

**INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH OF SOME
CHARACTERISTICS OF CHOIR SCENES AS
CULTUROLOGY ISSUE**

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Abstract: *The submitted article is devoted to the musical and dramatical characteristics of choir scenes in the operas written by Azerbaijani composers. The article provides insight into the development of Azerbaijani national opera starting from mugham operas in the 19th century up until the 20th century, including the review of some features in European and national context. Choir scenes' peculiarities, development principles and the tenderness of the musical languages specific to Azerbaijani national operas were also reviewed. The renovation principle of the dramatical content of the choir scenes of the Azerbaijani operas and musical languages was especially emphasized. There is noted the classification of the content of the Azerbaijani operas and dramatical and structural principles, peculiarities of the musical language, and the musical character of the images of choir scenes in Azerbaijani operas with lyrical and dramatical, literary and historical, satirical and patriotic content are analyzed. Specific qualities and role of the choir scenes in the Azerbaijani national operas are also taken into account.*

Keywords: Azerbaijani national opera, musical and dramatical characteristics of choir scenes, mugham opera, lyrical and dramatical opera, satirical opera, patriotic opera, musical dramaturgy.

Opera takes important place among the musical scene works created by the Azerbaijani composers and has already passed a century long development way. This history of Azerbaijani professional music starts with opera genre. The first Azerbaijani national opera, „Leyli and Mejnun” was written by U. Hajibayov in 1908 and based on the traditional oral musical professional genre-mugham. All further operas written by Azerbaijani composers were based namely on mugham. Mugham opera constructed a bridge between the traditional mugham which carries genetic code of Azerbaijani people and the contemporary Azerbaijani national music, and put foundation of the Azerbaijani musical theatre.

Formation of azerbaijani national opera

First Azerbaijani opera was created in 1908. As such, Beləliklə, 1908-ci ildə Azərbaycanca ilk opera yarandı. There was interesting fact, that alongside with mugham the religious performances called „shabih” would flow organically together in the opera. It’s worth of noting that choir groups took active participation during shabih ceremonies. U. Hajibayov’s „Sheykh Sanan”, „Rustam and Sohrab”, „Asli and Karam”, „Shakh Abbas and Khurshudbanu” operas which were created after „Leyli and Mecnun”, Z. Hajibayov’s „Ashiq Garib”, M. Magomayev’s „Shakh Ismail” operas praise humanity, freedom, love and happiness and have been imprinted in the national opera history.¹

Thus, opera was the first genre of the professional musical art in Azerbaijan. This synthetic genre has provided the solution for the number of problems in the course of creation of Azerbaijani professional musical art.

Widely spread discussions on the ways of development of the national opera, and in general, Azerbaijani art were connected namely with the development of opera in the 20^s of the 20th century. During this contradictory and complicated period of the national musical art, U. Hajibayli, M. Magomayev and very young A. Badalbeyli were pushing forward progressive thoughts on preservation of the national opera alongside with learning classic inheritance of the European composers.

Two operas of „Nargiz” and „Koroglu” written in the 30^s of the 20th century, the period which was characterised with the uplift of the Azerbaijani national music, became a huge achievement of the Azerbaijani musical art. „Nargiz” opera (1935) written by M. Magomayev was modern and revolutionary in its heart, and „Koroglu” opera by U. Hajibayli reflected heroic past of the Azerbaijani people. „Nargiz” which provided transition from the mugham opera to the modern classical opera, and „Koroglu” which manifested a turning point in the development of the Azerbaijani opera art were the result of long searches.

Azerbaijani opera has had long development process. J. Hajiyev’s and G. Garayev’s jointly written „Veten” („Motherland”) (1945), J. Jahangirov’s „Azad” („Free”) (1957), „The Fate of Khanende” (mugham singer), F. Amirov’s „Sevil” (1953), Z. Baghirov’s „Aygun” (1972), V. Adigozalov’s „The Dead” (1963) and „Natavan” (2001), R. Mustafayev’s

¹ F. Aliyeva, *The history of the Azerbaijani mugham opera*, „The world of mugham” International scientific symposium’s materials, Baku, East-West, 2009, p. 128.

