

International Symposium “Azerbaijani Mugham Across Borders”
Azerbaijan National Conservatory, 29-30 April 2026
Abstracts

Keynote speech 1

Sanubar Baghirova (Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences)

The Concept of ‘*ta`sir*’ in Mugham studies

The concept of "*ta`sir*", the emotional impact of music, is not new to maqam studies; it was developed in the works of Eastern medieval music theorists including the treatise “Adwar” by Safi al-Din al-Urmavi. The concept of "*ta`sir*" in their works, as well as in the treatises of latest authors, (for example, in the treatise ‘Adwar’ by an anonymous author of the 17th century) usually refers to the emotional impact of different musical modes on the listener. This issue is briefly touched upon also in Mir Mohsun Navvab's treatise "Vuzuhil argam" (1884) and is more clearly articulated in Uzeyir Hajibeyli's prominent theoretical work, from precisely the same perspective as the medieval treatises. Hajibeyli's often-quoted statement about the emotional impact of each of the seven main Azerbaijani modes provides only a general idea of their emotional nature, whereas the emotional states evoked by live mugham performance are largely unpredictable and do not always correspond to the generally accepted characteristics of these modes.

The concept of *ta`sir*; as the emotional impact of music, not modes, has not received systematic study in works on Azerbaijani mugham. It was first raised in my dissertation (1984) and further explored in my published work, "On the Ethical and Psychological Concept of Dastgah" (1989). In these works, the various emotional states conveyed in music and the logic of their development in dastgahs, leading to a cathartic artistic outcome, were revealed through an analysis of means of musical expression, through which these emotional states are expressed. The emotional impact of maqam music in the Arabic and Indo-Persian musical traditions has also been examined in various aspects also in studies by Marcus (1993), Racy (2003), Farraj and Sami (2019) and several other authors. The current paper focuses on the phenomenon of variability in the emotional impact of mugham, which determines its artistic function - aesthetic or ethical.

Keynote speech 2

Jean During (French National Centre for Scientific Research, CNRS)

Comparative perspective: dastgâh vs. maqâm, taqâsîm vs. improvisation. Some Iranian specificities.

From a comparative perspective, this article examines the concept of *maqâm*, highlighting its profound historical instability: mode, melodic construction process, narrative sequence, or even canonical “rank” within a repertoire and category of cultural legitimation. In Iran, the term was widely used during four centuries, but disappeared from scholarly terminology at the end of the 18th century in favor of the *dastgâh* system, based on the serialization of *gushe*. In

contemporary times, “*maqam*” has been reconfigured in Iran as a category for promoting regional traditions (Kurdish tanbur, bards of Khorasan), where it refers less to a mode than to a prominent place in a corpus, sometimes structured in suites. This re-semanticization sheds light on the conceptual differences between Persian and Turkish-Ottoman practices: in the former, modal stability and paraphrasing of the model (*radif*) predominate, while in the latter (*taqsîm / bedâhe navâzi*) the art of itinerary is the principle of creativity. The talk concludes with the stylistic specificity of Persian music, linked to a repertoire of ornaments and micro-formulas rather than abstract modal structures.

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Presentations

Zeynab Bagir (Azerbaijan National Conservatory)

The Xoyrat Genre in Iraqi Turkmen Music: Ethnomusicological and Musical Anthropological Context

Xoyrats occupy a significant place in Iraqi Turkmen folk culture, having evolved as both a literary and a musical genre. Transmitted orally from generation to generation, this musical-poetic form reflects the historical memory, socio-cultural environment, and emotional and spiritual worldview of the Turkmen community, and has become one of the principal indicators of their ethnocultural identity. Particularly widespread in Kirkuk and its surrounding regions, xoyrats have over time developed into a symbolic genre representing the cultural self-expression of Iraqi Turkmens. From an etymological perspective, the term xoyrat is believed to derive from the word xori/xor, which initially carried negative connotations associated with the social and religious perception of music and musicians. This attitude influenced the social status of performers in earlier periods; however, over time, xoyrat evolved into a respected and professional performance tradition. As a literary genre, xoyrats are classified into anonymous and authorial examples, while structurally they are divided into pun-based (complete and incomplete) and non-pun forms. In terms of content, xoyrats encompass a broad thematic range, including historical, socio-political, domestic, ritual, love, longing, and separation motifs. As a musical genre, xoyrats belong to the category of long-air (unmetered) forms and are generally based on the modal (*maqam*) system, characterized by a strong improvisational nature. Xoyrat modes have been transmitted through the master–apprentice tradition, and systematic notation has remained limited. In comparison with other long-form genres, xoyrats differ both in poetic structure and melodic development, requiring a wide vocal range and strong expressive capacity from the performer. The tradition of “calling xoyrat” holds an important place in social gatherings and ceremonial contexts, often performed in the form of poetic and musical dialogue. Thus, xoyrats represent a complex, multilayered, and distinctive cultural phenomenon within the musical-poetic heritage of Iraqi Turkmens.

