

Azerbaijani mugham between tradition and innovation

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Any art tradition proves its vitality by the way it keeps on developing and getting renewed. The art of *mugham* in Azerbaijan is an example of such a living art tradition. The history the *mugham* art tradition, as is natural for oral musical heritage, is a permanent process of forming certain art norms, their replication in performance practice, and canonization, followed by degradation and making up new ones. The artistic canon that forms the basis of *mugham* is distinguished by its certain mobility; it is historically specific, and it makes an artistic law for each given period of time. Thus, in this process of development, different historical strata become alloyed into the art, some of them being older while others are of a relatively recent origin.

The phenomenon of the canonization of *mugham* is fully realized in the traditional performing milieu. Terminologically it is expressed by the word *qayda* (rule), perhaps, the most frequently used word in the lexicon of Azerbaijani traditional musicians. "*Muğamı qaydası ilə ifa etmək*" ("to perform *mugham* according to the rules"), a popular expression in performing circle, is actually the demand to obey the canons of *mugham*. The performance rules (*qaydalar*) of *mugham* apply to modal structure and melodic vocabulary, principles of musical development in *mugham*, and to the norms of cyclic *mugham* composition. However, in the creative perception of a performer the art idea of *mugham* does not disintegrate into "rules", but is presented as an integral whole.

"Reality gains shape only in memory" - these words of Marcel Proust can be applicable to the existing *mugham* art canon and to oral musical heritage as a whole. The canon of *mugham* is an abstraction that gains a real form in the memory of a performer. The art of *mugham* performance is in fact the art of interpretation of this mental example and its materialization in time and sounding space. Rules (*qaydalar*) only concretely define the shape of art idea incarnated in *mugham*; in them as in the ancient Tarot cards, the knowledge of a certain way, a method of incarnation of the art idea of *mugham* is encoded. There is hardly any performer who realizes the semantic sense of the artistic resources he uses to express the idea of *mugham*, but the knowledge and his obeying the rules preserves this idea from large distortions. That is why it is the most important demand made on a professional *mugham* performer. At the same time, it creates the first condition of the artistic freedom of the performer.

The canon of *mugham* defines such parameters as key, modal scale, musical vocabulary and structure. The rules are to preserve the key of each *mugham* and its modal scale or tone-row. Nevertheless, studying the modal system of modern Azerbaijani *mughams* reveals the processes of their historical development, both scales and keys. This development shows itself, for example, in the transposition of modes or in the combination of their scale structures. For example, the *mughams Bayati Turk* and *Bayati Ghajar*, in fact, transcribe the *Rast* mode scale to e-flat and b-flat steps. However, due to alteration

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of the tonal colouring of the *Rast* mode, the *mughams Bayati Turk* and *Bayati Ghajar* are perceived as independent *mughams*:

Rast: d – e – fis – **g** – a – h – c

Bayati Turk: b – c – d – **es** – f – g – as

Bayati Ghajar: f – g – a – **b** – c – d – es

The alteration of one step in a *mugham* scale or change of its keynote or other methods of modal combinations change the tone vocabulary of the melody fundamentally and lead to the formation of a new *mugham* mode. For example, the scales of *mughams Bayati Turk* and *Shikeste Fars* in *dastgah Shur* consist of the same intervals, but have different scale structure and different tonics:

Bayati Turk: b – c – d – **e flat** – f – g – as – b (tetrachord + tetrachord)

Shikeste Fars: b – c – d – e flat – **f** – g – as – b (pentachord + tetrachord)

Mughams Shikeste Fars and *Vilayeti* in *dastgah Rast* have a common tonal pitch and tonic:

Shikeste Fars: g – a – h – c – **d** – e – f – g

Vilayety: g – a – h – c – **d** – e / e flat – f / f sharp – g

but in *Vilayety* e-flat and f-sharp steps are also added in this scale, due to which the modulation from *Shikeste Fars* (i.e. from the *Segah* mode) to *Vilayety* (through one tetrachord of *Shushter d-e flat-f sharp-g* in *mugham Vilayety*) goes smoothly.

