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Enlightening Societies in the Role of Developing Cultural Musical Traditions of Azerbaijan

Introduction

Modern educational institutions are closely linked to the main objectives of the associations of Muslim artists. We briefly cover these objectives, as their general goals partially or fully align with the objectives outlined in the UNESCO Charter.

Our article will primarily focus on the role and significance of the charitable educational institutions “Neshr-Maarif”, “Nijat”, and “Safa”, which were founded in collaboration with representatives of the intellectual elite in Baku. These institutions were established at a critical time and were crucial in promoting literacy, enlightenment, and musical education among Muslims. It is sufficient to recall that, at UNESCO, by the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, the ongoing struggle for respect for human rights and freedoms remains. Furthermore, efforts are being made to address global challenges faced by humanity, including the need to address the uneven development between different countries and regions, combat hunger and illiteracy, eliminate the consequences of neo-colonialism, eradicate racism, and ensure equal access to science, education, and culture for all people.

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The main problem

It applies similarly to the development of folk music. In this context, UNESCO strongly supports the activities of several educational organisations in its member states. Concerning Azerbaijan, this is the Nijat Society, which has, through the accumulation of all available resources, aimed to further promote and develop, for example, the Azerbaijani theatre. The society united all talented artists under its umbrella and created a unified theatre troupe.

The Nijat Enlightening Society initiated a competition to create an opera in the Tatar language. It led to the early production of the first Azerbaijani opera, U. Hajibeyova's "Leyli and Majnun". The Nijat Society, the most influential and respected organisation of its time, recognised the need to enhance the professional standards of the Azerbaijani theatre and create new opera productions. It led to the engagement of composer U. Hajibeyov, who was invited to Moscow. Although the management of the society had some shortcomings, and there were abuses concerning the production of Hajibeyov's operas for personal gain, it is important to note that only the Nijat Society paid artists' salaries. Neither the government administration nor the educational department had allocated funds for artists or the development of the arts for an extended time. The frequent performances of the works of U. Hajibeyov, such as "Leyli and Majnun", "Leyli and Kerem", and "Shah Abbas and Khurshid Banu", have instilled a love for Azerbaijani folk art in the audience and made it more accessible to their perception. It has led to an increase in the number of Azerbaijanis attending theatre performances.

Advanced progressive-minded members of the Nijat Society, such as N. Narimanov, G.B. Makhmudbeyov, M.E. Rasulzade, and A.M. Topchibashov, among others, contributed to the establishment of free evening classes for Muslims and free libraries. As it turns out, not only now but also half a century ago, reading rooms were opened in mosques. For this purpose, a room was rented on a central street. Teachers were hired to teach in Turkic to encourage a broad segment of the Muslim community to pursue education. In these same mosques, some attendees also received musical instruction. It is also impossible to overestimate the exceptional support

provided by representatives of the intellectual elite in Baku from the current day. Furthermore, it must be noted that whenever the financial situation of certain public institutions deteriorated and they faced closure, renowned Baku philanthropists Z.A. Taghiyev, M. Mukhtarov, I. Ashurbeyov, M. Asadullayev, and S. Hajinsky contributed significant funds to preserve and sustain the activities of those educational institutions, including folk music ensembles, recognising the benefits they provide to the people of Azerbaijan. All of this, of course, occurred in the past. However, threads are drawn from this period in order to preserve and promote the best traditions of contemporary folk national music.

One of the strengths of the modern educational institution “Nijat” is its organisation of anniversary events and benefit performances in honour of outstanding masters of the Azerbaijani stage. By evaluating their work through presentations, gifts, and monetary awards, these events inspire them to reach even greater heights in folk musical art and contribute to its continued development.

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It turns out that, not only in the present day but also half a century ago, reading rooms were opened in mosques. A room was already rented on the main street for this purpose. Teachers were hired to teach in the Turkish language to encourage a wide range of Muslims to participate in education.

In these same mosques, some attendees also received music lessons. It is also impossible to overestimate the invaluable support provided by representatives of the Baku intellectual elite throughout history. In general, whenever the financial situation of certain public organisations deteriorated, and they faced the risk of closure, world-renowned Baku millionaires such as Z.A. Taghiyev, M. Mukhtarov, I. Ashurbeyov, and M. Asadullaev have made significant donations to preserve and continue their activities, including those of folk music groups. These individuals realise these organisations' positive impact on the Azerbaijani people, and therefore, they are committed to supporting them. All this, of course, happened in the past. However, threads are drawn from those events to preserve and enhance the best traditions of contemporary folk music. It is also important to note

that one of the strengths of the modern educational institution “Nijat” is the anniversary events and benefit concerts it organises to honour the great masters of the Azerbaijan stage. Through evaluating their work – presented addresses, gifts, and monetary rewards – they are inspired to reach even greater heights in folk music and contribute to its growth.

