



**UNESCO MÜZİK ŞEHİRİ KIRŞEHİR  
ULUSLARARASI MÜZİK SEMPOZYUMU**

**UNESCO CITY OF MUSIC KIRŞEHİR  
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17-18 Mayıs / May 2022 KIRŞEHİR  
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**THE FOUNDER OF THE AZERBAIJANI GARMON SCHOOL, THE DEVELOPER OF THE ART OF THE MUGHAM PERFORMANCE ON GARMON, THE CREATOR OF THE FIRST-EVER ENSEMBLE "EASTERN GARMON PLAYERS" IN THE CAUCUSES, THE FIRST PROFESSIONAL MUGHAM VIRTUOSO OF GARMON "KOR" AKHAD ALIYEV**

*Alexandria Sultan von BRUSELDORFF<sup>1</sup>*

**ABSTRACT**

Inspired by the "UNESCO Music City Kirshehir International Music Conference" that is going to be hosted by Kirshehir Municipality, and jointly organized with the cooperation of Kirshehir Ahi Evran University, this paper talks about the lasting legacy of the extraordinary and legendary person Akhad Farzali oghlu Aliyev (Kor Akhad) who contributed to the preservation and development of the traditions of Mugham and folklore art in Azerbaijan. Doctor of art history, musicologist, ethnologist, Saadet Abdullayeva, in her book *Azerbaijani Musical Instruments Fascinate the World* writes that in the first half of the XX century, Akhad Aliyev became very popular and the people began to call him "Usta" (A master), or "Qarmonchu Akhad" (garmon-player Akhad) due to his extraordinary talent. She writes that, namely by Akhad Aliyev's suggestion and advice, the Saratov type of harmonica that existed in Baku at that time was amended and refined to suit traditional microtonal mugham music. Thereby, the artistic and technical capabilities of the instrument were expanded. Consequently, a new kind of harmonica (Azerbaijani *garmon*) was developed for the first time by Akhad Aliyev. Prominent musicologists and professional musicians consider him a "Legendary Azerbaijan Mugham Virtuoso" and distinguish him as a person who Azerbaijanized and nationalized the instrument of *garmon* and the performance of mugham on it. He was also an esteemed teacher for many famous harmonica, *garmon*, accordion, and *saz* performers, including one of the prominent followers of Akhad Aliyev's school, *garmon* player, and his best pupil, Teyyub Demirov, and the famous *saz* player from the ensemble "Sazchi Gizlar", Rahila Hasanova. Besides his performing and pedagogic career, Akhad Aliyev's phenomenon as a great team leader was discovered when he challenged himself in 1932 by creating and directing "Ensemble of

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Eastern Garmon Players". It was sensational for that time, firstly because it was the first-ever musicians' group consisting of only *garmon* players, and secondly, because this brave group of musicians performed on *garmon* Azerbaijani music and mugham. Akhad Aliyev was the first professional *garmon* performer whom Uzeyir Hajibeyli invited into the first national ensemble of "Soloists of Traditional Instruments". Besides the *garmon*, he mastered performing on several musical instruments, including *saz*, *tar*, pianoforte, and *tutek*, and was the soloist at the Philharmonic working with the ensemble "Sazchi Gizlar". Throughout his short life, Akhad Aliyev was able to cultivate the appreciation of artistic excellence, develop his style, and most importantly, school of art of performing Azerbaijani mugham on *garmon* that he left for generations to come.

**Keywords:** Akhad Aliyev, virtuoso of mugham, nationalization of *garmon*, *saz*.



Inspired by the "UNESCO Music City Kirshehir International Music Conference" 2022 in Kirshehir, this paper talks about the lasting legacy of the extraordinary and legendary person who contributed to the preservation and development of the traditions of Mugham and folklore art in Azerbaijan. Among many professional musicians of his time, he gained the reputation of the "Legendary Azerbaijan Mugham Virtuoso"<sup>2</sup>. Prominent

musicologists, composers, and workers of the art of Azerbaijan, including Afrasiyab Badalbeyli, Firudin Shushinski, Saadet Abdullayeva, Tofik Bakikhanov, Zakir Mirzoyev, Sanubar Bagirova, and others, appraised him as a person who Azerbaijanized and nationalized the instrument of *garmon* and the performance of mugham on it. He was the first professional *garmon* performer who made the instrument *garmon* well-received by society. Besides the *garmon*, he mastered performing on several musical instruments, including *saz*, *tar*, pianoforte, *tutek*. His name is Akhad Farzali oghlu Aliyev. Among many musicians of his time, he earned the nickname "Kor Akhad"