Fakhraddin Bakhshaliyev (Azerbaijan National Conservatory)

The Maqam System and Eastern Pantheism

The Eastern maqam (modus) system encompasses not only the science of music but also Eastern poetry and pantheistic Eastern philosophy. This philosophy systematically and logically orders the manifestations of the Sufi worldview—such as ecstasy, trance, and Divine intoxication—and enriches them with aesthetic categories. Although Eastern maqams, with their measures and boundaries, adhere to the Pythagorean octave principle, the processes occurring within this framework reflect the East's unique dynamics. According to the theory of sacred numbers like 3, 5, 7, and 40, the seventh tone being the final note harmonizes with the seven-stage developmental tendency in Eastern Sufism. The return to the first tone after the final one, arising as a necessity from nature, also philosophically signifies the non-linear representation of the Divine concept in art. The parallels that Eastern pantheism, and particularly the Hurufi philosophy, establish on numbers and letters are simultaneously completed through words and poetry. The unity of form and content created by the poetic text provides the maqam through which a Sufi performing a mugham ascends to the Divine. In this sense, the term “maqam” should also be understood. Each of the seven tones represents an individual maqam. The return from the last, i.e., the seventh maqam, to the first maqam constitutes a circle. This circular structure was once defined by Safi-al-Din al-Urmavi in his work “Advar.” The maqam creativity, in which music, poetry, performance techniques, and ultimately the performer's philosophical methodology all participate together, constitutes a syncretic unity. In Eastern Sufism, this is referred to as the “perfect human” formula. A person cannot always be perfect; however, events such as the art of maqam enable one to attain perfection within a certain temporal framework. Philosophers call this “absolute time.” Yet even this time is relative to the time we experience. This paradox demonstrates that, according to Eastern pantheism, God exists in all times and in all places.

Alexandra Balandina (Ionian University)

Reconfiguring Makam: History, Ideology, and Pedagogy in Greece

This paper offers an ethnographically grounded examination of makam culture in contemporary Greece, approaching makam not as a fixed modal system but as a historically layered, ideologically charged, and pedagogically contested form of musical knowledge. Rather than providing a technical account of makam theory, the paper explores how makam has been translated, re-named, re-contextualized, and selectively transmitted within Greek musical practice and discourse.

The discussion situates makam within the longer history of modal music in Greece from the late nineteenth century onwards, tracing its presence in urban popular and traditional genres such as café-aman repertoires, Smyrnaic song, and early rebetiko. It examines the gradual transformation of makam into δρόμοι, a process that allowed modal practices to persist while weakening the role of seyir, melodic hierarchy, and microtonality. Makam thus survived musically, even as its conceptual and theoretical coherence became increasingly fragmented. The paper further argues that makam constitutes an ideological problem in the Greek context. Closely associated with Ottoman and Turkish heritage, makam destabilizes dominant narratives of musical Greekness and reactivates long-standing East–West tensions. In response, it is

frequently renamed as Byzantine, Smyrnaic, or Anatolian, historicized back into antiquity, or avoided altogether. These strategies reveal makam as a site of cultural negotiation rather than a neutral musical system. Drawing on Greek-language scholarship, contemporary writings, and ethnographic observation, the paper highlights the selective and often ideologically filtered ways in which makam theory is presented today. It concludes by addressing the problem of makam pedagogy in Greece, emphasizing the tension between embodied, practice-based modes of learning and institutional teaching frameworks. An ethnographic perspective is proposed as essential for understanding how makam knowledge is negotiated, constrained, and reconfigured in contemporary Greek musical life.