Contrary to this, the current circumstances at the start of the 21st century undoubtedly provide greater opportunities for the widespread dissemination of Azerbaijani folk music and for defining the role and significance of Azerbaijani culture within the contemporary global cultural integration process. It is also worth noting that, within a relatively brief period of its existence, the “Friends of Culture of Azerbaijan” Foundation has made significant contributions to advancing, promoting, and recognising national artistic endeavours. The Azerbaijan Culture Friends Foundation chairperson is the first lady of Azerbaijan, Mehriban Aliyeva. The development of folk music traditions cannot be imagined without some financial investment. Nevertheless, it is notable that M. Aliyeva dislikes the term “sponsor”. As she stated in an interview with the Azerbaijan – Irs magazine, “sponsorship typically involves the contribution of funds with the aim of self-promotion and is, in fact, a commercial activity. Our foundation”, continued Mehriban Aliyeva, “has pure charitable objectives: assisting art and culture and making them accessible to all of us – residents, listeners and readers”². As a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, Ms Mehriban Aliyeva also noted in an interview with a newspaper the significant role of this organisation in developing musical arts in her country. She cited several events organised by the foundation, including presentations, concerts and tours by prominent international musicians, which were well-received both within the country and internationally.

She particularly highlighted musical evenings featuring the renowned Russian chamber orchestra Most-Vivaldi and the audience’s experience with other ensembles in Baku.

With great pleasure, it should be noted that the spirit of charity, which is so characteristic of the people of Azerbaijan, continues to live and is vividly manifested in the activities of the Friends of Culture Foundation of Azerbaijan and especially in the person of its President, Mehriban Aliyeva.

² М. Алиева, *Деятельность нашего Фонда*, [in:] *Азербайджан-ИРС*, Баку 2005, p. 12.

On September 9, 2004, M. Aliyeva was awarded the high title of UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for her significant contribution to the promotion and preservation of the intangible cultural heritage of Azerbaijan.

It is worth noting that during the ceremony of conferring the high title, M. Aliyeva emphasised in her speech that “mugham, ashug, and the unique sounds of our national instruments are part of the cultural heritage that we have preserved and must preserve for future generations. It is the aim of the work of the Friends of Culture Foundation, and this will be the focus of my future efforts as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador”. Of course, it would be desirable to see the names of representatives of the younger generation appear in connection with an increase in living standards and material well-being, and such an initiative would not only come from the foundations “Friends of Culture of Azerbaijan” and “Business people for Young Talents of Azerbaijan”, but also from other newly formed organisations and associations.

After all, anniversary celebrations, concerts, and festivals play an important role in terms of culture and education, serving to introduce a broad audience to the achievements of world music culture and helping to promote modern Azerbaijani art, as embodied in the works of prominent Azerbaijani composers, musicians, and public figures. It is indeed highly valued by UNESCO. However, the notable achievements of this cultural institution cannot be objectively compared to those of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation in terms of the scope of their activities. Before proceeding to the direct discussion of the central theme, a few words should be said about it. Since 2004, it has been implementing ambitious and bold projects. As correctly noted in one monograph, “the Heydar Aliyev Foundation was established due to the urgent need to show respect and admiration for the memory of the national leader, Heydar Aliyev, and to reflect on his rich spiritual and moral legacy. It emphasises the significance of new philosophical ideas and trends in Azerbaijan”³.

The Foundation is led by the First Lady of Azerbaijan, Mehriban Aliyeva. Over 17 years since its establishment, its significance cannot be overstated. The meetings of the Foundation under her leadership are a kind of

³ Н.Дж. Мамедханова, Б.Б. Кулиева, С.А. Мирбагир-заде, А.И. Мамедова, *Современный Азербайджан в контексте Востока и Запада и мультикультурализм*, Баку 2018, р. 92.

“productive cultural genesis”, which, as before, are actively engaged in the harmonious development of national cultures.

Scientists, representatives of various professions, and the interested population of our country can access the library collections. It is a significant organisation that preserves and promotes our nation’s cultural heritage and transmits the ideas of statehood and the national philosophy of “Azerbaijanism” to future generations. It should be noted that, over the past two years, the Friends of Culture Foundation of Azerbaijan, under the auspices of UNESCO, has organised a series of concerts as part of the Mugham Dyastgahly project, as well as a competition dedicated to the 120th anniversary of Azerbaijani great composer U. Hajibeyov.

One of the latest initiatives of the Friends of Culture, which has generated significant interest among the public, is the TV competition for young singers, which began in September 2007. Like all previous events, this contest was initiated by the foundation’s President, Heydar Aliyev, and his wife, Mehriban Aliyeva.