<sup>2</sup>Heydar Aliyev Foundation, The Azerbaijani Mugham Encyclopedia, p. 104 [http://mugam.musigi-dunya.az/k/kor\\_ehed.html](http://mugam.musigi-dunya.az/k/kor_ehed.html) (accessed August 28, 2019)

which means blind Akhad because he was completely visually impaired since childhood. Despite this fact, Akhad Aliyev (Kor Akhad) was a highly accomplished musician, as well as an esteemed teacher of many famous harmonica, *garmon*, accordion, and *saz* performers, including one of the prominent followers of Akhad Aliyev's school, *garmon* player, his best pupil, Teyyub Demirov and famous *saz* player from the ensemble "Sazchi Gizlar", Rahila Hasanova. Throughout his short life, Akhad Aliyev was able to cultivate the appreciation of artistic excellence, develop his style, and most importantly, school of art of performing Azerbaijani mugham on *garmon* that he left for generations to come. It is necessary to note that one of the most important projects accomplished towards the safeguarding of the national moral values and promotion of the Azerbaijani culture and mugham, initiated by the Vice-President of Azerbaijan, President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva, was the creation of the International Mugham Center in the City of Baku to widely promote in the world the Azerbaijani mugham, which was proclaimed by UNESCO as Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. It is worth emphasizing that the International Mugham Center with the support of the Madaniyyat TV channel attributed importance to the musical legacy of Akhad Aliyev and provided significant assistance in the organization of the concert event celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Akhad Aliyev (Kor Ahad) in 2018. World-renowned representatives of the Azerbaijani music community and mugham lovers attended this memorial evening. Well-known musicians talked about the services of Akhad Aliyev in Azerbaijani instrumental music and performed beautiful concert numbers at the event. The event was broadcast on the Azerbaijani TV channel "Madaniyyat". Furthermore, the International Mugham Center supported the publication of the scientific literary book by the name *Qarmonun Əfsanəsi* (The Legend of Garmon) dedicated to Akhad Aliyev's 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary which was officially presented at the Mugham Center in May 2019. One of the first documentary sources of information about Akhad Aliyev is written in the book *Azerbaijani National Musicians* by the researcher and musicologist Firudin Shushinski. Another primary source is the valuable memoirs left by his eldest daughter Leyla Aliyeva Sultan-Zade about her father. Aliyev Akhad Farzali oghlu was born in Baku in 1893. He was born with poor vision, by two years his eyes became gradually weaker, and when he was three, he became completely blind and was deprived of the world's light as an invalid. His mother bought him a harmonica to play with as a toy because he was not able to play with the

children from the neighborhood. When Akhad Aliyev was 10-12 years old, he mastered the performance of the traditional Azerbaijani dance music on the harmonica. He was often invited to perform at the weddings, in particular, at the special wedding events where only females gathered together to celebrate the act of wedding for the bride. This was because the males were not allowed at the traditional female wedding gatherings. Akhad's blindness and his incredible performing ability time after time captured listeners and earned him respect.<sup>3</sup> Doctor of art history, musicologist, ethnologist, Saadet Abdullayeva, in her book *Azerbaijani Musical Instruments Fascinate the World*, writes that in the first half of the XX century, Akhad Aliyev became very popular and the people began to call him "Usta" (a master), or "Qarmonchu Akhad" (garmon-player Akhad) due to his extraordinary talent. She writes that namely by Akhad Aliyev's suggestion and advice, the Saratov type of harmonica that existed in Baku at that time was amended and refined to suit traditional microtonal mugham music. Saadet Abdullayeva writes that the improvement of the *garmon* instrument, the sound system of which matches 17 step tone row of the Azerbaijani music, was made according to recommendations of the famous *garmon* player Ahad Aliyev, who had given a special touch to the Azerbaijani music, and then Akhad Aliyev's followers Teyyub Damirov and Mammadagha Agaev continued contributing into the improvement of the *garmon*. Saadet Abdullayeva points out that the history of *garmon* is connected with the eastern world. *Garmon*'s prototypes are the Chinese *shen* (sheng), Afghani, Pakistani, and Indian *Harmon* or *argan*, Azerbaijani *dzhibchig* known since ancient times. They got sounds with the help of air or by bellowing into the body. Because of the trade relations with Europe, the European masters of musical instruments became aware of this principle of producing sound. In 1821, German master Christian Friedrich Buschmann made a lip harmonica and then a single row hand harmonica with a bellow. Later, in 1830, the principle of sound-producing was introduced in Russia in the town of Tula; the 7 keys harmonica was made, allowing the playing of primitive songs. She writes: "The works on improvement of the instrument were performed in different provinces of Russia. The harmonics were significantly changed in construction. They differed by system, range of sound, number of voices and registers, and the presence or absence of the possibility of switching ready accords. Harmonics got the name of the place