„Vagif” (1962), Sh. Akhundova’s „The Bride’s Fortress” (1974), M. Guliyev’s „Deceived Stars” (1977), F. Adigozalov’s „Expectation” (2009)-each of those operas played a crucial role in the development of the Azerbaijani opera.²

In general, when taking a look at the development process of the Azerbaijani national opera one can see a very interesting and unique development way. Thus, mugham opera genre combining in itself national peculiarities and being the first genre of its kind in the Azerbaijani music attracts attention by the originality and self-identity of the national operas written in the real European traditions and colourfulness of its content and innovative musical language. When taking a look at the operas written by the Azerbaijani composers by decades it is possible to see a number of interesting facts. As we can see, mugham operas prevailed starting from the creation of the Azerbaijani national opera at the beginning of the 20th century up until 1930^s. This period was characterised by the dominant influence of the operas written by U. Hajibayli, the first Azerbaijani opera creator, and M. Magomayev. Starting from the 1930^s the national opera genre began its development based on European traditions by evolvement of the first Azerbaijani operas. Thus, this period was characterised by the formation of the thinking unity in the national music being in the uplift period, and the influence of the naturalness of the national and all-European traditions. M. Magomayev’s „Nargiz” (1935) and U. Hacibayli’s „Koroglu” operas have become the pearls of the Azerbaijani opera art of 1930^s. World War II in the 1940^s influenced the national opera genre and gave prevalence to enlivening of the people’s thoughts and actions, thinking and lifestyle. As a result of this influence, G. Garayev and J. Hajiyev had written the „Motherland” opera (1945), which reflected the tough laws of the war in its content and musical language. „Sevil” opera written in the 1950^s by Fikret Amirov was the greatest example of the lyrical-psychological opera, which had shown the use of classical dramaturgical traditions and the synthesis of modernity with national style in its choir scenes. Other national operas also stand out from the dramaturgical point of view. First satirical opera, „The Dead”, is written by V. Adigozalov in 1960^s. In general, this period is notable by the creation of interesting operas which defined the fate of the Azerbaijani opera. Operas written in 1970^s are characterised by the creation of connection between classical traditions and modernity and the ability to use national peculiarities in their full

² *Azerbaijani music of the 20th century/digest of articles*, 1st edition, Baku, Science and life, 1994, p. 200.

colourfullness. M. Guliyev's „Deceived Stars” and Z. Bagirov's „Aygun” operas are the most interesting works of this period from the point of view of their choir scenes.³ The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century are notable by the evolvement of operas which carry heroic and patriotic meaning. V. Adigozalov's „Natavan” and F. Alizade's „Expectation” operas brilliantly express the integration of the tradition and modernity. Thus, the glimpse of the development history of the Azerbaijani opera allows us to state the prevalence of the creative attitude to the classical traditions in the national operas, the tenderness of the dramaturgy, the variety of the choir scenes and other similar qualities. These operas have their original dramaturgic peculiarities and composition. In this sense Azerbaijani opera art resembles the colourful carpet. Moreover, when taking a close look to this carpet one can see organic unity and harmony. Everything is amalgamated into one entity. One of the main characteristics in the dramaturgy of all above-said operas is their choir scenes. Mugham was taking the leading role in the first mugham operas. Alongside with this, choir scenes were given some space as well: although it needs to be noted that there was no professional choir group during the performance of U. Hajibayli's „Leyli and Majnun” opera. Choir singing was formed in several directions in the Azerbaijani folk music.⁴ Choir groups participating in the performance of the „Halay” work songs, a number of wedding songs, elegies performed during mourning ceremonies, also „shabih” religious performances, are the examples of choir music in the folk art. U. Hajibayli uses all variety of these folk traditions in his „Leyli and Majnun” opera. „Leyli and Majnun” was the opera which was created from the inside of the national culture. Naturally, that due to its being the mugham opera, mugham's function was to reveal the images of the main characters. Mugham was impersonating and enlivening specific characters in specific situations. Therefore, the formation of the musical and dramaturgical beginning of the choir scenes in the national operas starts directly from „Leyli and Majnun” opera. It needs to be noted that the choir used in this opera is the first example of two-voice national choir.⁵

³ *Azerbaijani music of the 20th century/digest of articles*, 2nd edition, Baku, Science and life, 1997, p. 124.