Through this competition, talented singers carefully selected by a distinguished jury have the opportunity to showcase their skills and demonstrate their mastery of the art of Mugham. Live broadcasts of the competition on television, particularly in recent years, have significantly contributed to the dissemination of mugham among the general public, reaching the hearts of all, including people not well-versed in music. It has further popularised mugham and fostered a love for authentic folk music among viewers, which is important in today’s world. Based on the list of events organised by the Friends of Culture Foundation of Azerbaijan, it is clear that this organisation also has a musical and educational purpose. The societies “Neshr-Maarif”, “Nijat”, and “Safa”, established in Baku by patrons in the past, have become known as the first charity societies of the pre-revolution period, which fought for the eradication of illiteracy and promotion of art among Azerbaijani people.

At the same time, the Friends of Culture Foundation of Azerbaijan will undoubtedly be remembered as the first foundation to pursue similar goals for the modern independent Azerbaijani state. Currently, when Azerbaijan is experiencing rapid economic growth, artists and cultural figures require increased social support and attention. Unfortunately, they do not appreciate the attitude of other societies or organisations, and even less so of

wealthy individuals, who, in practice, provide little support (in terms of material assistance) to cultural figures.

The Central Committee of Culture of Russia plays a significant role in preserving and further promoting the best traditions of folk music under the patronage of UNESCO.

We would like to note that during the preparations for this planned activity, we managed to visit the Russian Embassy with the stated goal. This visit proved to be more productive and beneficial for us in terms of gathering information and necessary materials on the traditions of musical folk art and receiving feedback from UNESCO.

We became acquainted with the programme of activities implemented by the Centre of Russian Culture, which was established in 1993 at the initiative of the Russian community in Azerbaijan and has been headed since its inception to the present day by experienced teacher S.N. Barinova.

Here is what we learned about the matter of concern: As we have learned over the past few years, the Russian Cultural Centre, under the auspices of UNESCO, has hosted more than 100 literary and musical events dedicated to the works of prominent figures from Russian and Azerbaijani culture. With the support of the Russian Embassy, the children's Pushkiniana event organised by the Central Committee in honour of the 200th anniversary of the famous Russian poet turned into a significant celebration. More than 200 schoolchildren from Baku participated in this event. The final concert for the winners was held at the central hall of the R. Behbudov Theatre. Pushkin's poems were performed on stage, accompanied by music by Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff. In addition to classical music, there were performances using folk instruments, such as the tar and kamancheh.

From S. Barinova's article, "Culture Is Wiser Than Politics"⁴, it is learned that in June 2002, the Central Committee received an invitation from Suzdal to attend the International School "New Names", which is successfully led by the Honoured Worker of Culture of Russia, Y. Voronova. Additionally, UNESCO observers recommended participation in the anniversary celebrations marking the 10th anniversary of the founding of this school. It is with great pleasure that we report that, thanks to the support of the

⁴ С. Баринова, *Культура мудрее политики*, «Вестник» 2003, №9.

Foundation, two Baku students, Ulvia Hajiyeva and Lina Biryukova, aged 10, and Daria Shilenko, aged 12, participated in the anniversary events organised by UNESCO in Suzdal, Russia. As S. Barinova recalled, “We left there with a great spiritual boost after touching the ancient Russian soil and experiencing the best examples of Russian culture in music, art, and poetry. We returned home with numerous diplomas and vivid impressions. In addition, U. Hajiyeva from Baku was awarded a special award established by UNESCO for her outstanding achievements”. A significant event in the history of our republic was the organisation and hosting of the Central Committee’s I, N, and W contests and festivals, dedicated to the best performances of Russian and Azerbaijani folk music, classical music, songs, and dances – “Springs of the Soul”, held among both professional and amateur artists. These events were held in December 1998, May-June 2000, and May 2003.

The festivals brought attention to Russian and Azerbaijani folk art, revealing many admirers and discovering new, talented young performers. The contest winner was 12-year-old Esmira Rzayeva from Baku, who captivated both residents of Baku and Moscow with her performance of “Vale-nok” by Ruslan. The festival was attended by artists from Baku and guests from Ganja, Lankaran, Shamakhi, and Ismailly.

M. Ismailov and L. Karagicheva, in their monograph *Folk Music*, state: “Frequent creative interactions that establish a direct and immediate connection with UNESCO through the organisation of “Days of Culture” for various peoples in Baku, participation in contests and festivals – all these factors contribute to bringing peoples closer together, the interpenetration of cultures, and the ability to “extract a rational kernel” from all positive developments in the world of musical art”⁵.

It is not without reason that, even at the early stages of the development of Azerbaijani music, the renowned composer Uzeyir Hajibayov tirelessly emphasised, in his musical and aesthetic writings, that no culture can exist in isolation. Indeed, in his music, composer Uzeyir Hajibeyov has adhered to his ancient national roots and rich musical traditions while advocating for new content that reflects the modern era. He has also sought to create new forms and genres while fighting for the universal and international sound of Azerbaijani folk music.