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<sup>3</sup> Shushinski F. Azerbaijani National Musicians, p. 388-393

where they were created.”<sup>4</sup> This was done to suit the timbre and acoustics of the music performed in these regions at that time. Since the second half of the XIX century harmonics began to appear in Azerbaijan through the trade route by the Caspian Sea. Aqhahuseyn Daqli in his manuscript *Ozan Garaveli*, which is kept in the Institute of Manuscripts named after M. Fuzuli of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, notes: “we could hear its sounds before the construction of the railway in Azerbaijan (until 1880)”.<sup>5</sup> S. Abdullayeva points out a peculiar fact that the harmonica was first sold as a toy, and at that time, this instrument had a diatonic sound row with 7, 12, 14, 16, and 18 white keys. During the visit to the National Museum of History of Azerbaijan with the co-author of the book *The Legend of Garmon*, Gulhuseyn Kazimli, the 16 keys of round shaped harmonica constructed by Akim Trofimov Vorotsov from Tula, which was one of the first harmonics brought to Azerbaijan, was examined. While many harmonica players were mainly performing dance music, Akhad Aliyev was not satisfied with the diatonic voice leading accordions with white keys that dominated in Azerbaijan, as the construction of the harmonica was not designed to accommodate the timbre and musical sound of microtonal musical mugham.<sup>6</sup> Akhad Aliyev’s groundbreaking idea and mission solely became to Azerbaijaniize the harmonica to adapt the instrument to Azerbaijani mugham music. He called the constructor of harmonica Arkhip Karpushkin of Russian-malakan nationality living in Baku and gave him instructions on the technical and acoustic reconstruction of harmonica, including diminishing its body, applying missing sounds, thereby enriching its sound to perform the complex music of mugham on it. So, the artistic and technical capabilities of the instrument were expanded. Consequently, a new kind of harmonica (Azerbaijani *garmon*) was developed for the first time in the 1930s by Akhad Aliyev.<sup>7</sup> We can also cite the words from the doctoral work *Azerbaijani Garmon* of the honored artist of Azerbaijan, *garmon* player, the successor of Akhad Aliyev, Professor Zakir Mirzoyev, that Akhad Aliyev was the improver of *garmon* instrument that’s been turned into today’s national musical instrument. Zakir Mirzoyev together with Tofik Bakikhanov, who is a world-renowned composer, also noted that besides Akhad Aliyev’s

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<sup>4</sup> Abdullayeva S. Azerbaijani Musical Instruments Fascinate the World, p. 160-166

<sup>5</sup> Daqli A. (Hamidov A.H.) *Ozan Garaveli* III part Fund of the Institute of Manuscripts named after M.Fuzuli of ANAS, Manuscript with C-1 175/38009 code.

<sup>6</sup> Kazimli G., Sultan-Zade von Bruseldorff A. *The Legend of Garmon*, p. 118-120

<sup>7</sup> Mirzoyev Z. *Azerbaijani Garmon*, p. 48, 59-63

contribution to the nationalization of the instrument come from Russia, he was also known in Azerbaijan as a virtuoso *garmon* player. Talks about Akhad Aliyev's prodigy, his comprehensive and methodic knowledge of mugham, his sweet and longing interpretation of mugham that is hard to imitate even today for many professional *garmon* players, had drawn the attention of major professional musicians of that time. Akhad Aliyev's craftsmanship and ingenious technique impressed one of the leading Azerbaijani composers, pedagogues, and thinkers of that time, Muslim Magomayev the eldest, who in the late 1920s invited Akhad to perform Azerbaijani mugham and beautiful dance songs on live broadcasting platform radio. When Muslim Magomayev was composing the opera "Shah Ismayil", for the love scene between Shah Ismayil and his beloved Gulzar he decided to use the music based on *segah mugham mode*. Highly talented improvisation of *segah* mugham by Akhad Aliyev so impressed M. Magomayev that he worked out that fragment of that scene based specifically on Akhad's interpretive fingers and turned it into an orchestral masterpiece.<sup>8</sup> Soon Akhad Aliyev's ability to perform on various instruments aroused great interest and impressed outstanding composer, the founder of classical music in Azerbaijan, the creator of the first Mugham Opera, the People's Artist of the USSR, Uzeyir Hajibeyli. Uzeyir Hajibeyli often invited Akhad Aliyev to his house and listened to his interpretation of mugham and dance music, where he decided to hire Akhad to Azerbaijani Opera to perform dance music *Tyaryakyamy* at the wedding scene in his operetta "Arshin mal alan". Akhad Aliyev's eldest daughter accompanied her father on several such occasions and witnessed the words of great Uzeyir Hajibeyli, according to Leyla Aliyeva Sultan-Zade Uzeyir Hajibeyli said: "Akhad, your performance on instruments, particularly on *garmon*, is ingenious; you are, as everybody says, indeed a real virtuoso, it is evident as you sit in front of me that your performance is unrivaled and outstanding. I want you to participate in my operetta and support you in all your musical endeavors."<sup>9</sup> While creating the first national ensemble of "Soloists of Traditional Instruments", initiated by Uzeyir Hajibeyli and led under the guidance of People's Artist Ahmed Bakikhanov, Akhad Aliyev was invited to perform as a soloist on *garmon*. Akhad became the first soloist professional *garmon* player. Thus, the *garmon* was publicly introduced for the first time among Azerbaijani traditional instruments. The famous composer, conductor,

