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## UNESCO and the traditions of Azerbaijani folk music

## ТЮНЕСКО та традиції народного музичного мистецтва Азербайджану

**Abstract.** The paper examines the traditions of the musical art of Azerbaijan within the framework of UNESCO programs. Recently, new works on the general mission of UNESCO as a guarantor of science, education, culture and art have appeared in the press of Azerbaijan. The article focuses on one of the poorly studied aspects in order to bring the connection with folk music in line with UNESCO guidelines. The paper provides a clear and concrete reflection both in the theory of musical national creativity and in individual forms. For example, the work highlights Ashug music, the phenomenon of mugham, the art of khanende, etc. The role and importance of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation in spreading culture and the musical art was noted. UNESCO whose representatives are directly involved in the problems of science, education, culture and art, manages musical groups, holidays, festivals, and evenings of the member countries. The methodological basis of the study was the works by mainly Azerbaijani author. The methods of visual and practical analysis, comparative analysis, and systematization of empirical and theoretical data were used in the paper.

**Keywords:** UNESCO, cultural studies, musical art, event, programs, mugham, khanende, а артистів, і для керівництва театру — цей аспект воєнних реалій засновник «Київ Модерн-алету» Раду Поклітару неодноразово наголюшував у своїх численних інтерв'ю 2023 року.

**Problem statement.** The history of musical art in Azerbaijan may be traced several centuries back, and its richness and diversity deserves a large volume. Before delving into the main topic of this article, it is appropriate to provide a brief overview of the history. This will help to place the discussion on UNESCO's role in preserving and promoting folk music within a broader context. UNESCO assumes the responsibility for protecting and promoting the finest traditions of folk music, and it is important to understand the historical background to fully appreciate its efforts.

First, it should be emphasized how wide the range of charitable activities of Azerbaijani philanthropy is in this matter. Second, the role of the Azerbaijani authorities in creating the favorable conditions for development of culture and art of the Azerbaijani people. One of the first missionaries in this field was the millionaire Z. Taghiyev, who financed folk music and other types of national art. In particular, he funded the construction of the first theater, later a new circus by the Nikitin brothers, and then a special opera house under the leadership of the Mailov brothers, etc.

These events undoubtedly played a significant role in the active promotion of the European tradition of professional music into the folk musical art of Azerbaijan.

However, the reverse process also was notable: Azerbaijani singers, dancers, and artists opened up wider opportunities for the masters of the musical art of the oral tradition to enter the professional stage, laying a strong foundation for the creation and formation of the foundations of the folk school of composition.

**Literature review.** This problem was covered extensively in the academic literature (*Azerbaijdzhanskaya muzyka*, 1961; Alieva, 2005; Ismail-zade, 2008; *Istoriya Azerbaydzhana*, 1963). In this paper, predominantly the recent studies were considered. Materials of the National Library of Azerbaijan were used, and conclusions were drawn based on their analysis.

**The aim** of the paper is to analyze one of the least explored aspects and to align folk music with UNESCO guidelines.

**Results and Discussion.** The most significant traditions of folk musical art of Azerbaijan will be analyzed, while simultaneously noting those facts and circumstances that UNESCO oversees as objects of intangible heritage. The list of such objects is quite large today (it includes at least nineteen names) The focus points of this paper are the following:

Mugam and UNESCO,

Ashug Art and UNESCO,  
production of musical instruments and UNESCO,  
performing art on tar and UNESCO,  
bowed musical instrument and kamancha;  
mastery of performance and UNESCO,

Traditional Azerbaijani dances (Yalli, tendere, kochari and others) and UNESCO.

In addition, our this paper considers the musical evenings, festivals and holidays that organized in Azerbaijan under the auspices of UNESCO.

The history of the issue is inconceivable without a brief review of the state of musical life at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It has developed in three main directions:

introducing Azerbaijani folk singers and musicians of various profiles to the advanced European musical art and mastering new forms and genres of musical aesthetics, emergence of new forms of national folk music and performance and the creation of prerequisites for the formation of various forms of Azerbaijani schools of composition on this basis,

development of musical enlightenment associated with the general rise of national consciousness in the field of musical culture and art.

Modern-day researchers categorize the folk music of Azerbaijan into several periods.

The first period (the first quarter of the twentieth century) was marked with the establishment of the national opera genre and the heyday of folk performance. It is significant that in the works of researchers this period is declared the “golden period” in the history of Azerbaijani folk music, which first of all laid a solid foundation for the further development of these genres in Azerbaijan. This is what distinguished the musical life of Baku in this period, with two different cultures, Eastern and European, existing in parallel; as a result of their interaction, development of traditions of Azerbaijani folk art occurred in new conditions (Ismaylov & Karagicheva, 2011; *Istoriya Azerbaydzhana*, 1963).

The second period (the second quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) revealed a radical change in the national consciousness, bringing a new understanding of national traditions and values, contributed to the entry of Azerbaijani singers and performers on the professional stage and bringing the art of oral tradition to a wide audience of listeners through a new concert form—“oriental concerts” and “Muslim evenings.” All concerts of oriental music were organized exclusively for charitable purposes, in support of Muslim students studying abroad (during this period, charity was one of the driving forces of the educational processes in Azerbaijan).

