



Culture of Azerbaijan

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**HEYDAR ALIYEV
FOUNDATION**

M.F.Axundov adına
Azərbaycan Milli



Located at the very cross-section of East and West, Azerbaijan played a very important role in the emergence and the development of the world culture, being one of the oldest hotbeds of human civilization. Numerous archaeological sites and architectural landmarks, ancient tombs, rock carvings, manuscripts, abundant musical legacy, with fascinating mugham as its pearl, unique carpet designs passing over the message of the storied past, and multiple samples of tangible and intangible cultural heritage nowadays adorning the world's leading museums constitute an impressive contribution of this nation to the world's cultural treasure.

Azerbaijan was the home to the Orient's first secular theatre, opera, ballet and the Academy of Sciences.

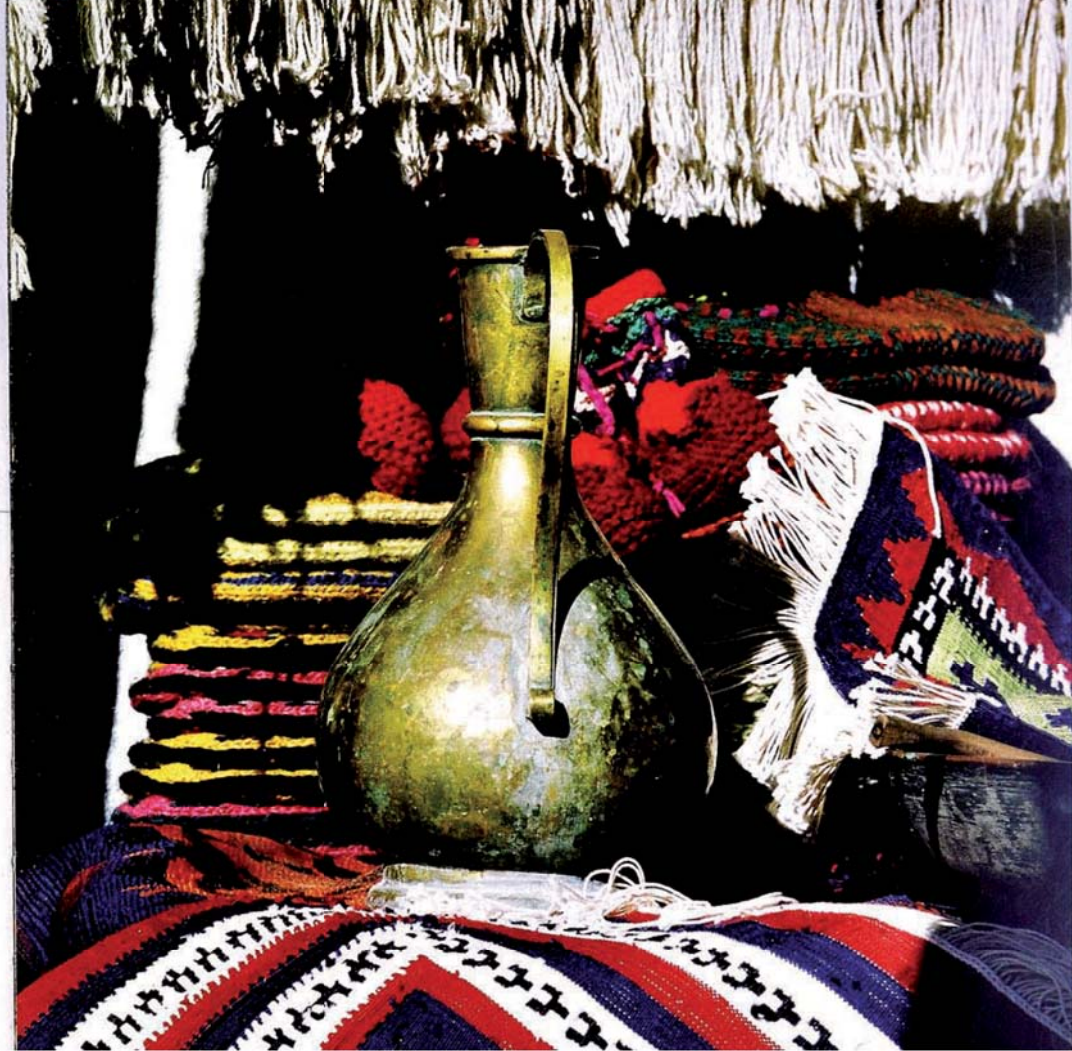
Taffeta (gulebetin and takalduz embroideries).
XIX century, Sheki. The National History Museum
of Azerbaijan, Inv. № 9586.