Giovanni De Zorzi (University of Venice Ca' Foscari)

Frist Results from 2024/2025 Field Research in Istanbul among *Maqām* Musicians

Between 2024 and 2025, I lived in Istanbul, where I conducted field research focused on the current state of Ottoman-Turkish art music. The work is part of the UKRI International project entitled “Maqām Beyond Nation”, dedicated to the art music (*maqām*) of the Middle East and Central Asia, shared between Ca' Foscari University of Venice and the University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). My research began with a series of meetings with the *Bezmârâ* Ensemble, directed by Fikret Karakaya, to prepare the repertoire for the concert to be held in Venice, at the Giorgio Cini Foundation, on 20 November 2024. I then met many brilliant young *maqām* musicians, which led me to share some observations: first of all, the abundance of young masters, often already teaching in conservatories and universities, and the vitality of concert activity in the city; then how many of them play in both art music and Sufi music ensembles, composed in the language of *maqām*, once forbidden but now performed in those very ancient centres (*tekke*), restored and in full activity, thanks to a complex phenomenon of neo-Ottoman “revival”. Finally, the presence of numerous workshops of luthiers and traditional instrument makers is striking, indicating a situation in full bloom.

Polina Dessiatnitchenko (SOAS University of London) and Saeid Kordmafi (SOAS University of London)

Feelings beyond Frontiers: Contemporary Mugham Creativity and its Links to Iranian Classical Music in the Discourses of Azerbaijani Musicians

The creativity of Azerbaijani musicians throughout the last few centuries presents many examples of how local mugham practices are linked to Iranian classical music. Following extensive repertorial interdependencies between the two traditions until the mid-nineteenth century (Djani Zadeh 2002; Sumits 2011) and with extensive collaborations between musicians across the Aras River at the cusp of the twentieth century, which in part led the imitation of Iranian singing in the 1960s (Chelebi 2009), there is a continuation of reliance on Iranian classical repertoires and aesthetics in present-day attempts to reverse Soviet changes. In this paper, we focus on current connections between the two traditions in creativity of Azerbaijani musicians and on

their discourses about this relationship. How do musicians make sense of Azerbaijani mugham as a distinct practice while at the same time acknowledging continuous ties to Iranian music and other maqam repertoires? How does such musical creativity serve as a tool to critically reflect on identity politics? Which theoretical frameworks, such as “cultural” and “musical” intimacies (Herzfeld 1997; Dueck 2013), “intentional hybridization” (Eisenberg 2024), or musical revival (Livingston 1999; Hill, Juniper & Caroline Bithel 2014) would fit to describe these musical exchanges? Specific case studies from individual repertoires and collaborative projects demonstrate which elements of Iranian music serve as desired additions into current practices of mugham musicians. In this paper, we cover examples of altered fretting (within the contested discourse of intervallic structures), new melodic sections and sentences, and reconstructions of entire cycles. Moreover, we question the centrality of feelings in the discourses of musicians, as Azerbaijani musicians often refer to intense emotions as a basis for their musical borrowings. Using words such as “genetic code,” musicians point to the sensual, visceral, affective dimension that guides them when inserting and altering musical features. We conclude the paper with questions about what this affective realm is and why it gains significance for musicians today.

Alexander Djumaev (Institute of Cultural Research and Intangible Culture Heritage of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Uzbekistan)

The shared character of the mythic-poetical and historic-cultural basis of conceptions of Central Asian maqomat and Azerbaijani mughamat

Study of the written sources of the late Middle Ages and the early 20th century confirms the shared character of the mythic-poetical and historic-cultural basis of the Central Asian *maqomat* and Azerbaijani *mughamat*. Art music in both traditions was guided by an analogous code of myths, legends and traditions, and a complex of musical-aesthetic notions on creativity, performing and listening. There were shared legendary figures – founders of similar mythical histories of *maqomat* and *mughamat*. A special place in the musical-poetical tradition of old Turkistan was occupied by the poetry of Fuzuli. His refined and multiciphered poetry embodied Islamic civilization and the “world of Islam”. The world of images and emotions contained in Fuzuli was taught in traditional schools (*maktab*) across these regions. The poetry of Fuzuli, alongside other poets, was also included in modern school programs.

The poem “Laili and Majnun,” and its musical theater performances which drew on *mugham/maqom* music, has special significance for both cultures. The poetry of Fuzuli retained its influence on the world outlook of the intellectual elite and well-educated people of Uzbekistan during the Soviet era, throughout the 1920s -1950s and again later. The 1910s-1920s was a period of active influence from the Azerbaijani musical and musical-theater tradition on the culture of Turkestan, and there was significant interaction between the two musical worlds. In my opinion, a possible hypothesis can explain this phenomenon: both *maqam* traditions can be characterized by categories of Islamic culture, *zohir* and *botin*. Perhaps under the influence of these categories – through the attraction of opposites (among other reasons) – one can explain the deep and long-standing interest among the traditional *maqom* performers of Uzbekistan in Azerbaijani *mugham* music.