The art of modulation in *mugham* performance is based on the comparison of similar scales and recalls the play of poetic assonances. The ability to switch flowingly, unnoticeably from one *mugham* to another one is perhaps the most evident characteristic of the craft and creative potential of the performer.

The scale range used in every certain *mugham* also makes one of canonic restrictions; it determines the limits of musical space of this *mugham*. According to classical norms, *mugham* melody does not move freely in this space, but gradually opens up, extending to its prescribed limits. At the same time there is a certain sequence of musical phrases in the melody the performer should also adhere to, at least in general outline. This principle of gradual musical motion and sequence of musical phrases is not always observed in the recent compositions of Alim Gasimov [Qâsimov].

As is known, at the basis of every *mugham* there are certain typical melodic models, different combinations of which *mugham* melody originates from. The musician is free to choose any variants of these phrases and their number, and this makes the melodic figure of the *mugham* and its compositional rhythm unpredictable to the listener, and at times even to the performer himself. Musicians with a true artistic gift not only combine these traditional models but also create their own musical phrases within the limits of the given mode and its melodic “grammar”, thus assisting in renovation of *mugham* vocabulary. The melodic phrases (*gusheler*), modulations (*kechidler*), and figurations (*zanguleler*) of Agakhan Abdullayev, who is spoken of in the performers’ circle as the one who “has his own way” (“*onun öz yolu var*”), are being gradually turned into ca-

nonic ones as they are replicated by young musicians. The art of another great master, Alim Gasimov, is also marked as “His Own Way” in Azerbaijani *mugham*, i.e. as an individual contribution to its artistic canon. His musical phrases and melodic modulations make an individual musical vocabulary that nevertheless does not exceed the bounds of the authentic one.

The ear of the national listener usually responds to changes in the musical vocabulary of *mugham* keenly and unconsciously “sorts out” new phrases as authentic or, on the contrary, uncharacteristic sounding for *mugham* (“*kharij seslenmeler*”). But in the multicultural musical environment of modern Azerbaijani society, where the ear of traditional musicians involuntarily absorbs foreign lexis, the musical vocabulary of *mugham* at times assimilates uncharacteristic sounds. Thus, a lexis that is atypical not only of national music, but of the stylistics of the cultural tradition to which it belongs, sometimes penetrates into modern *mughams*. Such are, for instance, tierce duplication of melodic lines that came from Russian music or attempts of the non-modal harmonization of a melody. These uncharacteristic sounds became so usual for the ear of the Azerbaijanis that their use in instrumental episodes of *mugham* does not cause any special resistance from many listeners any more.

Musical vocabulary and modal scale structures of *mugham* are the most ancient stratum of its artistic canon, whereas principles of musical form and, in particular, the structural canon of *dastgah*, are of a later origin. According to written sources and manuscripts, I have composed comparative tables of some historical versions of the same *dastgahs* that give an idea about the process of forming the structure of a *dastgah*. While comparing *dastgahs* performed in the period from the end of the 19th century until the 1970s to the *dastgahs* of our times in their academic version it is possible to conclude that the structural canon of modern Azerbaijani *dastgah* traces back to the educational versions of *dastgahs* of the 20s and 30s in the 20th century.