Abundant nature, favorable climatic conditions and affluent resources had a very positive impact on the artistic traditions and creative works of the Azerbaijani people. That being said, each specific art typical of the country had undergone a lengthy and oftentimes complex development path. Yet, the nation's artistic legacy creates a deep and comprehensive idea of Azerbaijan's culture.

Popular types of handicraft, closely interrelated with the day-to-day life of the Azerbaijani people, have a special place in the nation's creative legacy. With its centuries-old history from times immemorial to this very day, the popular handicraft encompasses a very broad area of trades and crafts, ranging from national costume to various decorative ornaments and household inventory.

Samples of handicraft works.

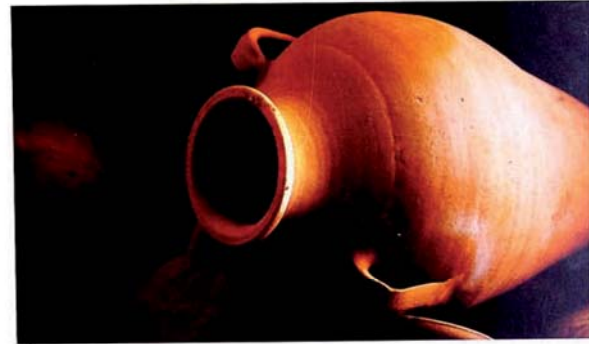
Kelaghai, a women's shawl made of silk.





Aragchyn, traditional
Azerbaijani headwear.

Shebeke. Intricate wooden frames adorning windows and façades were something that made the Azerbaijani wood-carvers famous throughout the world. Pieces of shebeke are linked together with no nails or adhesive materials.



Earthenware.

Rock carvings and portrayals are of an extremely high importance among the most ancient works of figurative art found in various parts of Azerbaijan, such as Gobustan (with petroglyphs ranging from the Paleolithic period to the Middle Ages), Ayichyngyly and Perichyngyl mountains around Zalha lake, Kalbajar District (early Bronze Age, the 3 millennium B.C.), as well as in Gemigaya mountains to the north of the town of Ordubad.

In Gobustan, the area stretching from in the south-eastern slopes of the Greater Caucasus mountain range to the coast of the Caspian Sea, boasts of the traces from all Paleolithic periods to the Middle Ages. The ancient petroglyphs (rock carvings) found here are of an extremely high archaeological and historic value since they shed the light on the life, views and activities of primeval human societies. More than 6000 petroglyphs were found carved into the rocks of Gobustan, depicting hunting scenes, fishing, day-to-day life, group dances, various symbols, constellations, celestial bodies, etc.

In 2007, the Gobustan State Historic and Architectural Reserve was included in UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage List.

Rock carvings in Gobustan.





Novruz, the spring holiday has a special place in the system of spiritual values still cherished by the Azerbaijani people. This is one of the oldest popular festivities celebrated in connection with nature's revival and arrival of spring. Various events are held during the festivities including baking pastry, cultivating seeds as the symbol of Novruz. Making flames turns the whole festivity into quite a spectacular show. Fires are built as a farewell with winter and a sign of welcoming spring.

In 2009 Novruz was included in UNESCO's world intangible cultural heritage list, whereas on February 23, 2010, during the 64th Session of the UN General Assembly, March 21 was announced 'the International Day of Novruz'.