Stefan Williamson Fa (University of Cambridge)

Mugham Aesthetics in Transnational Azerbaijani Devotional Recitation

This paper examines how mugham moves across devotional and secular domains, and across national borders, through an analysis of the intertwined practices of *məddahlıq*, *mersiyəxanlıq*, and *rovzəxanlıq* on both sides of the Aras River and beyond. Historical accounts show that, alongside specialist reciters who performed laments in honour of Imam Husayn and the Prophet's family during the Islamic month of Muharram, mourning *məclis* gatherings also functioned as key spaces for the vocal training of prominent *xanəndə*. These settings supported both the development of mugham vocal technique and the transmission of devotional poetry by Azerbaijani literary figures such as Fuzuli, illustrating the permeability of boundaries between religious expression and the emerging mugham canon. Historically and into the present, Azerbaijani *məddah* have drawn upon knowledge of mugham and modal structures, while *xanəndə* have maintained close connections with devotional repertoires, a relationship emphasised in recent scholarship (Dessiatnitchenko 2023). I argue that in the post-Soviet period, the intensified engagement of devotional reciters with mugham aesthetics, together with increased openness to instrumental accompaniment, has contributed to the growing popularity of *məddah* from the Republic of Azerbaijan among Azerbaijani- and Turkish-speaking communities seeking affective and musically sophisticated forms of devotion to the Prophet's family. Based on ethnographic research with reciters and listeners in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Turkey, and the European diaspora, this paper reassesses the conceptual and sonic borders of both mugham and *məddahlıq*. By tracing how these practices circulate across political and religious boundaries, the study highlights the fluidity of mugham as it is reshaped through devotional performance, while showing how devotional contexts, in turn, continue to shape mugham aesthetics, pedagogy, and transnational reception.

Rachel Harris (SOAS University of London)

Musical encounters across the Soviet-Chinese divide

In this presentation I reflect on a project to stimulate musical encounters across Central Asian borders, bridging the 20th century divide between Uzbek and Uyghur maqom/muqam traditions. I focus on the intimate moments of negotiation and creative adaptation as a group of Uyghur and Uzbek musicians, deeply rooted in their respective maqām traditions, devise and perform an original concert repertoire based in musical collaboration. This practice-based creative research experiment is part of a wider project that explores the submerged links between the “national cultures” which dominated the 20th century. Our project uses archival research to uncover their shared histories and works with contemporary musicians to explore the potentials of new cross-border creativity. The process of breaking through the walls of these entrenched national canons is a delicate one, which challenges national sensibilities, embodied habits of performance, and ways of hearing. The research probes historical processes of aesthetic formation and contemporary creative practice in rehearsal through a series of questions. How do shared musical traditions separated by politics for a short period of 100 years come to sound so “Other”? How do musicians go about bridging these

divides, creatively adapting their practice in order to fit together with their collaborators? What challenges, and what kinds of value do they see in these projects of “neighbourly” collaboration? For researchers, this kind of project throws up a set of parallel questions concerning research method and impact. How might we go about capturing and interpreting these moments of encounter, and what work is our research and documentation performing in the various locales where it takes place?

Turan Ibrahimov (Independent scholar)

Aghakarim Nafiz Shirvani: The Voice and Verse that Transcended the Borders of Mugham

