Murad Adigezalzade

Murad Adigezalzade was born in 1973 in Baku and in 1980 entered the Bulbul Secondary Special Music School. In 1991 he entered the Uzeir Gadjibeyli Baku State Music Academy and in 1996 won first prize in the National Pianists' Competition, winning the titles of Best Pianist of the Year and Best Musician of the Year. After graduating, he entered the Munich Musikhochschule completing his studies there in 1998 and embarking on postgraduate studies at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory in Moscow. Since 2004 he has been a soloist of the Moscow State Academic Philharmonic. In 2005 he was made Honoured Artist of the Azerbaijan Republic, and in 2007 received the Presidential award. In addition to concert activity that has taken him to Turkey and elsewhere, he is piano professor at the Baku Musical Academy. His repertoire ranges from works by Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Schumann, Schubert, Brahms and Tchaikovsky to Rachmaninov and others. Since 2006 he has been director of the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic.

Joan Rodgers

Photo: Anne-Marie Le Blé

Joan Rodgers is equally established in opera, concert, and as a recitalist. She has appeared in concert with conductors including Solti, Barenboim, Mehta, Harnoncourt, Mackerras, Ashkenazy, Salonen and Rattle. Operatic engagements have included performances at all the major British opera houses as well as in Paris, Munich, Brussels, Amsterdam and Vienna and the Metropolitan Opera, New York. She has also appeared in recitals and concerts throughout Europe and the United States, including at the Edinburgh International Festival, Kings Place, the Wigmore Hall and in Paris, Vienna, Amsterdam, Moscow and New York. Joan Rodgers received the Royal Philharmonic Society award as Singer of the Year for 1997, the 1997 Evening Standard Award for outstanding performance in opera for her performance as The Governess in the Royal Opera's production of *The Turn of the Screw* and an Honorary Doctorate of Music from Liverpool University in July 2005. She was awarded the CBE in the 2001 New Year's Honours List. In 2010 Joan Rodgers took up the post of International Chair in Singing at the Royal Northern College of Music.

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra

Photo: Robert Taylor

Acknowledged as one of Britain's most prestigious orchestras, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra enjoys an international reputation for bringing audiences worldwide first-class performances and the highest possible standards of music-making across a diverse range of musical repertoire. Since its formation, the orchestra has been directed by some of the world's finest conductors, continuing with current Artistic Director and Principal Conductor, Charles Dutoit. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is resident at London's Cadogan Hall, performs regularly at the Royal Albert Hall and gives a prestigious series of concerts each year at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. The orchestra is committed to offering an extensive British regional touring programme and has also toured more than thirty countries in the last five years. The orchestra records extensively for film and television as well as for all the major commercial record companies and also has its own record label. www.rpo.co.uk

Dmitry Yablonsky

Photo: Lluis Costa

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 début 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 Juillard School with Zara Nelsova. Dmitry Yablonsky made his début 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 the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra and has conducted many other orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 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 Azebaijan. 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.

NAXOS

AZERBAIJANI PIANO CONCERTOS

Amirov/Nazirova • Adigezalov Guliyev • Badalbeyli

Farhad Badalbeyli, Piano • Murad Adigezalzade, Piano
Joan Rogers, Soprano
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra • Dmitry Yablonsky

Azerbaijani Piano Concertos: Fikret Amirov (1922-1984) and Elmira Nazirova (b. 1928)

Vasif Adigezalov (1935-2006) · Tofig Guliyev (1917-2000) · Farhad Badalbeyli (b. 1947)

The works on this recording are by four graduates of the Azerbaijani State Conservatoire (now Baku Music Academy), in whose compositions Western music tradition is successfully married to elements of Azerbaijani folk-music and *mugam*. *Mugam* is a centuries-old highly improvisatory form of art-music with specific concepts of musical expression that demand of its performers a very high standard of professionalism. In Azerbaijan *mugam* is performed by a *hanende* ensemble, comprising a *tar* (a double-chested plucked instrument of the lute family, widely used in Middle-Eastern art-music), *kemancha* (a bowed stringed instrument) and a singer (*hanende*), who also plays the tambourine and tells stories of a highly moral nature about the events of the past and present, and love. Because *mugam* is an important element among their compositional resources, all four composers are great musical storytellers, and their skilful use of orchestral colour is notable for its vivid pictures and portraits.