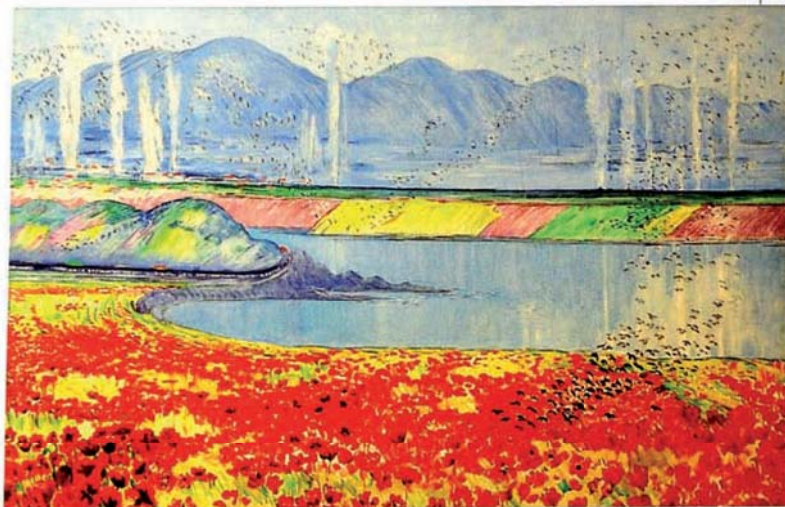
Khoncha (a tray with festive treats), offered during Novruz.



The Geychay Orchards, 1956,
canvas by T. Narimanbeyov.
The R. Mustafayev Azerbaijan State
Museum of Fine Arts.

The Museum of Modern Art, 2009, Baku.
Design, installation and art concept
by A. Sadykh-zadeh.

The Earth's Dream, 1963,
canvas by S. Bahlulzadeh.
The R. Mustafayev
Azerbaijan State Museum of
Fine Arts.



The Azerbaijani painting traditions, with their roots going back to the very ancient periods, have a very peculiar origin indeed. Rock carvings constitute the oldest form of local painting. Rich traditions of monumental painting may be traced in murals of the Sardar Palace in Iravan, the Royal Palace in Sheki, and a number of residential premises in Shusha. The most outstanding representatives of the Azerbaijani painting school include M. M. Navvab, A. Azimzadeh, B. Kengerli, A. Husseynzadeh, S. Bahlulzadeh, T. Narimanbeyov, B. Mirzazadeh, M. Abdullayev, T. Salahov, etc.



In 2009, following the initiative of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, the Museum of Modern Art was established in Baku. The Museum boasts of the best canvases and sculptures representing the Azerbaijani avant-garde art from the second half of the XX century to this day. The Museum's collection includes more than 800 works by the Azerbaijani avant-garde artists and sculptors, both the beginners and the renown ones.



The most remarkable works of Azerbaijani sculpture include F. Abdurahmanov's monuments to N. Ganjavi (Ganja and Baku, 1949), the Liberated Woman's Statue (Baku, 1960), monuments to S. Vurghun (Baku, 1961), and the Hero of Soviet Union M. Huseynzadeh (1973, Baku), J. Garyagdy's monuments to M. A. Sabir (Baku, 1958) and N. Narimanov (Baku, 1972), O. Eldarov's and T. Mammadov's monument to M. Fuzuli (Baku, 1962), T. Mammadov's memorials to U. Hajibeyli (Baku, 1962) and Nasimi (Baku, 1972) and O. Eldarov's monuments to K. Natavan (Baku, 1960), H. Zardabi (Baku, 1973), M. Magomayev (Baku, 1987) and H. Javid (Baku, 1993), as well as the bust of Azerbaijan's National Leader Heydar Aliyev (Nakhchivan, 1983), H. Aliyev's tombstone monument (Baku, 2004), and the Elegy composition commemorating Academician Z. Aliyeva (Baku, 1989).

Monument to Nizami Ganjavi, an outstanding Azerbaijani poet and intellectual. 1949, Baku, by F. Abdurahmanov.



Bust of Natavan, a recognized Azerbaijani poetess. 1954, by Omar Eldarov. The R. Mustafayev Azerbaijan State Museum of Fine Arts.



The Mardakan Castle, erected by
Abdulmejid Masud oghlu, 1232.

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The Momine Khatun Mausoleum.
1186, Nakhchyvan.



The Azerbaijani figurative art is closely interrelated with architecture. The most remarkable architectural landmarks include the Maiden Tower and the royal Palace of the Shirvanshah in Baku, both included in UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage List, as well as Mausoleums of Momine Khatun and Youssif ibn Kuseyir in Nakhchyvan designed by Ajami, the Palace of Panakhali-Khan in Shusha, the Natavan Residence and the Royal Palace in Sheki.

The Circular Temple, one of the
early Christian landmarks dating to
the times of the Caucasian
Albania, Sheki.