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<sup>8</sup> Rahmanli E., Performing arts of *garmon* and his training in Azerbaijan, p. 41-50

<sup>9</sup> Aliyeva Sultan-Zade L. interview by Sultan-zade von Bruseldorff A., June, 2010

and music critic, author of the music and libretto of the first Azerbaijani ballet and the first ballet in the Muslim Orient “Giz Galasi” (The Maiden Tower), Afrasiyab Badalbeyli pointed out that Akhad Aliyev was the most famous garmon player of that time; he also admitted that there was no such performer in the entire Transcaucasus. Besides that Akhad Aliyev was also a superb performer on *saz*. Akhad Aliyev’s performance on *saz* is especially noteworthy. His performance of *ashiq* music “Yanig Kerem” every time was turned into “the musical event”, because it sounded so soulful and unforgettable.<sup>10</sup> It’s no coincidence that Uzeyir Hajibeyli involved Akhad Aliyev in the organization, selection, and training of female performers on *saz* when the ensemble of “Sazchi gizlar” (The girls performing on *saz*) was created under the auspices of the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic, where Akhad stayed as a soloist till the end of his life. During the interviews with many musicians regarding Akhad Aliyev’s mastership of playing several instruments, the professor of the Azerbaijan National Conservatory, Doctor of Arts, musician, Abasqulu Najafzade pointed out that: “It is interesting that while playing these instruments, he used the ‘ornaments’ and grace notes that he used while playing the *garmon*. It is very difficult. As each instrument has its specific feature”.<sup>11</sup> Besides his performing and pedagogic career, Akhad Aliyev’s phenomenon as a great team leader was discovered when he challenged himself in 1932 by creating and directing the “Ensemble of Eastern Garmon Players”. It was sensational for that time, firstly because it was the first-ever musicians' group consisting of only *garmon* players, and secondly, because this brave group of musicians performed on *garmon* Azerbaijani music and mugham. He performed with his ensemble on many prestigious and popular concert platforms, including the famous Culture House named after I.M.Abilov from 1934 to 1935. The author of the book *Akhad, the establisher of the school of garmon* (Qarmon məktəbini yaradan Əhəd), researcher, doctor of philosophy in art history, Ehsen Rahmanli and the co-author, *garmon* player, Ilgar Karimov, write that Akhad Aliyev’s decision of creating that ensemble was an additional revolutionary step in the nationalization and popularization of *garmon* in Azerbaijan.<sup>12</sup> Becoming more and more famous, he was invited to several grandiose and prestigious musical events. At the invitation of Uzeyir Hajibeyli, Akhad Aliyev was included in the delegation

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<sup>10</sup> Rahmanli E., The mastership of performance on garmon and its education in Azerbaijan, p. 45

<sup>11</sup> Najafzade A. interview by Sultan-zade von Bruseldorff A., March, 2018

