

NAXOS

Fikret  
**AMIROV**

**Shur**

**Kyurdi Ovshari • Gyulistan Bayati Shiraz  
Azerbaijan Capriccio**

**Russian Philharmonic Orchestra • Dmitry Yablonsky**



## Fikret Amirov (1922-1984)

### Shur • Kyurdi Ovshari • Gyulistan Bayati Shiraz • Azerbaijan Capriccio

The Azerbaijani composer Fikret Amirov was born in the city of Ganja (Kirovobad in the former Soviet Union) in 1922. His father Meshadi Jamil' Amirov was an excellent singer and tar player (double-chested plucked instrument of the lute family, widely used in Middle Eastern art music). Fikret Amirov grew up with his father's playing and singing, absorbing Azerbaijani national music traditions and quickly becoming a proficient tar player himself. After finishing the Ganja Music School and College in 1938, he spent a year studying composition at the Baku Music College, and in 1939 was accepted to study composition at the Azerbaijan State Conservatory. His studies at the conservatory were interrupted by the Second World War, but he was wounded at the front and demobilised in 1943, which allowed him to return to his degree in 1944 and complete it in 1948.

Throughout his career Amirov held various administrative posts: he was artistic director of the Baku Philharmonic Society in 1947, director of the Azerbaijani State Theatre of Opera and Ballet between 1956 and 1959, and secretary to the Azerbaijani Composers' Union. He was also active as a composer. In 1965 he received the title of National Artist of the USSR.

Amirov wrote in many genres. His works include operas, ballets, symphonies, symphonic poems, symphonic *mugams*, suites, piano concertos, sonatas, musical comedies, songs, romances, incidental stage music, and film music. His work is highly individual and bears the definite mark of his Azerbaijani roots, although he was also influenced, on his own admission, by Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky. All his works are firmly rooted in Azerbaijani folk-song traditions, and even in his instrumental compositions vocal origins are very prominent. In general his music combines the traditions of his native folk-music with those of Russian and European art music. Amirov's use of the orchestra is notable above all for its clarity and vivid pictorial

imagery. His melody is, in Shostakovich's words, 'the soul of his music'. Expansive and broad, it breathes freely in the symphonic works created by a fusion of classical elements with national idioms.

One of the strongest influences on Amirov's music is that of *mugam* – a highly improvisatory form of art music with specific concepts of musical expression that demand of its performers a very high standard of professionalism. In the Azerbaijani language, *mugam* refers to a tonal system, as well as a large rhapsodic musical form, performed by a *hanende* ensemble, comprising a tar player, kemancha player, and a singer (*hanende*) who also plays tambourine. The singer is a narrator who tells stories about the events of the past and present, often of a highly moral nature.

*Mugam* demands a free, improvisatory form and method of performance, but each section obeys strict rules, which define the order of cadences, melodies, and relationships of the musical tones. The sections of *mugam* alternate with song and dance-like episodes (*tesnifs* and *rangs* respectively).

Azerbaijani *mugams* are products of centuries-old tradition, with counterparts in various Middle Eastern countries. In 2003 UNESCO awarded *mugam* the status of a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Fikret Amirov was the first Azerbaijani composer to fuse classical and his native music in symphonic *mugams*. After Amirov, Azerbaijani composers made wide use of *mugams* to create songs, operas, symphonies, and works in other musical genres.

The symphonic *mugams* *Shur* and *Kyurdi Ovshari* were first performed to great public acclaim in Baku on August 8th, 1948 just a few months after their composition, and later taken up by orchestras worldwide. The following year the 27 year-old composer was awarded a State Prize for the two works. By using the elements of the traditional *mugam* in a symphonic work Amirov created a new symphonic

genre, based on the principle of alternating episodes of a quasi-improvisational idiom and traditional divisions of the *mugam*. The episodes are separated by the rhythmically strict passages in song (*tesnif*) or dance (*rang*) styles, which Amirov based closely on carefully selected authentic folk melodies. In *Shur* and *Kyurdi Ovshari* the free development inherent in the traditional mugam combines naturally with the variational and polyphonic treatment, where two or three themes are often intertwined together. *Mugam* is a solo-voice genre, and Amirov reflected this by giving eloquent solo episodes to almost all the orchestral instruments, most notably the woodwind.

*Shur* and *Kyurdi Ovshari* are individual, colourful, and bold works that display endless variety of rhythmical, harmonic, and melodic invention, as well as the brilliance of Amirov's instrumentation. These two symphonic *mugams* offer a great variety of musical material and dramatic effects, from the light-hearted to the serious, from delicate sounds to powerful surges, from a lyrical, pensive, and almost introspective mood to extroverted splashes of brilliantly effervescent colour. Amirov's youthful, boisterous vigour permeates both works without any flashy or undue show-off element, and all his instrumental and musical effects are conveyed within a controlled structure of formal unity.

First performed in Moscow in 1973, Amirov's third symphonic *mugam Gyulistan Bayati Shiraz* (1971) was an instant hit with the audience. In this work, inspired by the colourful and expressive poetry of Saadi and Hafiz, Azerbaijani traditional *tesnifs* become an integral part of the musical structure and language. The *mugam* style is enriched here by the addition of *ashug*, another form of Azerbaijani art music, which Amirov skilfully combines with the elements of classical music structure.