M.F.Axundov adına
Azərbaycan Milli
Kitabxanası

Decorative and applied arts have deeply-rooted traditions in Azerbaijan. Craftsmanship skills and gift of the Azerbaijani artisans may be traced in the works of jewelry works, stone masonry, weaving, embroidery and carpet production. The age of handicraft works found in Nakhchivan, Mingechevir, Gedabey, Gazakh, Ganja and other places is estimated by thousands years. Utensils, arms and embellishments discovered in these areas are not only important as historic facts, but provide a valuable source of information regarding the local traditions of craftsmanship.



Powder flask (adorned with shebeke and carved ornaments). XIX century.
The National History Museum of
Azerbaijan, Inv. № 229





Dagger (adorned with silver, gold,
diamond, emerald and ruby).
The Azerbaijan National Museum of
History, Inv. № 2



Gilded silver belt. XIX century, Guba.
The National History Museum of
Azerbaijan, Inv. № 293





The most remarkable examples of metal works include the Ganja Gate (manufactured by Osman Ibrahimoghlu, 1063), a silver pitcher (crafted by Osman Nakhchivani, 1190, the Louvre, Paris) a bronze cattle (crafted by Abdulaziz Shafiaddin oghlu Tabrizi, 1399), and Khoja Ahmad Yasavi Masoleum (the Republic of Kazakhstan).

In 2008, the famous Ganja Gate made by Osman Ibrahimoghly, the blacksmith, in 1063 was thoroughly restored to its original shape following the Heydar Aliyev Foundation's initiative. Adorned with national ornaments, it was re-installed at the entrance to the town of Ganja. The Gate was removed by foreign invaders after a devastating earthquake of 1139.

The Ganja Gate, restored to its original beauty in 2008.

Carpet weaving has traditionally been among the most prevalent forms of decorative and applied arts in Azerbaijan. Archaeological excavations and written sources provide sufficient evidence of local carpet production dating back to the period of Bronze Age (late II – early I millennia B.C.). Deeply-rooted traditions of carpet production were reported by a number of ancient historians like Herodotus, Cladius Elian, Xenophon and others.

The Carpet Museum. Khachmaz.