<sup>12</sup> Rahmanli E., Karimov I. Akhad, the establisher of the school of garmon, p. 60-62



of musicians during the ten-day Literature and Art of Azerbaijan's prestigious "Music Decade" that was held in Moscow in 1938. At the height of his creative life yet during the tumultuous times of World War II, Akhad Aliyev passed away at the age of 49 in 1942 in the city of Baku survived by his wife and five children. As of today, prominent professional *garmon* players of Azerbaijan refer to Akhad Aliyev as a forefather of Azerbaijani *garmon*. His fame that started being widespread during his creative life is being echoed throughout the time to our days. Despite the tremendous legacy that this man bestowed upon us, regretfully, only two gramophone records left after him were produced in Moscow in the 30s at the "Nogin" gramophone record factory. On one of them, he performs *segah* on *garmon*, and on another one, he performs *chahargah* on *saz*. Professionals are well aware of how hard it is to perform *chahargah* on *saz*. It requires great mastership. Moreover, his performance of mugham *segah* refers to the most outstanding samples of the inspired interpretation of mugham. These records are kept at the State Sound Recording Archive of the Azerbaijan Republic and were handed in for the public presentation during the 125<sup>th</sup> jubilee at the Mugham Center by the director of the Archive, Hasankhan Madatov, in 2018.<sup>13</sup> Presentations about Akhad Aliyev have been introduced at various international conferences, including the topic "The Legendary, Blind Garmon (Accordion) Player of Azerbaijan "Kor Akhad" Aliyev (Blind Akhad)" which was presented at the 33rd World Conference of International Society for Music Education (ISME2018) held in Baku, Azerbaijan. The topic "The Lasting Legacy of the Legendary Azerbaijan Mugham Virtuoso of Garmon Akhad Aliyev (Kor Akhad)" was presented at the ISME Legacy Conference held in 2019 in Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey. The topic "The Major Role of Akhad Aliyev in the formation of the ensemble "Sazchi Gizlar" created on the initiative of U.Hajibeyli" was presented at the International Scientific Conference on "Ashiq Art and Written Literature" dedicated to the memory of Ashiq Shamshir and Samad Vurgun held in Gazakh, Azerbaijan. Akhad Aliyev's name as an outstanding *garmon* and *saz* performer has been written in the history of Azerbaijani traditional music forever. Currently, every effort is being made to immortalize Akhad Aliyev's legacy and his name for generations to come.

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<sup>13</sup> State Sound Recording Archive of Azerbaijan Republic, Madatov H. interview by Sultan-Zade von Bruseldorff A., October 2017



*The first "Ensemble of Eastern Garmon Players" was created and directed under the Kor Akhad Aliyev, 1932*



*The first "Ensemble of Eastern Garmon Players" was created and directed under the Kor Akhad Aliyev, 1932*



*Akhad Aliyev performing on saz*



*Xalq çalğı alətləri ansamblı. Birinci sırada qəranon ifaçısı Kor Əhad*

*The first national ensemble of "Soloists of Traditional Instruments"*



*30-cü illərin ikinci yarısı. Ələkbar Nəzərlinin bağ. Şəkildə soldan birinci Ə.Nəzərli, üçüncü tarzan M.Bakıxanov, Q.Pirimov, ortada xanəndə C.Qaryəğdioglu, sağdan üçüncü T.Dəmirov, dördüncü Kor Əhad, Bakı və Zaqafqazlıya musiqiçilərindən bir qrup*

*The second half of the 30s. Alakbar Nazarli's garden. In the photo, the first from the left is A. Nazarli, the third is the tar player M. Bakikhanov, G. Pirimov, the singer J. Garyaghdioğlu is in the middle, the third from the right is T. Damirov, the fourth is Kor Akhad, a group of Baku and Transcaucasus musicians.*



*The world-renowned composer, People's Artist of Azerbaijan, Tofik Bakikhanov the 125<sup>th</sup> jubilee event dedicated to Akhad Aliyev, International Mugham Center, 2018*



*People's Artist of Azerbaijan, Artistic Director of the ensemble "Soloists of Traditional Instruments" named after Ahmed Bakhikhanov, at the 125<sup>th</sup> jubilee event dedicated to Akhad Aliyev, International Mugham Center, 2018 (the same ensemble where Akhad Aliyev started performing as the first garmon player)*



*Famous garmon players of Azerbaijan paying the tribute to Akhad Aliyev's legacy at the 125<sup>th</sup> jubilee event dedicated to Akhad Aliyev, International Mugham Center, 2018*



*The presentation of the book *Qarmonun Əfsanəsi* (The Legend of Garmon) dedicated to Akhad Aliyev (authors: Gulhuseyn Kazimli & Alexandria Sultan-Zade von Bruseldorff, chief editor: academician Nizami Safarov), International Mugham Center, 2019, photos are provided at the courtesy of AZERTAC News Agency*



Akhad Aliyev performs chahargah on saz      Akhad Aliyev performs segah on garmon  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3d1ReB8SdEY&t=2s>,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bl7HmkI3ONY>

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