Fikret Amirov grew up listening to his father playing the *tar* and singing. From an early age he absorbed Azerbaijani national music traditions and quickly became a proficient *tar*-player himself. Throughout his career he was artistic director of the Baku Philharmonic Society, having been appointed in 1947, director of the Azerbaijani State Theatre of Opera and Ballet between 1956 and 1959, and secretary to the Azerbaijani Composers' Union. In 1965 he received the title of National Artist of the USSR. Amirov's works include operas, ballets, symphonies, symphonic poems and *mugams*, suites, piano concertos, sonatas, musical comedies, songs, romances, incidental stage music, and film music. His music is highly individual and bears the unmistakeable stamp of his Azerbaijani roots, although he was also influenced, on his own admission, by Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky. In general his music combines the traditions of his native folk-music with those of Russian and European art music. Amirov was the first Azerbaijani composer to write instrumental concertos, and fuse classical and his native music in symphonic *mugams*. After Amirov Azerbaijani composers made wide use of *mugams* to create works in a variety of musical genres.

Amirov's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra after Arabian Themes* was written in collaboration with the prominent Azerbaijani pianist Elmira Nazirova, who was the inspiration behind Shostakovich's *Tenth Symphony*, in the third movement of which her name is musically encoded. The concerto was inspired by Amirov's trip to several Arab countries, where he was struck by how often he heard the melodies and rhythms that were very close to his native Azerbaijani music. He recorded Arab folk-tunes while travelling, later combining them with Azerbaijani melodies in the *Concerto*, seamlessly intertwining them within the framework of the traditional European genre. Saturated with distinctive melodies the *Concerto* is a captivatingly romantic work that demonstrates Amirov and Nazirova's masterful use of orchestral resources. Considerable technical demands are made of the pianist, whose role is akin to that of the *hanende* singer in a traditional *mugam*.

The first subject of the *Allegro* is presented in the orchestra and full-bodied chords of the piano while the second subject, a measured and calm Arabic melody, is embodied within the rich harmonic and orchestral textures. The sombre *Andante sostenuto* is a movement where a subdued dynamic world and delicate orchestral colours alternate with the dramatic and powerful voice of the whole orchestra. The final *Allegro giusto* brings back the vigour of the first movement, and the pianist and orchestra engage in an energetic dialogue, culminating in a dramatic and impressive peroration, a musical summary of the whole work.

Vasif Adigezalov was one of Azerbaijan's most distinguished and prolific composers and performers. He studied the piano with Simuzar Guliyeva and

composition with Kara Karayev. His father, Zulfugar Adigezalov (1898-1963), was a prominent *hanende* singer and, like Amirov, Adigezalov grew up listening to *mugam*, which he later incorporated in his works. Adigezalov was awarded Azerbaijan's highest national awards, People's Artist of Azerbaijan (1989), State Prize (1990), Glory (1995), and Independence Order (2005). Between 1973 and 1983 he held the post of Director of the Baku Music College and taught at the Baku Music Academy from 1961, serving also as Head of the Choral Conducting Department. He was chairman of the Azerbaijani Composers' Union from 1990 until his death in 2006. Among Adigezalov's compositions are operas, operettas, oratorios, cantatas, four symphonies, symphonic poems, four concertos for piano and orchestra, concertos for violin and orchestra and cello and orchestra, songs and romances, instrumental music, incidental music for plays, and film music, that display bold imagery and brilliant melodic invention. Adigezalov was also active as a pianist and performed his own piano works, which form a sizeable part of his distinctive contribution to piano music in Azerbaijan.