Amirov shows a true mastery of his always interesting and inventive orchestration. Its diversity is a testament to the composer's boundless imagination, which enables him to take what he needs from a vast reserve of ideas. The sombre mood and dark colours of the introduction very quickly change to Amirov's trademark optimistic, powerfully expressive melodic and harmonic idiom, immersing the audience into the sound-world of his native Azerbaijani music. An energetic ostinato piano drives the work towards its development, whose jarring rhythmical patterns also appear at the end, bringing it to a well-rounded conclusion.

*Azerbaijan Capriccio* (1961), a work of infinite tonal variety and changing colours, also has its roots in folk-music. It opens with an epic and masculine theme in the bass that appears against the harmonic support in the high register of the woodwind and strings. The composer's mastery of orchestral writing and his boundless imagination, steeped in the musical traditions of his native country, effortlessly capture the listener's attention.

Fikret Amirov's works are some of the most expressive, creative, and imaginative compositions for symphony orchestra. His symphonic *mugams Shur*, *Kyurdi Ovshari*, and *Gyulistan Bayati Shiraz* sparkle with brilliant orchestration, rich melodic invention, and expressive instrumental solos. Inspired by *mugam*, the ancient art of sung story-telling with instrumental accompaniment, Amirov's works bring to life colourful images from the rich heritage of Azerbaijani folklore. *Azerbaijan Capriccio* is a scintillating finale to what has been a journey of wonderful discovery of these gems of Azerbaijani music.

Anastasia Belina

## **Russian Philharmonic Orchestra**

The Russian Philharmonic Orchestra is firmly rooted in Russia's rich musical traditions, and has achieved an impressive and outstanding musical quality by drawing its musicians from the highest ranks of Russia's most famous orchestras such as the Moscow Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Russian National Orchestra and the State Symphony Orchestra. The Russian Philharmonic Orchestra was originally formed as a recording ensemble and has gone on to receive high acclaim also for its concert performances. In addition to regular recordings for leading international companies, the orchestra has also undertaken tours to Turkey, Austria, Germany, China, Taiwan, Finland and elsewhere. Dmitry Yablonsky was appointed Music Advisor to the orchestra in 2003. In 2006 the orchestra won a Gramophone Prize for their recording of Shostakovich on Deutsche Grammophon.

## Dmitry Yablonsky



Dmitry Yablonsky was born in Moscow into a musical family. His mother is the distinguished pianist Oxana Yablonskaya, and his father Albert Zaionz has for thirty years been principal oboist in the Moscow Radio and Television Orchestra. Dmitry began playing the cello when he was five and was immediately accepted by the Central Music School for gifted children. When he was nine he made his orchestral debut as cellist and conductor with Haydn's *Cello Concerto in C major*. In Russia he studied with Stefan Kalianov, Rostropovich's assistant, and Isaak Buravsky, for many years solo cello of Bolshoy Theatre Orchestra. Before immigrating to the United States he performed on many occasions in Moscow and many cities of the former Soviet Union. He was finally able, in 1977, to obtain a visa that allowed him and his mother to move to New York, where he became a pupil of Lorne Munroe at the Juilliard School of Music. In 1979, at the age of sixteen, he participated in the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont, the youngest to do so that summer. In 1980 he met Aldo Parisot, distinguished cellist and professor at Yale University, where he spent four years, at the same time furthering his interest in conducting. After graduating from Yale, he spent two years in the artist diploma programme at the Juilliard School with Zara Nelsova. Dmitry Yablonsky made his debut as a conductor in Italy at the age of 26, when he stepped in to replace another conductor at the last minute. As a cellist he has played in major concert halls throughout the world, and in chamber music has collaborated with distinguished colleagues. For four years he has been Principal Guest Conductor of Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra and has conducted many other orchestras, collaborating with leading

soloists. Dmitry Yablonsky has made more than seventy recordings, many of them prize-winning, as conductor and cellist for Naxos, Erato-Warner, Chandos, Belair Music, Sonora, and Connoisseur Society. He has organized international festivals, including the Wandering Stars Festival, which takes place in different countries each year. He is Co-Artistic Director of Qabala Music Festival in Azerbaijan. In 2009 he became an academician of the Independent Academy of Aesthetics and Liberal Arts in Moscow, and also professor of cello at the Baku Academy of Music.

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A prolific composer in many genres, including operas, musical comedies, songs, orchestral works and stage and film music, Fikret Amirov came to prominent public attention at the age of 26, when his two symphonic *mugams*, *Shur* and *Kyurdi Ovshari*, were first performed in Baku in August 1948 to popular acclaim. Based on the Azerbaijani *mugam*, a highly improvisatory form of folk-music which alternates song and dance-like episodes, *Shur* and *Kyurdi Ovshari*, together with Amirov's third symphonic *mugam* from 1971, *Gyulistan Bayati Shiraz*, sparkle with brilliant orchestration, rich melodic invention and expressive instrumental solos. The *Azerbaijan Capriccio*, a thrilling example of orchestral pyrotechnics, also has its roots in folk-music.

Fikret  
**AMIROV**  
(1922-1984)

- |   |                                       |              |
|---|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | <b>Shur (1948)</b>                    | <b>20:50</b> |
| 2 | <b>Kyurdi Ovshari (1948)</b>          | <b>15:50</b> |
| 3 | <b>Gyulistan Bayati Shiraz (1971)</b> | <b>13:39</b> |
| 4 | <b>Azerbaijan Capriccio (1961)</b>    | <b>8:52</b>  |

**Russian Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**Dmitry Yablonsky**

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