This paper examines the multifaceted artistic legacy of Aghakarim Nafiz Shirvani — a master vocalist, composer, and poet whose creative output bridges Azerbaijani mugham performance and classical Oriental poetry. Born in 1948, Nafiz is the author of over 200 tasnifs (mugham songs), more than 60 lyrical compositions, and around 500 poems written in classical aruz meter. His saginamas and ghazals vividly reflect the aesthetic, philosophical, and musical essence of mugham modes such as Shur, Rast, Segah, Mahur, and Humayun, while preserving the legacy of the Shirvan school of singers. Through his ghazals, takhmises, and naziras, Nafiz establishes a poetic dialogue with masters like Hafez Shirazi, Alisher Nava’i, Fuzuli, Seyid Azim Shirvani, Baqi, Nabi, Nishat, and Nabati — thereby connecting Azerbaijani and broader Eastern literary traditions. His Divan, composed in ten bahrs and twenty-eight prosodic patterns, represents a rare phenomenon in classical and modern Azerbaijani literature. His art, uniting voice, word, and melody, transcends cultural boundaries and embodies the spiritual universality of Azerbaijani mugham. This study evaluates the work of Aghakarim Nafiz Shirvani in the global context of Azerbaijani mugham, both across centuries and across countries - in the fields of literature, music, and cultural diplomacy. The songs, tasnifs, and pishrovs he created and restored and performed are included in the study for the first time. The presentation will feature live tasnif singing and recitation of poetry by Aghakarim Nafiz Shirvani himself.

Fardin Mahammadzade (Azerbaijani National Conservatory)

The role of aruz metrical patterns and tafila rhymes in the creation of mugham melody (example of shur mugham)

In mugham art, words and music are intimately related. The role and importance of words for musical improvisation demands further scholarly attention. Undoubtedly, just as mugham has laws that have been developed and standardized over centuries, there are scientific parameters that govern words and poetry. If we take into account the links and harmony between these two types of art, we can see how the theory of aruz, which manifests itself in genres such as ghazal, qasida, etc., is integrated in mugham, and vice versa, how mugham is integrated in aruz. The most significant feature that connects both traditions is the phenomenon of rhythm. Important ideas about the unique role of rhythm and aruz in mugham, and the ways in which they manifest during improvisation, are repeatedly found in research by scholars such as Uzeyir Hajibeyli and Ekrem Jafar. In this article, we have tried to examine the relationship between the rhythmic structure of

mugham melody and the rhythmic features in aruz, as well as the presence of mutual influence on each other. The parameters of metrical patterns and tafila rhymes in aruz bahrs are examined based on musical examples transcribed by the authors. We analyze these notated examples that are based on two performances of shur mugham by Talat Gasimov and Alim Gasimov. In both cases, all the sections performed throughout the dastgah, the ghazals sung in the sections, their bahrs, patterns and tafilas are examined in parallel with musical melodies.

Mehman Mikayilov (Asaf Zeynally Music College)

Historical Development of Maqam in the Caucasus Region

An in-depth study of mugham, which is considered to be the most magnificent monument of Azerbaijani musical culture, plays an important role in familiarizing oneself with the genetic code of Azerbaijani people. Mugham plays a key role in the development of spiritual values, general culture, art and literature of the Azerbaijani people. While mugham is a representative of folklore, over the past 100 years, as a result of the efforts and hard work of the great Azerbaijani composer Uzeyir Hajibeyli, the genre has gone through much development and reached the level of professional music. Azerbaijani composers have created hundreds of songs, arias, romances, concerts, suites and symphonic mughams based on the principle of mugham-maqam. Even today, these works are highly appreciated by our people and are performed and practiced in all countries of the world, along with mugham performances. However, starting from the 1930s, certain prohibitions were imposed on the widespread promotion and performance of mugham for exactly 70 years. Although our mughamat is now valued and protected by the state, the tar and mugham have suffered many blows as a result of the prohibitions of that time. Azerbaijani tar is famous not only in the Caucasus but also throughout the world and the East with its 28 frets. However, in the 1930s, six frets were forcibly cut off. As a result of these prohibitions and the cutting of six frets of the tar, many mughams were eliminated. Today, inspired by the care our state shows for our mugham monuments, we are working to restore these mughams together with master Alim Gasimov, Fergana Gasimova, Gulyaz Mammadova and Gulyanag. We have already fully prepared the original form of the bayati-turk, shur, and bayati-kurd mughams. We are also restoring the separate musical sections and sentences of our current mughams that have been destroyed over time. Today, as a result of the efforts of the genius Uzeyir Hajibeyli, 10 sections are performed as part of shur dastgah. We have restored 70 sections of shur in their original form. In addition, we have increased rast dastgah comprised of 11 sections in standard practice to a cycle with 38 sections.