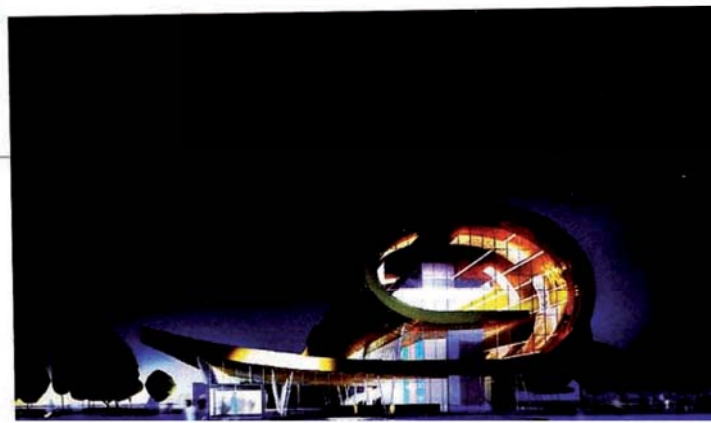


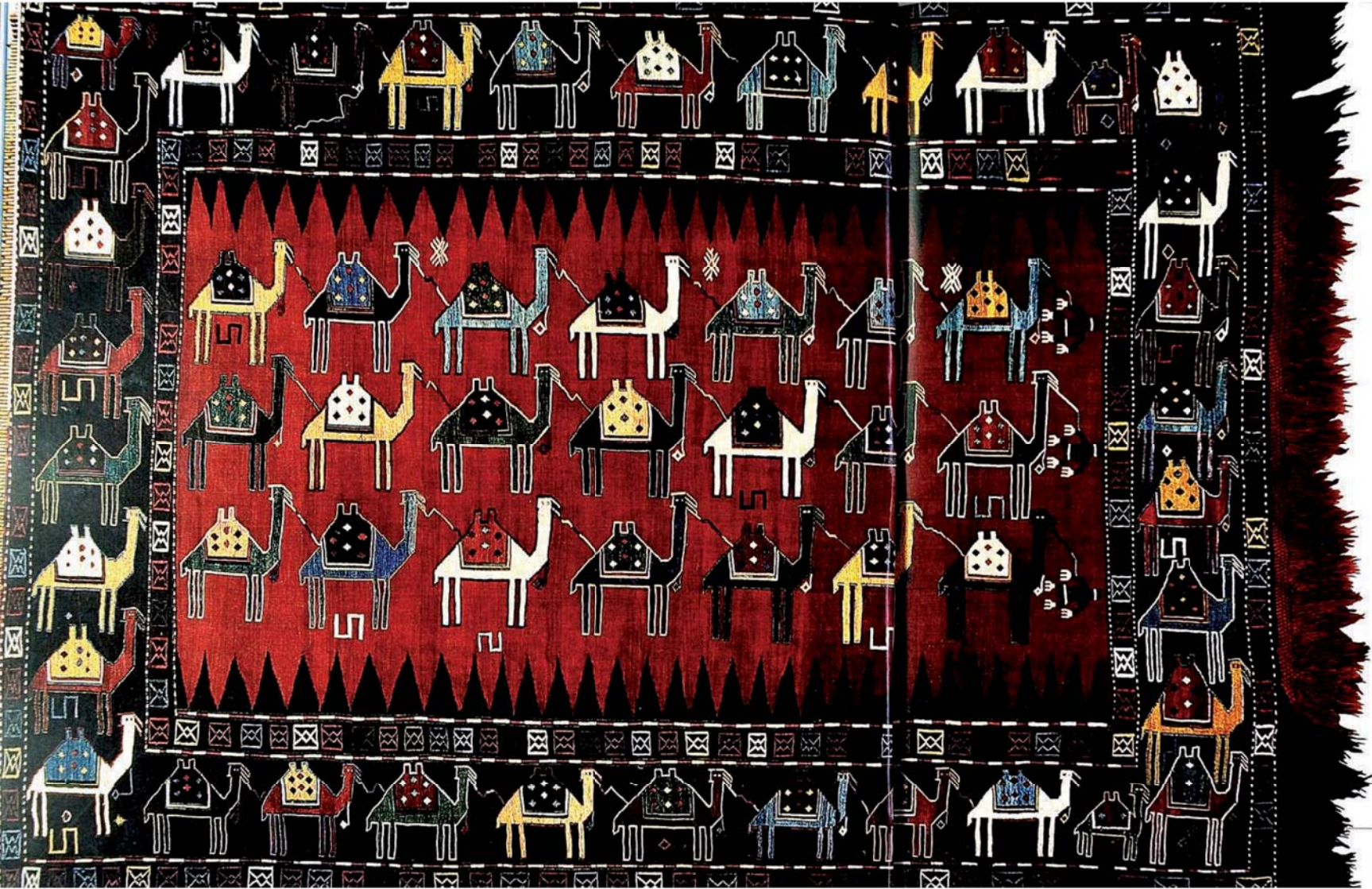
The State Museum of Azerbaijani Carpet, Popular and Applied Arts, founded in 1967, is the first influential institution of its kind specialized in carpet art and boasting of the richest collection of valuable carpets. Following the incentive of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, and with UNESCO's support, a new building for the Azerbaijan State Carpet and Folk Applied Arts Museum was recently erected in Baku.

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The Azerbaijan State Carpet and Folk Applied Arts Museum.





'Shadda' carpet. Nakhchivan, Azerbaijan.
Late XIX century. The Latif Karimov
Azerbaijan State Carpet and Folk
Applied Arts Museum.



The Land of Fire, the homeland of the Azerbaijani people known for its rich cultural legacy, is in the meantime the hotbed of a truly fascinating music.

Portrayal of people performing yally, a traditional round dance, is of a particular interest among the Gobustan rock carvings. This is another evidence of the passion towards music cherished by the Azerbaijani people since times immemorial.

Among the oldest music-related finds, there is a stone-carved tambourine (gavaldash) discovered in Gobustan and the musical instrument reminiscent of balaban, a traditional local wind instrument. Some rocks in Gobustan stand out by their physical composition and geological structure. A piece of rock producing a melodic sound similar to that of a musical instrument is a clear example of this, hence the stone was named gavaldash, i.e. 'tambourine stone'. Musical instruments like kamancha, gopuz, lute, chang, santur, canon, sheypur, various types of drums (naghara), timbal, def, dumbek and others were widely popular in Azerbaijan since the Middle Ages.