⁴ L. Mammadova, „The history of the Azerbaijani choir performance art in the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century”, in *Musical world*, volume I-II, no. 27, 2006, pp. 69-73.

⁵ G. Abdullazade, „Fikret Amirov-85”, in *Musical world*, 2007, volume I-II, 2007, pp. 47-50.

Classification of the azerbaijani operas based on their content

During the research of the musical and dramaturgical role of the choir scenes in Azerbaijani operas, one needs to specially emphasize the renovation of the national operas from the content and musical language point of view. Taking a look at the classification of the Azerbaijani operas from the content point of view we can see that there are several opera types formed around various topics: lyrical-dramatical, satirical and patriotic, and the operas devoted to the historical figures. In general, the musical and dramaturgical development of choir scenes in Azerbaijani operas is directly connected with the content of the opera. The same can be said about the musical language. The characteristics defining the operas written by the Azerbaijani composers are the use of the Azerbaijani national musical elements, including the reference to mugham and folk music.⁶

The role of choirs in the dramaturgy of the Azerbaijani operas and embodiment of mass was original and peculiar, and had specific function in the formation and expression of the characters. It is a known fact, that the characters are being revealed not only in individual roles, but also in mass scenes. In general, the development of the choir scenes in the national operas is characterized by various imagery. These traits which played a crucial role in the development of the opera can also be seen in various opera examples. It is possible to obtain information about choir scenes of various styles when taking a look at musical and dramaturgical solution of the choir scenes in various operas.⁷

Choir scenes in the azerbaijani operas with lyrical-dramatical content

In this paragraph we will review the development of the choir scenes with the lyrical-dramatical content and devoted to historical figures. For example, Sevil's image, the main character of F. Amirov's „Sevil” opera is disclosed not in the beginning of the opera, but in the dramaturgy of the choir scene, when the main character starts demanding the protection of her own rights. This peculiarity can be seen in other operas too, including the example of the classical national opera

⁶ *Research problems of the Azerbaijani national music*, Baku, 1992, p. 236.

⁷ *Materials from the 2nd International scientific symposium on „Mugham world”, 2nd international scientific symposium of the „Mugham” research group under the auspices of U. N. E. S. C. O.'s International council on traditional music (I. C. T. M.)*, Baku, East-West, 2011, p. 181.

„Koroglu”. But the main character of Z. Bagirov’s opera „Aygün” is disclosed in the environment far from the mass, in private mode. Choir scenes in this opera have only played a background role, the type of the commentator. The genre of mugham plays main role in opening up the character of Gulbahar, main figure of the „Fortress of the Bride” opera written by Sh. Akhundova. Every choir scene in the „Fortress of the Bride” opera combining melodious and mugham opera genres performs as the catalyzer of a specific type. „Catalyzer-choir scenes” expression can be used connected namely with this opera. The dramaturgical load of the choir scenes in V. Adigozalov’s „Natavan” opera is much bigger due to the mass being the leading imagery of the opera. Epic characteristics of dramaturgy in this opera are very vivid. Some of the choir scenes even remind of frescos and bring oratorios characteristics into the opera.⁸ The dramaturgical role of the choir scenes in this opera is very high, as the mass plays the crucial role here. Choir scenes perform as a commentator of all events, explain and reflect the main idea of the opera. Thus, the variety of the choir scenes in Azerbaijani opera with lyrical-dramatical content and devoted to the historical figures and revelation of musical and dramaturgical peculiarities attract specific attention.