See tables below :

Navvab treatise (1884)	Majlis of M. Mansurov (before 1909)	Version by Faraj Rzaev (before 1927)	Educational program of 1922	Manuscript by Jabbar Garyagdy ogly (1930s)	Educational program of 1935
1 Chahargah 2 Segah 3 Zabul 4 Yed Hisar 5 Mukhalif 6 Maglub 7 Mansuriyya 8 Zaminkhara 9 Maverannah 10 Hijaz 11 Shahnaz 12 Azerbajjan 13 Ashiran 14 Zeng-i shuturu 15 Karkuki	1 Bali Kabutar 2 Jövhari 3 Beste Nigar 4 Manendi - Mukhalif 5 Yed Hisar 6 Hisar 7 Pas Hisar 8 Mukhalif 9 Masnavi* 10 Maalif 11 Gürre 12 Maglub 13 Mansuriyya 14 Rubend 15 Üzzal	1 Chahargah 2 Beste Nigar 3 Firuz 4 Manendi - Mukhalif 5 Maalif 6 Jövhari 7 Mukhalif (Kerimabadi) 8 Hisar 9 Gulriz 10 Zirkesh 11 Rubend 12 Gürre 13 Mukhalif 14 Maglub 15 Mansuriyya 16 Üzzal 17 Chahargah	1 Maye Chahargah 2 Bali Kabutar 3 Beste Nigar 4 Manendi - Mukhalif 5 Mukhalif 6 Hisar 7 Gürre 8 Mukhalif 9 Maglub 10 Mansuriyya 11 Üzzal 12 Mukhalif 13 Chahargah	1 Maye - Chahargah 2 Güshe - Zabul 3 Güshe Beste Nigar 4 Manendi Mukhalif 5 Mukhalif 6 Chahargah 7 Tasnif* 8 Zerbi - Mansuriyya 9 Maglub 10 Manend 11 Maye Chahargah [Hisar – new episod]	1 Maye Chahargah 2 Bali Kabutar 3 Beste Nigar 4 Manendi Mukhalif 5 Hisar 6 Gürre 7 Mukhalif 8 Maglub 9 Mansuriyya 10 Üzzal 11 Mukhalif 12 Chahargah

Table 1. Dastgah Chahargah.

Majlis of M. M Mansurov (before 1909)	Manuscript by S. Mansurov (1920s)	Version by Faraj Rzaev (before 1927)	Educational program on <i>mugham</i> of 1922	Manuscript by Jabbar Garyagdy ogly (old version)
1 Maye	1 Daramad*	1 Maye	1 Maye Shur	1 Maye Shur
2 Daramad*	2 Zirkesh	2 Daramad*	2 Daramad Shur*	2 Mouye
3 Jedayi	3 Salmak	3 Shur	3 Mouye	3 Gshe Nava
4 Gherayili*	4 Gulriz	4 Mouye	4 Bayati turk	4 Bayati turk
5 Qvhari	5 Bozorq	5 Busalik	5 Shikaste fars	5 Bayati ajam
6 Haji dervishi	6 Dubeyt*	6 Salmak	6 Nish-faraz	6 Nishibi faraz
7 Gulriz	7 Ghajar	7 Zirkesh	7 Semai Shams	7 Suzi-gdaz
8 Mubarriga	8 Gurur Shur	8 Gulriz	8 Hijaz	8 Semai Shams
9 Mouye	9 Bayati kurd	9 Siyahruh	9 Sarenj	9 Maverannah
10 Busalik	10 Bayati turk	10 Jedayi	10 Ghamanghiz	10 Hijaz Kaaba
11 Bayati turk	11 Ruh-ul-arvah	11 Shahrashub*	11 Shahnaz shaqq	11 Sarenq
12 Shahrashub*	12 Zaminkhara	12 Nishibi faraz	12 Shahnaz kurd	12 Zaminkhara
13 Dugah	13 Hijaz	13 Khojasta - Shikaste fars	13 Dilkesh	13 Ruh-ul-arvah
14 Ruh-ul-arvah	14 Sarenq	14 Semai Shams	14 Salmak	14 Nishibi faraz
15 Zem-khara	15 Abu ata	15 Hijaz Bagdadi	15 Busalik	15 Maye Shur
16 Shikaste fars	16 Siyahi	16 Hijaz Arabi	16 Shur	----- <u>New version (1930s)</u>
17 Ashiran	17 Gabri	17 Raz Majnuni		1 Maye Shur
18 Semai Shams	18 Dashti	18 Gabri		2 Gshe Nava
19 Tizek	19 Ghilaki	19 Qvhari		3 Mouye
20 Hijaz	20 Kabili	20 Sarenq Abu ata		4 Baba Tahir
21 Shah Khatayi	21 Afshari	21 Ghamanghiz		5 Bayati turk
22 Maverannah	22 Hajiyuni	22 Mehti Zarrabi		6 Bayati ajam
23 Mehti Zarrabi	23 Bidbuni	23 Shaqq - Shahnaz		7 Nishib faraz
24 Gabri	24 Gharaja	24 Kurd Shahnaz		8 Maye Shur
25 Baba Tahir	25 Razvi	25 Shur Shahnaz		9 Tasnif*
26 Sarenq	26 Ashiqqsh	26 Shahi - Shahnaz		10 Semai Shams
27 Dugah	27 Ghatar	27 Shahnaz khara		11 Maverannah
28 Ruh-ul-arvah	28 Shahrashub*	28 Dilkesh		12 Hijaz
29 Nishibi faraz		29 Jvhari		13 Sarenq
		30 Shur tamam		14 Nishib faraz
				15 Maye Shur
				16 Tasnif*