Rich information regarding medieval musical events, genre and instruments may be found in Dede Gorgud epic story (VII century), as well as literary works by Nizami, Khagani and Fuzuli.

Folk songs, dances and the ashlyq (minstrel) legacy have a special place in Azerbaijan's national musical art. In 2003, mugham, viewed as the cornerstone of the Azerbaijani national musical legacy, was included in the List of the World Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage Masterpieces, whereas in 2009 the ashlyq art was included in UNESCO's List of the World Intangible Cultural Heritage.

With the purpose of wide propaganda of the Azerbaijani mugham, the International Mugham Center was erected in 2008 in Baku. By its shape, the building resembles part of the tar, a musical instrument having a leading place in performance of mugham.



The International Mugham Center. 2008, Baku.

The International Mugham Center. 2008, Baku.



The International Mugham Center. 2008, Baku.



The XX century presented a new phase in the history of the Azerbaijani music. It was exactly the time when the composer school featuring high professional standards, unique vision and peculiar style appeared in the country. Works by U. Hajibeyli, M. Magomayev, Z. Hajibeyov, A. Zeynally, A. Badalbeyli, Q. Qarayev, F. Amirov, Niyazi, S. Hajibeyov and others made the music of Azerbaijan recognized throughout the world.

Leyli & Majnun opera by Uzeyir Hajibeyli in 1908 laid the foundation of the opera art all over the Muslim world, whereas Afrasiyab Badalbeyli's Qyz Qalasy (The Maiden Tower) appeared as the first ballet performance in the Orient in 1940.

Playbill of Leyli & Majnun, 1908.

* A piece from Leyli & Majnun opera
by U. Hajibeyli, 1958.



Город

БАКУ

ПРОГРАММА

В субботу 12 января
оперными артистами театральной секции общества «Меджит»
под наблюдением авторов и при участии любителей
представлена будет
в первый раз на мусульманской сцене.

ОПЕРА

Лейли и Меджнун

переланная из поэмы Физули
и положенная на музыку
братьями Гаджибековыми.

При полных обстановках
и новых костюмах,
сшитых специально
для этой пьесы.

Режиссер — Дряблинский

Газета "Каспия", январь 1908 г.

ЦЕНЫ МЕСТАМ БЕНЕФИСНЫ.

Для дам-мусульманок
имеются закрытые ложи.



The Azerbaijan State Academic Opera
and Ballet Theatre. 1910-1911, Baku.
Design by N. Bayev.

A ballet scene.





A ballet scene 'Intizar'
(Expectation), 2010.



The U. Hajibeyli Baku Music
Academy, 1885.



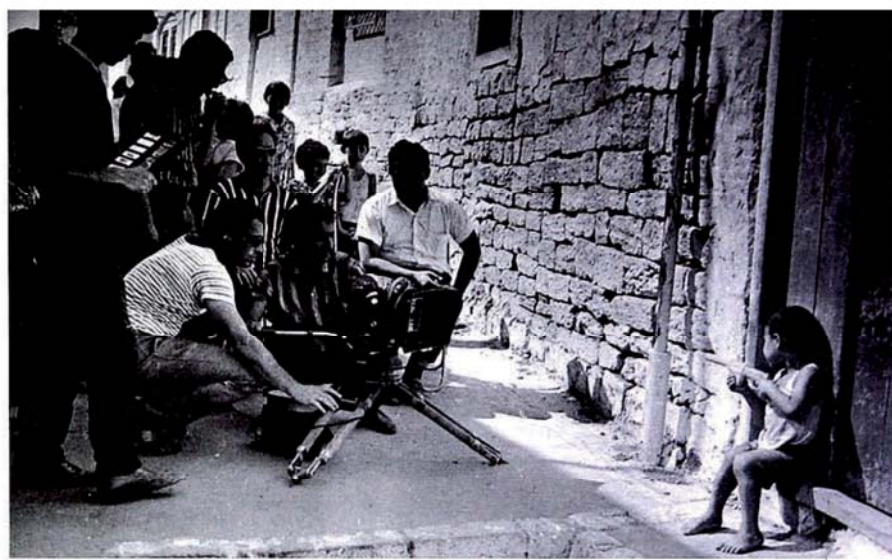
Since times immemorial, the national music was developing hand in hand with literature. Avesta, reportedly written by Zardusht (Zaratustra) in the first half of the VII century B.C., is viewed as one of the oldest written works not only of the Azerbaijani people, but the whole of the Near East. Avesta reflects the most important aspects of mythological visions of the Azerbaijani people with its tangible contribution to the treasury of the world's culture. That being said, the epic story of Kitabi Dede Qorqud with the history of 1300 years is by far the most ancient and remarkable piece of the Azerbaijani folk art preserved in a written form to this very day.