Choir scenes in the azerbaijani operas with satirical content

Satirical opera examples are few in the Azerbaijani opera, just as in the world classics. In the Azerbaijani opera, this genre is present in V. Adigozalov’s „The Dead” and M. Guliyev’s „Deceived Stars”. Alongside with these, there are some satirical elements in other operas as well. Satirical elements arrange the majority in the musical comedies of the founder of the of the professional Azerbaijani composers school, U. Hajibayli and even approach the line of lyrical-comical opera. The choir scenes in the Azerbaijani satirical operas look like they are created by the choir ensemble. Sometimes, the choir performs together with the speech of the scene participants or that of the main characters. Compared to a few classical Azerbaijani opera traditions preserved in V. Adigozalov’s „The Dead” opera, the „deceived Stars” of M. Guliyev demonstrate innovation and peculiarities of the folk square performances.⁹ Choir scenes in the Azerbaijani satirical operas are characterized by the modern

⁸ *The history of the Azerbaijani music (From the ancient times until the 20th century)*, book 1, Baku, East-West, 2012, p. 591.

⁹ F. Aliyeva, „The history of creation of the Azerbaijani composing tradition”, in *Musical world*, volume I-II, 2002, pp. 9-18.

musical language, „the theatre inside the theatre” feature, dynamic in the dramaturge, and the incarnation of the social-philosophical concept. People’s imagery is especially important in the Azerbaijani satirical operas.¹⁰ Choirs performing the commentator role express the psychology of the mass. It is interesting that a portion of choirs in the Azerbaijani satirical operas is formed in the polyphonic style. Especially, this can be seen in V. Adigozalov’s „The Dead” opera, where the choirs in polyphonic style perform during the most tense moments thus commenting on the events taking place. There are also choir scenes of homophonic and harmonical texture, words-free and performed in vocalise manner and static in their character. These choir scenes are of symbolic sense, are not bulk in nature and are very laconic. Especially, reflection of the peculiarities of the folk square performances leads to use of the number of folk music genres in the opera. Recitative-declamational style of choirs, benefitting from national music and opera-buffa genre appear in the original dramaturgy of the musical-scene genres. It also needs to be noted that the dramaturgy in the national satirical operas had been multifaceted and reflecting on everyday life. In general, the function of the choirs is diverse and depending on the context can be static, background, commentative and explaining.¹¹

Choir scenes in the azerbaijani operas with patriotic content

Patriotic theme has always been the most topical and of continuous interest in the history of the Azerbaijani music. This topic adapting to the historical heroic topic has found its incarnation in various genres, including the opera. The patriotic content was especially important in the course of various historical events, transition periods, showcasing the spiritual uplifting of the people and freedom movements. Creative works with the patriotic content cover a large period starting from U. Hajibayli’s „Koroglu” opera and up until the „Expectation” opera written by F. Alizade in the 21st century. Although the operas are united by the common idea, they are expressed in different styles. Choir scenes in the operas praising patriotism and heroism have their own style by puffing out the mass incarnation. This can be vividly seen in „Koroglu” opera with its epic character coming out of folk saga. The role of choirs which transmit the epic genre of this opera into the crucial component is

¹⁰ A. Taghizade, *Azerbaijani music of the 20th century*, Baku, Science and education, 2011.

¹¹ Z. Gafarova, „Uzeyir Hajibayli’s ‘Leyli and Majnun’ opera”, in *Musical world*, volume I-II, no. 35, 2008, p. 62.

