culture hold extensive catalogs of early mugham recordings. Many have been restored by the "Musigi Dunyasi" journal and made available through the "Azerbaijan Discography" website, covering recordings from 1900–1940.

The earliest gramophone recordings of mugham singers date back to 1906. From 1906 to 1916, companies such as Gramophone, Pathe, Sport-Record, Extraphone, and the Nagin Factory recorded the voices of famous mugham performers.

The Heydar Aliyev Foundation published collections such as "Karabakh Singers," "Mugham Encyclopedia," "Azerbaijani Singers," and "Azerbaijani Mugham" in CD and DVD formats. Online resources like "Azerbaijan Discography" and the "Mugham Encyclopedia" also play an important role.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the historical formation of Azerbaijani mughams developed within the framework of the "Twelve Mugham" system, and their roots are reflected in the works of Urmavi, Maraghi, and Nizami. The scientific study, documentation, and recording of mugham were intensively carried out in the 20th century, largely thanks to Uzeyir Hajibeyov, who laid the foundation of modern mugham scholarship.

The creation of mugham-operas, symphonic mughams, mugham-poetry, and mugham-jazz demonstrates the high respect for national music and its ability to evolve through synthesis with other genres. We believe that future researchers will continue expanding the scientific study of mugham, maqam, and related musical traditions.

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