⁵ М. Исмаилов, Л. Карагичева, *Народная музыка Азербайджана*, Баку 2011.

Today, Hajibeyov's musical and aesthetic concepts and instructions remain relevant. Any opportunity to introduce modern music or Azerbaijani folk music to the world stage should be supported by relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Culture of Azerbaijan. Objectively speaking, UNESCO is a powerful organisation capable of achieving a truly international level in each aspect of its activities. For instance, during a recent visit to the Japanese Embassy, it was learned that on February 24, 2003, the Governments of Japan and Azerbaijan signed a musical grant agreement in the cultural field. Under this programme, Japan donated many musical instruments to the Azerbaijan State Symphony Orchestra, the Bul-Bul Special Music School, and U. Hajibeyov. As we have previously noted, one of UNESCO's main goals is to support the development of traditional cultural skills, such as the creation of Azerbaijani folk instruments, which is evident in Professor S. Abdullayev's book *Azerbaijani Folk Musical Instruments*, which meets modern technical and design standards. The publication, which is full of rare photographic materials on slides, has significantly contributed to shaping the modern image of Azerbaijan. It testifies to ancient roots and traditions in Azerbaijani folk music.

Another event organised by the Japanese Embassy deserves special attention. In January 2007, a memorandum was signed between representatives of the Japanese Embassy and the Rector of the Baku Music Academy, Professor F. Badalbeyli. According to this memorandum, the Japanese side has donated 12 grand pianos of the highest quality from the UAMAHA company. This act has been received with great appreciation by the musical community.

Conclusion

Considering the state of Azerbaijani folk music in this paper as an integral part of world music culture and UNESCO's response to it, it is clear that the turn of the 20th–21st centuries was a significant phase in forming new modes of communication between national music cultures. It created a favourable basis for the further development and enhancement of new musical performances and the creation of other branches of music science related to studying the origins of ethnic folk music and Azerbaijani traditional instruments. Additionally, foreign embassies and international

companies operating in Azerbaijan significantly promote and develop contemporary national music culture. In our view, it would be difficult to list all the various competitions, festivals, and musical events organised by foreign embassies and companies within the scope of this work. However, our information allows us to form a reasonably accurate understanding of the main areas of their activities aimed at promoting and further developing Azerbaijani music.

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Enlightening Societies in the Role of Developing Cultural Musical Traditions of Azerbaijan

Summary

The article submitted for review is written on an important topic. New publications on UNESCO's overall mission as a promoter of science, education, culture, and art have recently been published in the Azerbaijani media. The author of this article has chosen one of the least explored and understood aspects – to align folk music with UNESCO's guidelines. Notably, the author,

a cultural critic by profession, has thoroughly researched the topical literature on folk music. Her chosen subject has found clear and concrete expression in the theoretical study of national musical creativity and specific forms. For instance, the article highlights ashug music, the concept of mugham, and the art of khanende. Additionally, this work stands out for its absence of unnecessary content regarding UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage. Instead, it focuses solely on the traditions of Azerbaijani musical art. The role and significance of cultural foundations have been developed with a programme that includes music festivals and events dedicated to Oriental music. However, first and foremost, the significance of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation's role in promoting culture among the public was acknowledged, and a specific discussion was held regarding musical arts.

Keywords: cultural studies, Azerbaijani music, tradition, art, educational societies, cultural foundations

Просветительские общества в роли развития культурных музыкальных традиций Азербайджана

Резюме

Представленная на обсуждение статья написана на актуальную тему. В последнее время в азербайджанской печати появляются новые труды о генеральной миссии ЮНЕСКО как гаранта науки, образования, культуры и искусства. Автор статьи избрала один из наиболее редких и малоизученных аспектов – привести в соответствие с указаниями ЮНЕСКО связь с народной музыкой. Заметно, что автор плановой работы, будучи культурологом по своей профильной специальности, тем не менее хорошо изучила критическую литературу по народной музыке. Избранная ею тема нашла своё ясное и конкретное отражение как в теории музыкального национального творчества, так и в отдельных видах. Например, в работе получили освещение ашугская музыка, феномен мугама, искусства ханенде и т.д. Работа примечательна ещё и тем, что в ней нет абсолютно лишнего материала по пунктам ЮНЕСКО, также касающихся нематериального наследия. Всё внимание приковано к традициям музыкального искусства Азербайджана. Разработана роль и значение культурных фондов, в программу которых входили и музыкальные фестивали, вечера, посвященные восточной музыке. Но в первую очередь была отмечена роль и значимость Фонда Гейдара Алиева в распространении культуры среди населения, и отдельный разговор шёл о музыкальном искусстве.

Ключевые слова: культурология, азербайджанская музыка, традиция, искусство, просветительские общества, культурные фонды