the main peculiarity of the dramaturgy of choir scenes. Namely, the patriotic traditions of the „Koroglu” opera had influenced other operas with patriotic content. The role of choir scenes in the operas devoted to the incarnation of patriotic topic, plenty of mass scenes give the operas the grandeur. The of the choirs in the patriotic operas are characterised by the slogan styles, appealing intonations and march genre. Choirs take active part in and interfere into the course of events, thus taking active position in the dramaturgy. Another very important factor is that the choir scenes are shown in different situations with various emotional reactions, thus creating splendour stage performance by combining the ensemble scenes with the choir ones. Such scenes attract attention by their scale. For example, the grandeur of the choir scenes in the „Motherland” opera jointly written by G. Garayev and J. Hajiyev (1945) provide the opera with the oratorios peculiarity. In general, this is a defining characteristic of the operas with patriotic content. Another peculiarity of the patriotic operas is their epic character. The phased progress of events contributes to the gradual disclosure of the events in the choir scenes and culminational ending. At the same time, dynamic development of the people’s imagery combined with the epic character is adapted to the dramaturgy of the choir scenes.¹² Yet another defining characteristics of the operas with patriotic content is the revelation of people’s imagery in multifaceted way. The mass shown in these operas are at the same time of sad and optimistic, proud character. In general, the mass incarnation is at the forefront at the operas combined under the same idea: U. Hajibayli’s „Koroglu”, G. Garayev’s and J. Hajiyev’s „Motherland”, J. Jahangirov’s „Free”, and F. Alizade’s „Expectation” operas. Choir scenes have great dramaturgical role. The leading position of the choir, monumentalism of the choir scenes, direct support of the choir scenes for the other scenes in the performance result with the consideration of choir’s oratorios characteristics in the operas with the patriotic content. „Koroglu” and „Motherland” operas have a more vivid epic character, „Free” opera is characterised with lyrical beginning, and these facts influence the style of the choir scenes in the patriotic operas. Tragical content is the one which takes a vivid position in the „Expectation” opera. It is natural that the modern writing technique of the choir scenes is clearly seen in this opera written in the modern style. Verbal choirs in the „Expectation” opera is the greatest example of this. Polyphonic style is widely spread in the patriotic operas. In general, male

¹² F. Aliyeva, *The history of the Azerbaijani mugham opera*, „The world of mugham” *International scientific symposium’s materials*, Baku, East-West, 2009, pp. 127-131.

choirs are more prevalent in the patriotic operas, than the female ones, which is directly connected with its content. Female choirs are static, while male choirs are active in this kind of operas. Thus, choir scenes in the patriotic operas increase the dramaturgical load, play crucial role in the progress of events and push the development of the opera choir music.

Methodology

The article provides us with the research of musical and dramaturgical characteristics of the choir scenes in the Azerbaijani operas based on inheritance and traditions principle. In general, the studies about the musical and dramaturgical solutions in the choir scenes of the Azerbaijani national operas are carried out based on the historical and theoretical research methods with the implementation of the comparative and reciprocal analysis. Main defining process of the research was to take a look into the history of creation of the Azerbaijani national operas and the review of context of the musical and dramaturgical solution of the choir scenes in these operas. The solution of musical dramaturgy of the choir scenes in the Azerbaijani operas can be accepted as the continuation of inheritance principles. In its turn, the implementation of the traditions and inheritance principles have resulted in the conformity to the natural laws of the European musical system and musical genres combined with the enrichment of the national music. Thus, the application of the national musical elements including mugham to the opera genre and creation of the mugham opera by U. Hajibayli, were taken as the basis of the development of the national opera and used as a kind of inheritance.¹³ At the same time, referring to the scientific methods of the musical and dramaturgical characteristics of the choir scenes in the Azerbaijani operas, the national musical examples were studied as well for review of the important impact of this genre on the national music.

¹³ S. Kasimova, *Opera art works of the Azerbaijani composers*, Part 1, Azerbaijani State Publishing House, 1973; S. Kasimova, *From the history of the Azerbaijani opera and ballet (1908-1988)*, Baku, Adiloglu, 2006, p. 23; B. Yarustovskiy, *Essays on the 20th century opera dramaturgy*, Moscow, Music, 1971, p. 356; R. Petzolt, „Die Oper in ihrer Zeit“, in *VE B. Breitkopf u Hartel Musikverlag*, Leipzig, 1956.