Adigezalov possessed an innate and comprehensive knowledge of *mugam*. In his *Fourth Piano Concerto* the melodic potential of Azerbaijani oral music tradition – *ashug* art and classical *mugam* – appear in organic synthesis with contemporary musical techniques, and the dialogue of piano and orchestra acquires truly symphonic proportions. The *Allegro non troppo* is underpinned by pulsating orchestral textures supporting the piano part, which alternates between measured lyricism and energetic display. The *Andante* is introduced by a pastoral call from the oboe, reflected in the piano's calm and peaceful entry. The lyrical and emotional piano part is supported by a wealth of orchestral colour and a rich harmonic language, while the strings are given much freedom to unfold their powerful and flexible melodic lines. The finale arrives with bold, jarring rhythms that immediately bring to mind the piano music of Shostakovich and Prokofiev. After the contrasting lyrical middle section the return of the opening musical material of the finale signals a turning-point that tirelessly and determinedly drives the work to its conclusion.

Tofig Guliyev showed musical talent at an early age, but started to study music only after he had turned twelve, which was considered quite late by the standards of Soviet education. His progress, however, was fast, and from the very early stages of his studies his predilection for vocal music was evident. In 1934 he enrolled into the Azerbaijan State Conservatoire to study two disciplines at the same time: conducting and composition. Shortly before finishing his studies, he became interested in collecting and recording traditional Azerbaijani folk-songs, dances, and *mugams*. Guliyev continued his studies in the Moscow State Conservatoire, where he discovered an interest in popular music and became involved with jazz by playing piano in a band at the "National" hotel. He founded the first State Pop Orchestra in 1939, and co-founded the first jazz orchestra in Baku in 1941. He was active as a conductor and composer, working in the Azerbaijan State Drama Theatre, and writing a number of symphonic and chamber compositions, music for theatre and film, and songs. His music is a fusion of Western traditions, Azerbaijani folk-music, and American jazz. Guliyev was the First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Composers' Union between 1969 and 1979, and was elected Chairman of the board in 1990, holding the post until his death.

The bubbling energy of Guliyev's *Gaytagi – Dance for piano and orchestra,* originally written for piano only in 1958 and subsequently orchestrated in 1980, bursts in from the first notes of the piano and orchestra. The brilliance of the piano part is fully complemented by the orchestra that carries the piano on a wave of excitement until the very end. The rhythmical dance character, lyrical episodes, and pianistic fireworks all ensure an exciting ride for both performer and audience. An unexpected 'Hey' from the players signals the approach of the sparkling conclusion.

Farhad Badalbeyli, the son of the outstanding Azerbaijan director and actor Shamsi Badalbeyli, was born into a famous dynasty of Azerbaijani artists in

Baku in 1947. He came to international attention after taking third place and winning a special prize at the Smetana Piano Competition in Czechoslovakia in 1967, and winning the Vianna da Motta Competition in Portugal in 1968. He was appointed an Honoured Artist of Azerbaijan (1972), People's Artist of Azerbaijan (1978), People's Artist of the USSR (1990), and Laureate of Azerbaijan State Premium (1986). He was a founding member of the Union of Azerbaijan Musicians, which he has chaired since 1989, and has been a member of the foundation Friends of Azerbaijan Culture since 1995. He performs worldwide, and teaches at the Baku Musical Academy. He has been rector of Baku Music Academy since 1991.

The Sea and *Shusha*, programmatic works, depict scenes of Badalbeyli's native Azerbaijan. *The Sea* begins with an undulating orchestral introduction, after which the piano enters with arpeggiated soaring lines. At the mid-point of the composition an orchestral climax gives free reign to the composer's expansive music, and the work ends with the return of the opening ascending figures in the piano. The overall mood of *The Sea* is that of calm grandeur; the author stands back to observe the magnificence of nature and share his awe and respect with his listeners.

Shusha is a vocalise for a singer and orchestra that tells the sad tale of the ancient Azerbaijani city of Shusha, captured by Armenian forces in 1992 but to this day an enduring symbol of Azerbaijani literature and music. Shusha is where not only the composer's father was born, but almost all the most important musicians and composers of Azerbaijan, including Uzeir Gadjibeyli, who wrote the first opera in the East, *Leyli and Mejnun,* Fikret Amirov [Naxos 8.572170] and Vasif Adigezalov.

Anastasia Belina

Farhad Badalbeyli

The pianist and conductor Farhad Badalbeyli was born in 1947 and since 1991 has been rector of Baku Music Academy. The winner of a number of international competitions, he has received various honours in the Soviet Union and in his native Azerbaijan.