

**Research Report
IREX STG**

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Grant Year: 2002

Upon My Travel to Azerbaijan, May 4 – June 1, 2002

1. Topic of research and countries visited

My research involves the music and musical culture of Azerbaijan, focusing on the processes of Westernization, Sovietization, and secularization throughout the most of the twentieth century and on drastic changes such as de-secularization and liberation from Russian influences at the end of the century.

The research was conducted in Azerbaijan.

2. Relevance and contribution to the field

There is very little ethnomusicological research on Azerbaijanian music in English. Moreover Azerbaijanian musicological literature tends to focus on the analysis of musical text. In this work I employ cultural studies methodology, including sociological, gender, and post-colonial theory. This research focuses on the aftermath of breakup of the Soviet Union.

3. A concise summary of your approach and research methodology including a list of research sites.

During my IREX fieldwork, which I conducted primarily in Baku, the Azerbaijanian capital, I was engaged in interviewing musicians, observing musical and cultural events, and working in archives.

In the course of my study I interviewed leading musicians including Alim Gasimov, Sakina Ismailova, Aigun Qasimova (singers), Mahmud Salahov, Elman Sadykhov, Arif Asadulaev, Yassaf Eivazov (instrumentalists), Salman Gambarov, Jamil Amirov, Rain Sultanov (jazz performers), Rahila Hasanova, Elnara Ragimova, Sevda, Ibragimova, Vasif Adigozalov (composers), Farhad Badalbeili (pianist, the president of Baku Academy of Music), Elhan Babayev, Ramis Zohrabov, Shakhla Mahmudova, Tariel Mammadov (musicologists).

I interviewed members of Baku Islamic clergy including imam Mikhail Jabrailov and darvish Meshadi Agil.

I had a series of meetings and interviews with member of Azerbaijanian State Science Academy philosopher and Sufi scholar Firidun Gurbansoyi, the director of The Museum of Azerbaijanian Music Leila Bagirova, chief editor of state radio music program Hajibaba Mammadov, and a film producer Mahir Darvish.

In the course of my stay in Azerbaijan I visited

The Museum of Azerbaijanian Music, Museum of Rugs, and The State Historical Museum. Also I attended several classes and concerts in Baku Music Academy, the highest state institution of musical education. I had an opportunity to attend opera productions at the Azerbaijanian Opera and Ballet House as well as the unique Azerbaijanian Mugham Theater, and performances in a jazz club as well as musical events in private settings.

I also collected secondary source material unavailable in the United States: Excerpts from the dissertation of *darvish* weddings by S. Seidova, clips from newspapers, CD discs with video and audio material, and various scholarly books.

4. A summary of research findings and preliminary conclusions

Despite economic and social hardships facing artists and musicians, the musical life of Baku remains intense. Along with the Opera House, Musical Theater, various state concert halls, concert take place in museums and art exhibitions. The number of private recitals in rented public stages and in personal houses has increased since Azerbaijanian independence. A large proportion of both public and private events are co-sponsored by local and foreign businesses.

The globalization often perceived as a threat to local cultures has a dual effect in Azerbaijan. On one hand it disseminates Western-American-centered pop culture via TV and video media and CD products. On the other hand, the intricacy of Azerbaijanian music corresponds not only to local nationalism, but also to the globally spread interest in world music cultures. This interest is furthermore nourished by foreigners who work, live, visit, or interact with Azerbaijanians and Azerbaijanian culture. The support of European and American organizations and private funds is often combined and/or matched by state funds, a system nonexistent ten years ago in the country, where the cultural life was defined ideologically and financially by the central government.

Because of my interest in current revival of native traditions in the musical and cultural life of Baku, I was specifically interested in dervishes (Islamic mystics), because of their belief in communing with the divine through music. Historically Azerbaijan was a land of important dervish orders that during last hundred years were suppressed by both Soviets and the traditional Muslim clergy (itself fighting for its survival and thus opposing internal divergence). One of the most intriguing findings on this topic was that in the contemporary religious infrastructure, the revival of dervishes is happening literally under the roof of the traditional mosque. For example, I had several conversations with a mullah of Taza Pir, the “new mosque” in the central part of Baku, who was known several years ago as a dervish. The trio of Mashadi Agil, Haji Yashar, and Mashadi Nazir from Buzovny performs in dervish weddings and various religious festivals.

Another area of my search involved popular music which has combined traditional native forms with global pop culture. Azerbaijanian rap groups, such as “Dayirman” converge rap music with old Azerbaijanian *meikhana*. *Mugham* jazz, initiated by Azerbaijanian pianist and composer V. Mustafa-zade in 1960s, continues to thrive.

5. Suggestions for future research agendas in your field for the scholarly community

Topics that would be interesting to pursue are

Music and the re0emergence of Islam in Azerbaijan; the financial management of musical institutions and performance in post-Soviet Azerbaijan; the intersection of Azerbaijanian traditional oral music with Western modern classical music and pop culture; and many other areas of Azerbaijanian musical culture that remain largely invisible outside of its homeland.

6. Any recommendations for the US Policy Community

While Azerbaijanians are well acquainted with American music, it would be extremely valuable to encourage and support musical cultural events that would introduce Azerbaijanian music in the United States. These could take place in university communities through concerts, master classes, joint musical events, and student/faculty exchange programs.

I hope that my visit to Azerbaijan will significantly enhance my monograph on Azerbaijanian music and will lead to an important essay on Azerbaijanian dervishes on the intersection of tradition(s), history, and contemporaneity.