The works of Azerbaijani classic and modern writers have got their due place in the depository of the world literature. Literary legacy of N. Ganjavi, I. Nasimi, M. Fuzuli, S. I. Khatai, M. P. Vagif, M. V. Vidadi, M. F. Akhundzadeh, N. Vezirov, M. S. Ordubadi, G. Zakir, M. A. Sabir sound very modern and topical even today.

The Nizami Ganjavi National
Museum of Literature.
1940, Baku.

Dramatic art is closely related to literature. Certain performance elements in various ceremonies, rituals and games were instrumental in the formation of an independent popular theatre. The popular theatre in Azerbaijan has always been very realistic in its nature and maintained close ties with the mass.

The history of professional dramatic art in Azerbaijan starts with The Vizier of Lankaran Khanate and Hajji Qara performances by M. F. Akhundzadeh staged in 1873 in Baku. The repertoire of the Azerbaijani theatre, with its very complex background, increased significantly in later periods. At the moment, a broad variety of works of various dramatists, both local and internationally renown, classic and modern, are staged in the country's multiple theatres.



The Azerbaijan State Academic National Drama Theatre. 1960, Baku. Design by G. Alizadeh and M. Madatov.

Filming Once in a Southern City, 1969.

The history of cinema art in Azerbaijan starts in 1898. The first local cinema works took shape of chronicles, such as Fire at the Oil Gusher in Bibi-Heybat, The Oil Fountain in Balakhany, Festivities in the City Park, the Caucasian Dance, and a short motion picture Caught Red-Handed. In 1916, the first Azerbaijani movie In the Kingdom of Oil and Millions was shot based on the novel with the same name. Arshin Mal Alan (Cloth Peddler), the first Azerbaijani comedy based on U. Hajibeyli's famous operetta was filmed at the same time. The national cinema was getting ever more mature as the time passed by. A number of serious works portraying people's life and the problems they faced were created in various genre of cinema art.

Located on the brink of East and West, Azerbaijan has always contributed a lot to the development of the intercultural dialogue. With today's rapid development, the country recently hosted a number of serious cultural events. For a number of years, Azerbaijan has been a venue for a set of esteemed international festivals and forums. The International Mugham Festival and International Contest of Mugham Performers, the M. Rostropovich International Music Festival, jubilee celebrations commemorating U. Hajibeyli, D. Shostakovich, Bulbul and other famous composers and performers, the International Jazz Festival, the International Music Festival in Gabala, East-West Cinema Festival, International Theatre Festival, The Maiden Tower International Arts Festival, International Ashuq Contest are just a few to mention.

The First M. Rostropovich International
Music Festival. Baku, 2007.



The International Jazz Festival.
Baku, 2010.

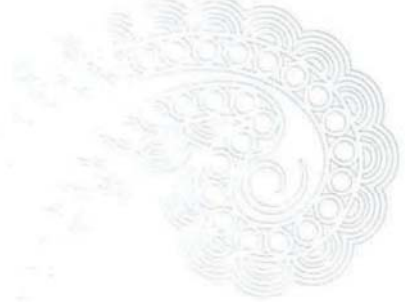
The Second International
Music Festival in Gabala, 2010.



QƏBƏLƏ II BEYNƏLXALQ MUSIQI FESTİVALI



The Second International Music
Festival in Gabala, 2010.



Some outstanding works of the Azerbaijani handicraft may be nowadays found in the leading museums of the world. The Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the Metropolitan in New York, as well as museums in Vienna, Rome, Berlin, Istanbul, Teheran and Cairo boast of some elaborate works created by artisans from Tabriz, Nakhchyvan, Ganja, Gazakh, Guba, Baku, Sheki, Shamakhy and Ordubad.



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