Results

Thus, the choir scenes playing a crucial role in the disclosure of the progressive ideas making for the prevailing content of the Azerbaijani operas, humanism, personality freedom, love and happiness feelings, justice and benevolence, patriotism and heroism are very important for the musical and dramaturgical solution of the Azerbaijani operas. The renovation of the content and musical language of the Azerbaijani operas was a very important factor in the expression of the dramaturgy of the choir scenes of various imagery. In this sense, the Azerbaijani national operas played crucial role in the development of the national musical theatre and the whole of the Azerbaijani culture. The musical dramaturgy of various content on the choir scenes of the Azerbaijani operas meant a new step in the progress of the national assimilation. In general, the opera genre integration with our national music in the 20th century, played an important role in the art of the Azerbaijani composers and had gone through the long development period. Taking over from the European music, the national opera genre just like the other genres, had acquired absolutely new meaning, laws of the national musical thinking and was enriched with the national musical language peculiarities taking over from mugham. Thus, the use of the traditional European opera in the professional Azerbaijani music meant both the appropriation of this genre in the national musical art and the enrichment of this genre by the new musical system. The listed traits have found a brilliant reflection in the implementation process of the musical and dramaturgical characteristics of the choir scenes in the Azerbaijani operas in the context of the European and national traditions.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research of the musical and dramaturgical characteristics of the choir scenes in the operas written by the Azerbaijani composers have revealed a number of interesting and essential traits. It needs to be noted that even if the choir scenes were not characteristic for the Azerbaijani national music, there were folk musical performances resembling the choir singing during the square performances and various ceremonies. First choir scene in the history of the national dramaturgy was used in U. Hajibayli's „Leyli and Majnun” opera in 1908 and by this had started the development of the choir music in the professional Azerbaijani stage. If the choir in the first Azerbaijani operas was two-voiced, further sharp

increase in the development can be vividly seen. This development is clearly observed in U. Hajibayli's „Koroglu” opera which was written 30 years later from the moment of the first Azerbaijani opera. „Koroglu” opera being the peak of the Azerbaijani opera, combines in itself the Azerbaijani and world classical experience and is the first Azerbaijani opera which has reached the level of the world art. Organic combination of the classical opera in the musical dramaturgy of „Koroglu” and dramaturgic characteristics of the modern 20th century opera have created the musical dramaturgy of new type directly expressed in the dramaturgy of the choir scenes.¹⁴

In general, the variety of the choir scenes is very characteristic for the Azerbaijani operas. Just as in the best examples of the world opera, the choirs in the national opera art serve as the participant of the events and ensure the revelation of the dramaturgical knots. However, there are in the national operas sometimes passive choirs which serve as an examples of the traditionalism and inheritance.¹⁵ There is a vivid innovative musical language in the dramaturgy of the choir scenes in the national operas which is the result of use of mugham traditions. Sometimes, the development of the dramaturgy of the choir scenes is based on the national peculiarities. It needs to get noted again that the most vivid characteristic of the national opera genre is its innovation in the musical language and content which is reflected in the dramaturgy of the choir scenes. The classification of the Azerbaijani operas according to their content: lyrical, devoted to the historical figures, satirical and patriotic had influenced the enrichment of the dramaturgy of the choir scenes with the national music's rhythm and elements.¹⁶ Thus, one can observe the integration of the tradition and modernity, national and European style in the development of the choir scenes of the Azerbaijani operas which is reflected in the variety and affluence of the national musical and dramaturgical characteristics.

¹⁴ G. Abdullazade, *Music. Human. Society*, Baku, Writer, 1991, p. 245; U. Vaynkop, *What you need to know about opera*, Music publishing house, Lenigrad department, 1967.

¹⁵ M. Druskin, *Questions of the opera's musical dramaturgy*. *L. Muzyka*, 1952, p. 344. *The history of the Azerbaijani music*, Part 1, Baku, Maarif, 1992, p. 301.

¹⁶ Z. Gafarova, *Mugham traditions in the Azerbaijani choir music*, Materials of the 1st Republican scientific conference on “Research problems of the Azerbaijani national music”, Baku, 1992, pp.189-190.