It should be noted that in the first two periods UNESCO had not yet been formed. However, the third period already coincided with the founding of this organization. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize the great

role of the Azerbaijani government in organizing “oriental concerts” and “musical evenings.” Musicologist A. Ziyatli, in one of his monographs focuses on the folk music, emphasizing, “Musical traditions are revered in Azerbaijan. And it is gratifying to note the fact that this is under the active supervision of such a large and powerful organization in the modern world as UNESCO. This world-famous Organization strongly supports the holding of ‘oriental concerts’ and ‘musical evenings’ on the territory of our republic. Moreover, it often organizes them together with the heads of the musical centers of Azerbaijan” (Ziyatli, 1987, p. 53–54).

What do they represent if they inspired a genuine interest of UNESCO? As many modern musicologists note, at first they mainly served the process of isolating, cleansing, and polishing Azerbaijani music from everything “extraneous.” It was necessary to isolate outright “weak” music from the “general flow” of oriental music. The author A. Ziyatli elaborated that UNESCO at one time noted a significant role in this matter. The UNESCO reports included the names of the creators of the musical and theoretical treatises Mir Mohsun Navvab, a virtuoso singer who brought the art of both folk and professional oral traditions to a wide audience of listeners. Khanende is separately included in the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List.

It is significant that all concerts of oriental music were organized exclusively for charitable purposes, i.e. charity, being the driving force behind the development of art as the best folk and partly professional oral tradition, at the same time contributed to the popularization and penetration of Azerbaijani music with the general public.

Musicologist Nurida Ismail-zadeh summarized the works in the aspect of the charitable significance of the “oriental concerts” and “muslim evenings,” noted by UNESCO (Ismail-zadeh, 2008). Having studied the materials of some of the Organization’s reports, she listed the conclusions reached by UNESCO. According to the researcher, they appeared in the following form:

1) In the development of the vocal art of the Ashugs, the khanende, as well as in the acquisition of professional skills, a significant role belongs to the Herrat Gulu music school, created by Haji Gusi and M. M. Navvab. As a result of his efforts Azerbaijani folk musicians were able to perform individually for the first time at a charity evening in Shusha in 1899.

2) The first “oriental concerts” in Shusha and Baku reflected the growing interest of Azerbaijani music lovers in the truly folk musical art. In 1999, this was mentioned in one of the UNESCO resolutions.

3) The first “oriental concerts” gained popularity for outstanding Azerbaijani khanenede, ashugs and instrumentalists such as Haji Gusi, Jabbar Karyagdy, Kechami oglu Mamed, Abdulbagi Zulalov, Seyid Shushinsky, Seyid Mirbabayev and several others. According to Nurida Ismail-zadeh, UNESCO emphasized that the skills of Azerbaijani

instrumentalists, khanenede, Ashugs and representatives of other types of national folk music continue to develop the best traditions in Azerbaijan. For their part, these facts and circumstances were also widely covered in the local and All-Azerbaijan press. It was pointed out that the performing art of singers and folk musicians became well known not only in Azerbaijan but also abroad. Indeed, they are well known in Europe, in the West, especially in the USA, through UNESCO and some other non-governmental organizations.

5) United into small ensembles, the so-called “ensembles of sazandars,” each of the singers had their own musical and instrumental ensemble, repertoire, and specific features of their artistic performance,

6) All these positive processes in the musical life of Azerbaijan inspired people, this specifically attracts UNESCO members and professionals. Such musical evenings undoubtedly orient the Azerbaijani authorities towards the creation of various theatrical performances, the mass concerts of oriental music, so ardently loved by all Azerbaijani people.

7) All musical events held in Azerbaijan have always been held with great success under the leadership and participation of the brightest representatives of the national elite and intelligentsia: A. B. Akhverdov, G. B. Zardabi, B. B. Badalbeyov, J. Garyaghdi, and other brilliant connoisseurs of folk music.

8) It is gratifying to note that each new concert differed from the previous one with a higher level of performance, a variety of programs, a number of invited musicians, and an expanded audience. It goes without saying that this provides a good additional incentive for the development of the traditions of national folk art in general.

9) Finally, the members of UNESCO was also too notice of the conclusions drawn from all the previous points. The great success of the “oriental concerts” produced a new form of concerts—“evenings of oriental music”. In recent years, they have become a truly new step towards the formation, approval and dissemination of Azerbaijani music around the world with the help of UNESCO, and the “sazandar ensembles” have become an integral part of the musical and social life of Baku, firmly entering the life and everyday life of all strata of society.

10) The great merit of the “oriental concerts” and the abovementioned “evenings of oriental music” is that they, through the national melodies beloved by the people, contributed to the emergence of Uzeyir Hajibeyov’s first Azerbaijani opera *Leyli and Majnun*.