Kanan Sadigov (Azerbaijan National Conservatory)

Performance Practices of Maqam-Mugham Musical Traditions Across Western and Central Asia

The Azerbaijani mugham tradition is distinguished by its rich performance practices. The Azerbaijani tar occupies a central position here, and its solo instrumental performance features are of great significance. The creative legacy of master

performers and their contemporaries demonstrates a wide range of playing techniques. Of particular interest is the fact that modal musical genres related to mugham exhibit certain similarities in performance practice with Azerbaijani mugham instrumentalism. In this context, the instrumental performance practices of traditional music across Western and Central Asia draw attention. These similarities may arise from the structural features of the instruments, shared performance practices, or the characteristic principles of modal music. The study focuses primarily on plucked string instruments played with a plectrum (or finger) and their performance features. It compares several similar and contrasting aspects of their playing techniques. To achieve this, the analysis examines both right-hand techniques (plectrum or finger) and left-hand techniques (finger placement), which form the core of instrumental performance across these traditions.

Aysu Sadigova (Azerbaijan National Conservatory)

Development and Evolution of Mugham Performance on the Qanun

Among Azerbaijan's national musical instruments, the qanun occupies a special place and is widely used in contemporary mugham performance. Although the introduction of the qanun into formal education was somewhat delayed during the Soviet era in the 20th century, the instrument was nevertheless present in musical practice. The renowned performer Asya Tagiyeva (1935–2011) gained particular recognition for her interpretations of the mugham modes “*Chahargah*” and “*Bayati-Shiraz*.” In 1959, through the initiative of S. Alasgarov, the qanun was included in the ensemble of the Folk Instruments Orchestra that would participate in the Decade of Azerbaijani Literature and Art in Moscow. From 1966 onwards, the instrument was gradually incorporated into the educational curriculum. Mugham lessons for qanun students were taught by tar and kamancha mugham instructors. In this regard, we especially acknowledge the contributions of the tar player, People's Artist and Associate Professor Malik Mansurov, head of the Instrumental Mugham Department at the Azerbaijan National Conservatory. At the 2013 First Instrumental Mugham Competition, the mugham “*Bayati-Shiraz*” and the “*Chahargah Composition*” were performed on the qanun using a new performance technique, influenced by the technical style of the Turkish qanun school. In contemporary practice, several techniques used in tar mugham performance—such as *xum*, *glissando*, *vibrato*, *dumb finger* (*fisca*), and *staccato*—are applied to qanun mugham performance as well. These techniques contribute to conveying the artistic essence of the mugham more accurately. However, excessive or inappropriate use of such techniques is undesirable and requires performers to possess refined taste and deep appreciation of mugham. Qanun performers continue to study mugham modes and attempt to improve performance approaches. In our presentation, we will conduct a comparative analysis of Asya Tagiyeva's 1950s performance of the “*Chahargah*” mugham and contemporary qanun performances of the same mugham using new technical approaches, accompanied by live performance examples.

Mahmoud Salah (Azerbaijan National Conservatory)

Mugham Science: Up Until the Present

This paper discusses the microtonal sounds that are central in the musics of the Middle East and Central Asia, as well as the comparison between musical theory and performance practice of people with common roots and religions. Mugham science is a multifaceted musical system with both historical roots, theoretical structure, and modern research directions. It is a pillar of Azerbaijani musical identity, as well as a living continuation of the ancient modal systems of the Middle East. The development of this science both enriches national musical thought and makes mugham one of the relevant fields of world musicology. Based on the principle of inheritance of musical culture, the article examines the modal, intonational, and structural parallels between Zoroastrian religious hymns, the mugham system, and the recitation of the Quran. The concept of inheritance is used here in a broader sense than intergenerational transmission: it is proposed that cultural codes, intonations, religious singing traditions, and modal principles, although transformed in different periods and religions, survive by preserving their basic melodic structures. Azerbaijani mugham is presented as a cultural system that most stably preserves these ancient intonation layers. As successors of inheritance traditions, our Azerbaijani classical mugham performers have left behind a considerable legacy. This wealth is also in the gramophone records and in the oral knowledge passed down from master to student. The article also pays special attention to the innovations brought to the tar by Mahmud Salah; innovations that also remain faithful to classical mugham performance. Along with the traditional tar, there is currently a mixed musical form consisting of a sequence of mugham pieces, songs, and dances. We can encounter such forms in mugham performances, which are the product of Mahmud Salah's imagination. The unique style of playing the tar, which stands at the forefront of mugham performance, allows for the preservation of previous classical sections and serves as a basis for development.