Table 2. *Dastgah Shur*.

In the 20s and 30s along with these educational versions of *dastgahs*, considerably more detailed versions were preserved in the repertoire of big masters of that time. But in the following performance practice brief versions of *dastgah* became more and more widespread. In the 1930s through the 1960s the increase of Europocentric tendencies in Azerbaijani culture led to a change of social status of traditional art including the art of *mughamat*, which led to a larger reduction of *mugham* repertoire. Starting from the 70s, compositions of modern *dastgahs* became stabilized and in a general way preserve their structure until the present.

The canon of *dastgah* regulates the key and mode of each *mugham* that is a part of it, the order of parts in composition, the dramatic composition of the gradual rise to a culminating point, and the spatial limits of musical composition. However, it is also possible here to give examples of creative interference in the canon both from the history of *mugham* performance and modern musical practice as well. For example, Seyid Shushinsky, the prominent Azerbaijani *khanende* of the last century, and an innovator who enriched *mugham* with new phrases (*gusheler*), methods (*khallar*), and tones (*nefesler*), quite often included in his *dastgahs* the *mughams* never performed in these *dastgahs* before (for example, *mugham Dilkesh* in the *dastgah* of *Rast* that he placed between *Shikeste Fars* and *Irag*), or he united different *dastgahs* in one composition (for example, *Rast-Humayun*, *Shur-Shahnaz*, *Gatar-Bayati*). Many of his creative discoveries are now canonical.

The art of the prominent *khanende* of our times Alim Gasimov presents the same craft and innovative attitude towards canon. His compositions are so rich with new lexical, rhythmic, textural and compositional elements that they at times balance on the verge of authenticity. On the basis of the melodic material of *mugham* he creates his own, non-canonical, authorial versions that enchant the public with their amazing expressiveness and spirituality, while filling his colleagues with indignation with excessive freedom in treating traditional form. Even in those of his compositions where the structural canon of *dastgah* on the whole is preserved, his compositions make an impression of being non-canonical. This impression is induced by the singularity of his instrumental adaptation of the melodies, his interpretation of the form and function of *tasnif* and *rang* in *dastgah* (as an element of dynamic dramatic composition, not as decorative inserts of the cycle), and the polyphony of musical texture where every instrument and voice conduct their own separate line, unlike traditional principles of ensemble (soloist and instrumental imitational accompaniment). And, finally, his manner of performing *dastgah* as a bewitching mystery show that leads a keen listener into the state of *zikir* is unique for the modern practice of secular *mugham* performance.