11) “Muslim evenings”, which are, in fact, a continuation of the same “oriental concerts” and at the same time “evenings of oriental music,” were actively organized by the charitable educational societies “Neshr-Maarif” and “Nijat”. The main goal was, as always, to help students and those in need of education to pay scholarships to study in Europe.

12). The “Muslim evenings” were held exclusively on the initiative of prominent Baku patrons (Z. Taghiyev, M. Naghiyev, I. Safaraliyev, I. Hajinsky, A. Ashurbeyov, and others) who organized a funds collection for the needs of Muslim students, making an invaluable contribution in introducing Muslims to enlightenment and education.

13). As a result of the “oriental concerts” and “evenings of oriental music,” the fame and popularity of folk, as well as individual professional Azerbaijani musicians grew beyond the borders of Azerbaijan, and concert participants were repeatedly invited to Kyiv, Riga, Warsaw, and other cities by the companies “Sport-Record,” “Extraphone,” and “Gramophone” for recordings of inimitable samples of Azerbaijani folk songs and mugham.

It is evident that the development of mugham traditions, the art of ashugs, khanende, etc. would be impossible without the periodical gatherings of the specialists. They also have their own tasks, which have also been becoming better known to UNESCO lately.

The Union of Muslim Artists was the first step for Azerbaijani musicians, pursuing not only purely professional but also purely national, original goals. There was a clause in the charter of the Union, which referred to the raising and development of theatrical business among Muslims, the development of their interest in art.

“Indeed, our stage needs to be developed,” states M. Dilbazova, “and this can be done by an organization that is close to the theatrical business. Such organization today is the Union of Muslim Artists. It is well known to UNESCO. Hopefully, Azerbaijani professionals will make all the necessary efforts to ensure that the union fulfills its obligations” (Dilbazova, 1985, p. 98–99).

It is interesting, in terms of a brief historical outline of musical art, to note that the first typically folk performance staged by the Union of Muslim Actors on December 8, 1917 at the Tagiyev Theater was, as always, Hajibeyov’s famous opera *Leyli and Majnun*. These tradition lasts to this day. The available donations in excess of the ticket price go to the benefit of the national stage productions. After the proclamation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic in May 1918, it was headed by M. E. Rasul-zadeh, one of the board members of the charitable educational society “Nijat.”

During the era, the unstable internal political situation, the threat of military intervention from Russia led to the fact that the visits of touring musicians to Baku drastically decreased, and with cultural life fading.

The “Associations of Muslim Artists” and the “Directorate of the Hajibeyov Brothers” operating during this period, although rarely, staged performances by Azerbaijani composers. Gradually, after opera houses attracted more amateurs in their studios, folk national music began to develop and improve. On March 7, 1919, M. Magomayev’s opera *Shah Ismail* premiered, which was

an important milestone in the development of Azerbaijani folk opera art.

Despite the difficult political situation, the fruitful musical and social activities of outstanding Azerbaijani composers U. Hajibeyov and M. Magomayev, inseparable from socio-political life in general, were marked by development of important forms and genres of national art, the affirmation of the principles of nationality and realism, which further progressed in Azerbaijani music.

**Conclusions.** Having considered in this work the state of Azerbaijani folk music as an integral part of world musical culture and the responses to it from UNESCO, it is obvious that the turn of the twenty-first century was a significant stage in the development of new forms of communication

between national musical cultures. This created a favorable ground for the further improvement of new types of musical performance, for the creation of other areas of musical science related to the study of the origins of national folk music and the origin of Azerbaijani folk instruments. Foreign embassies and foreign companies operating in Azerbaijan also play a significant role in the development and promotion of modern national musical culture. Though it was impossible to focus on specific contests, festivals and musical evenings sponsored by foreign embassies and foreign companies within the framework of one work, even the provided facts enable drawing a fairly definite picture of the main directions of their activities related to the further development and popularization of Azerbaijani music.

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**ЮНЕСКО та традиції народного музичного мистецтва Азербайджану**

**Анотація.** Розглянуто традиції музичного мистецтва Азербайджану в межах програм ЮНЕСКО. Останнім часом в азербайджанській пресі з'являються нові праці про генеральну місію ЮНЕСКО як гаранта науки, освіти, культури та мистецтва. Проаналізовано один із найбільш рідкісних та маловивчених аспектів — привести у відповідність до вказівок ЮНЕСКО зв'язок із народною музикою. У роботі отримали висвітлення ашугська музика, феномен мугама, мистецтва ханенде тощо. Розроблено роль та значення культурних фондів, до програми яких входили музичні фестивалі, вечори, присвячені східній музиці. Відзначено роль і значущість Фонду Гейдара Алієва у поширенні культури, зокрема музичного мистецтва. Методологічною основою дослідження стали роботи переважно азербайджанських авторів. У статті використано методи наочно-практичного аналізу, порівняльного аналізу, порівняння та систематизації емпіричних та теоретичних даних.

**Ключові слова:** ЮНЕСКО, культурологія, музичне мистецтво, мугам, ханенде.

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