Nabil Shair (Independent scholar)

Composition vis-à-vis improvisation in Arab *maqām* music: Examining a *mawwāl* piece by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

In contrast to much, though not all, Western music, in which the roles of composer and performer are separate, in Arab *maqām* music the performer functions simultaneously as both performer and composer. This dual position is particularly prominent in improvisational Arab music, as in its preeminent improvisatory genre, the *mawwāl*. In this study, I examine the inherent relationship between composition and improvisation in Arab *maqām* phenomenon by analysing a *mawwāl* piece composed and performed by the renowned musician Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: “*‘Illī Rāḥ Rāḥ.*” Whereas most vocal improvisation is presented in Arab music literature without a defined or definite melodic (or rhythmic) structure, I posit that the *mawwāl* genre has an integral compositional dimension alongside its improvisational one. The methodology implemented in this research is based upon the use of the theory of natural schemata as an analytical framework along with a structural analysis based on a detailed descriptive transcription of the piece. The examination of the *mawwāl* piece by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb reveals defined and quasi-defined structures on the macro and micro levels of the piece, mainly manifested as recurring, defined compositional devices and interrelationships throughout the piece within the allegedly

improvisational frame of the *mawwāl* genre. This study contributes to broadening and maybe revamping both the literary and performing aspects of the “improvisatory” music of Arab *maqām*.

Giultekin B. Shamilli (The State Institute for Art Studies of the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation)

Maqam and Liturgy in the Traditional Music of the Jews of Persia and the Caucasus

This paper presents the results of a recently completed monograph on this topic. The study collects, systematizes, supplements, and corrects data from disparate sources, including encyclopedic and monographic publications in European and Eastern languages. Attention is given to rare documents and audio materials. A special focus is the reconstruction of the maqam modal system, based on an analysis of A.-Ts. Idelson's collection of Eastern Jewish melodies and examples of contemporary religious practice. Observations are made regarding the assignment of maqam modes to specific forms of religious music—both synagogue and extra-synagogue. The millennia-long tradition of associating the prayer cycle with specific psycho-emotional states becomes evident. For example, almost 90% of penitential prayers are sung in maqam *shur*, which at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries was called *hosseini* or *hosseini-e dugah* and is associated with the figure of David. This connection is systematically traced in anonymous Persian treatises on music from the 17th and 18th centuries. Almost all *kinnot* laments are performed in maqam *bayati shiraz*. An examination of the current liturgical practices within the Moscow community of Caucasian Jews from Quba and Derbent reveals a significant transformation of these traditions, marking a notable deviation from their recorded form at the turn of the twentieth century.

Will Sumits (Orient-Institut Istanbul)

Reshaping Resonances: Instrumental Innovation Across the Ottoman Empire, the Caucasus, and Central Asia (1875–1925)

This paper examines innovations in musical instrument construction in the Ottoman Empire, the Caucasus, and Central Asia around the turn of the 20th century. It argues that organological change during this period reflects political, technological, and industrial transformations that reshaped these regions between 1875 and 1925. Focusing on three types of innovation—modification of established instruments, adoption of instruments from neighboring traditions, and the invention of new instruments—the paper situates developments in relation to late imperial reform, urbanization, and emerging national discourses while highlighting the musical ingenuity of performing musicians. The addition of mandals to the kanun in the Ottoman context, for example, responded to changing aesthetic demands and new ensemble settings. In the Caucasus, structural modifications to the Azerbaijani tar standardized tuning and expanded its sonic projection, aligning the instrument with urban concert life and emerging notions of a national mugham canon. Simultaneously, the circulation of instruments such as the ud across the Ottoman world reflected

intensified transregional mobility and a more industrial approach to musical instrument fabrication. Newly invented instruments—such as the Ottoman Nev-Rebab and the Gülnihal—embodied experimental engagements with timbre, range, and modern craftsmanship, while modifications of traditional instruments in Central Asia mirrored emerging national music aesthetics shaped by new cultural policies of the time. By comparing these cases, the paper demonstrates how instrument making functioned as a site where musical ingenuity converged with technological modernity, imperial reform, and nationalist imagination, reshaping makam and mugham traditions across interconnected geographies.