The talented musician, *tar* player Malik Mansurov, also introduces a number of new melodic, rhythmical, and compositional details in the canon of *mugham* and *dastgah*. In his solo compositions he uses new sonoric and textural elements, and, what is unusual, applies to *mugham* quite widely *ashig* rhythms, that make us to remember of his small Homeland – Ghazah, which is one of the ancient centres of Azerbaijani *ashig* art, representing another branch of Azerbaijani traditional music. And in the instrumental compositions for *tar* and *ghaval* of Mahmoud Salah, rhythmic accompaniment is applied to not only such measured melodic forms as *daramad*, *tasnif* and *rang* (called “*bahrli hava*”), but to metrically free *mughams* (“*bahrsiz hava*”), and sometimes even to the whole *dastgah*, often becoming a solo during the performing of *dastgah*.

The tradition of *mugham* lives only so far as it is periodically renewed, and there will always be innovation processes in it so far as there is an artistic canon. At the same time, it is the presence of such an academic culture of the preservation and handing down of *mugham* that creates a considerable immunity of the artistic tradition, which protects it from erosion in the musical culture of modern Azerbaijani society. This academic culture of observing the *mugham* canon kept the art of *mugham* from destruction during the years of Soviet ideological pressure on traditional art. Though under the nihilistic, centrifugal tendencies of Soviet culture from the 1920s until the 1970s of the 20th century, the art tradition of *mugham* strengthened its viability and survival, adapting itself to the reality and dictates of the time; in particular, sacrificing a part of the *mugham* repertoire, reducing the formal dimensions of *dastgah* and giving dynamics to its compositional rhythm.

Public appreciation of *mugham* starts to change since the 70s with the activation of UNESCO work in preservation of oral musical heritages in the Soviet Union and with the process of organizing first international forums of traditional music here.

By the 90s when Azerbaijani society started to realize the value of traditional musical heritage, the art of *mugham* had come through with a store of undoubted achievements and the same doubtless losses. Clarification of the national *mugham* repertoire, the appearance of pleiades of teachers and *mugham* performers – singers and instrumentalists who had an all-around musical education, the development of modern methods in studies of *mugham* theory and history, and finally, the beginning of a process of the integration of Azerbaijani *mugham* art as an independent cultural tradition into the world cultural space, can be considered achievements. Among the losses suffered we are forced to establish the cutting down of the *mugham* “habitat”, i.e. the sphere of its experts and amateurs, the reduction of “professionalism of listener’s perception” (Alma Kunanbayeva), and correspondingly a drop in artistic demands made by the public on *mugham* performance. The development of the technical potential of instruments which resulted in a peak of brilliant virtuosity in performance can turn into a lack of the artistry, spirituality, and meditation that create the true nature of this art and its cathartic impact. The wide involvement of *mugham* in mass media (with the absolute prevalence of TV – and radio featuring taped broadcasts rather than live performances) promotes its gradual desacralization, its turning from esoteric art into a popular, exoteric one.

In the 20th century, the art tradition of *mugham* also experienced a new, inauthentic form of development as the primary art material in the music of Azerbaijani composers. To some extent, *mugham* engendered creative thought in the art of almost all Azerbaijani composers of the 20th century, leading to more and more new forms and artistic interpretations of its genre, form, drama, art language and imagery, principles of musical development, timbre and rhythmic peculiarities. In the art of Azerbaijani composers of the middle-aged generation, *mugham* is also used as direct quotation (Faradj Garayev’s “*Koran, hutba, mugham*”), as collage, as using an expression of Izaliy Zemtsovsky “a parallel line” (Firanghiz Alizadeh’s “*Dervish*” and her other compositions), or as an imposition on another cultural background (Eldar Mansurov’s “*Bahramname*”).

The art of *mugham* has not exhausted its potential to develop both in its authentic and inauthentic forms. It is being renewed before our very eyes and along with that it is being preserved in its fundamental forms. The rules (*qaydalar*) are changing with every new epoch but are not negated.