Alexandria Sultan Von Bruseldorff (Azerbaijan National Conservatory)

Preserving the Azerbaijani Mugham Vocal Canon in the 21st Century: Integrating Oral Tradition with Contemporary Vocal Science and Pedagogy

Azerbaijani mugham singers (*khanende*) confront a pressing challenge: preserving an oral master–apprentice vocal tradition amid globalisation, transnational collaboration, and intensive contemporary performance demands. *Khanende* demonstrate exceptional melismatic agility, microtonal nuance, and timbral flexibility—skills that depend on acute auditory perception, respiratory control, vocal stamina, and precise neuromuscular coordination. Prolonged high-intensity performance risks vocal fatigue, degraded resonance, and distortion of melodic ornamentation, jeopardising the aesthetic and ethical tenets of the mugham canon. This study describes the development of an academic course specifically designed for Azerbaijani *khanende*, integrating traditional master–apprentice system with evidence-based voice science, vocal acoustics, physiology, voice health, and pedagogy of the voice. While voice-science curricula exist in Western conservatoires for classical and operatic traditions, this initiative is the first to adapt these pedagogies explicitly for practical mugham performance training in Azerbaijan. Situated within an academic research programme at the Voice Study Centre (University of Essex) the module’s development involves systematic review of historical and contemporary mugham literature, consultation with master *khanende*, observational analysis of performance practices, and iterative pilot testing to refine pedagogical content and instructional strategies. Intended for implementation as a taught academic course through the Voice Research Scientific Laboratory at the Azerbaijan National Conservatory, the course is maturing into a structured syllabus and supporting materials addressing vocal physiology, acoustic production, culturally informed technique, and holistic vocal health. As the first initiative of its kind in Azerbaijan, this course offers a holistic, culturally informed pedagogical model that bridges centuries-old oral tradition of vocal mugham with contemporary voice-science insights, fostering sustainable mastery of the *khanende* art form.

Beyimkhanim Valiyeva (Azerbaijan National Conservatory)

Interpretation of mugham and freedom of improvisation in modern performance: boundaries between tradition and innovation

Mugham art is one of the highest manifestations of Azerbaijani musical culture and remains in continuous flux, inspired by both scientific and spiritual development. In modern times, mugham performance demands not only preservation of the tradition, but also innovation. This paper analyzes the nature of mugham's creative boundaries; relying on perspectives from pedagogy and performance practice, we explore the balance between tradition and innovation. The concept of "interpretation" in modern performance combines the stable melodic structures of mugham with individual emotional expression. The performer's freedom of improvisation is closely related to his or her inner world of feelings, spiritual state and aesthetic taste. However, the freedom of improvisation is not only freedom, but also responsibility - because each new improvisation, while remaining faithful to the spirit of mugham, also carries the mission of modernizing it. This study shows that the freedom of improvisation is the main essence of mugham, but this freedom is not only musical freedom, but also a moral responsibility. This article also discusses the performance styles of creative singers and how they approach mugham. In conclusion, it is noted that the survival and development of mugham art depends on the performer's ability to combine deep respect for tradition with the search for innovation.

Sashar Zarif (York University)

Dancing Mugham: Embodied Methodologies for Understanding Azerbaijani Mugham Through Movement, Memory, and Modal Sensibility

This paper examines Dancing Mugham, an embodied research framework developed by artist-scholar Sashar Zarif within his broader Living Stories methodology, as an innovative approach to understanding Azerbaijani mugham. While mugham is conventionally analyzed through sound, poetry, and modal structure, this project proposes embodiment as an additional analytical lens through which the emotional, cognitive, and affective dimensions of mugham can be accessed. Rather than deriving movement from musicians themselves, Dancing Mugham foregrounds the inherent corporeal processes—breath, attentional focus, expressive posture—that already underlie modal interpretation, positioning the body as a site of perceptual and analytical insight. Based on multi-sited workshops and collaborations in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Iran, Morocco, and the Canadian diaspora, the project demonstrates how embodied engagement provides participants with alternative ways of perceiving modal contours, rhythmic cycles, and affective transitions that exceed auditory perception alone. Workshop observations suggest that kinaesthetic forms of attention enable musicians and audiences alike to engage more deeply with mugham's internal logics, revealing relationships between poetic imagery, modal progression, and embodied sensibility. Here, dance operates not as accompaniment or illustration, but as a methodological tool that renders aspects of mugham's experiential depth intellectually and perceptually available. By situating Dancing Mugham as a transnational, practice-based mode of inquiry, the paper argues that embodied methodologies open new possibilities for dialogue across related modal traditions without obscuring their distinct histories. It contributes to emerging conversations on aesthetic experience, intermodal translation, and the role of embodied knowledge in contemporary mugham and maqam scholarship.