UZEIR HAJIBEKOV'S MUSICAL COMEDY "ARSHIN MAL ALAN": ARTISTIC FEATURES, MUSICAL DRAMATURGY, AND NATIONAL DISTINCTIVENESS

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Summary. This article examines the musical comedy "Arshin Mal Alan" by the outstanding Azerbaijani composer, playwright, and public figure Uzeyir Hajibeyov. The focus is on the historical and cultural context of the work's creation, the characteristics of the libretto, musical dramaturgy, national melodies, the system of artistic imagery, and the comedy's social and moral content. The article explores the role of the poetic legacy of Fizuli, a classic of Eastern literature, in shaping the work's lyrical expressiveness. The article analyzes the interplay between the comedic action, vocal numbers, and folk-musical intonations, through which the composer succeeded in creating a distinctive model of Azerbaijani musical theater. Particular attention is paid to issues of freedom of choice, the status of women in traditional society, resistance to outdated customs, and the affirmation of the human right to love and personal happiness. The historical significance of "Arshin Mal Alan" in the development of national musical culture and its artistic value in the context of world musical theater are emphasized.

Keywords: Uzeyir Hajibeyov, "Arshin Mal Alan" musical comedy, Azerbaijani music, Fizuli, libretto, musical dramaturgy, national melody, folk song, musical theater, lyricism, comedic characters, social issues, national traditions.

Introduction The early 20th century marked a crucial stage in the development of Azerbaijani musical culture. During this period, professional music was taking shape, new genres were emerging, the possibilities of the theatrical stage were expanding, and national musical traditions were entering into active interaction with European forms of musical thought. Uzeyir Hajibeyov (1885–1948)—the composer who laid the foundations for Azerbaijani professional opera and musical comedy—played a particularly significant role in these processes.

Hajibekov's work is distinguished by an organic fusion of the national musical language, folk melodic intonations, the Eastern poetic tradition, and the principles of European musical dramaturgy. His works not only enriched the national repertoire but also became a unique artistic reflection of the social and cultural transformations of Azerbaijani society in the early 20th century. The musical comedy "Arshin Mal Alan" composed in 1913, holds a prominent place among them. The premiere took place on October 25, 1913, in Baku, at the Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev Theater.

The relevance of this study stems from the need for a comprehensive examination of a work in which the comedic form serves as a means of exploring social relations, family traditions, and human values. Beneath the plot's outwardly entertaining nature lies a serious message concerning the affirmation of personal freedom, human dignity, and the right to independently choose one's own path in life.

The purpose of this article is to identify the artistic features of the musical comedy "Arshin Mal Alan" and to determine the role of musical dramaturgy, national melody, and literary and poetic sources in revealing the work's ideological content.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to examine the historical context in which the comedy was created, analyze its plot and cast of characters, describe its musical and expressive devices, and determine the work's significance in the development of Azerbaijani musical theater.

1. The historical and cultural context behind the creation of the work. The development of professional musical theater in Azerbaijan took place against a backdrop of intense cultural exchange. The audience's exposure to European opera, the development of dramatic theater, and the work of national educators all contributed to the emergence of new artistic forms. At the same time, folk songs, mugham, dance music, and the rich literary heritage of the East remained the most important sources of creative development. Uzeyir Hajibeyov became one of the first composers to successfully integrate these elements into a professional musical stage work. His opera "Leyli and Majnun", staged in 1908, marked the beginning of the national opera tradition. In the years that followed, the composer turned to musical comedy, which allowed him not only to develop national musical forms but also to address the everyday life of society directly.

Before composing "Arshin Mal Alan", Gadzhibekov wrote the musical comedies "Husband and Wife" and "If Not This One, Then That One". These works already revealed the characteristic features of his

artistry: a social focus, an ironic attitude toward social prejudices, vivid theatricality, and a desire to make music accessible to a wide audience. “Arshin Mal Alan” represented a further development of these artistic principles and demonstrated the maturity of the composer’s thinking. The concept for the work took shape during Gadzhibekov’s stay in St. Petersburg. The composer wrote the libretto himself, drawing on his observations of social life, national traditions, and the dramatic possibilities of the comedy genre. Fizuli’s poetic lines lent certain musical episodes additional lyrical depth and linked the work to classical Eastern literature. The title of the comedy is linked to the image of a fabric merchant who goes from house to house offering customers fabric measured in arshins. This everyday image takes on special significance in the work: the protagonist’s trade becomes a way to overcome the restrictions associated with the traditions governing how young people get to know one another before marriage.

The historical significance of a work is determined not only by its popularity but also by its artistic reinterpretation of familiar social norms. Gadzhibekov approaches national customs not as an immutable system of rules, but as a space where tradition and renewal, family authority and personal feelings, material considerations and a sincere human desire for happiness collide.

2. The libretto and the ideological and thematic content of the comedy. The libretto of “Arshin Mal Alan” is built around a romantic conflict that unfolds through a series of comical situations, misunderstandings, and unexpected plot twists. At the center of the work is Asker, a young, wealthy merchant who wishes to marry for love. However, the existing customs governing courtship and the selection of a bride prevent him from seeing the young woman directly and deciding for himself with whom he would like to spend his life. Asker refuses to accept these customs unconditionally. On the advice of his friend Suleiman, he decides to disguise himself as a fabric merchant and, posing as a peddler, visit the homes where the young women live. Thanks to this, the hero gains the opportunity to get to know his future bride without revealing his true status. While visiting Sultanbek’s house, Asker meets Gulchochra. A mutual attraction develops between the young people, which becomes the foundation for the story’s further development. However, their love faces social obstacles: Sultanbek is unwilling to marry his daughter off to a man he considers a mere merchant, while Gulchochra herself fears that her fate will be decided without regard for her own wishes. The comic conflict arises from the discrepancy between the characters’ actual circumstances and how they are perceived by those around them. Asker, who possesses wealth and high social status, voluntarily assumes the guise of a simple merchant. Sultanbek, on the other hand, strives to preserve notions of status and family dignity, failing to realize that such attitudes stand in the way of his daughter’s happiness. The issue of marriage plays an important role in the work. The author contrasts the formal choice of a spouse—based on family arrangements and financial status—with the free affection that arises between two people. At the same time, the author does not deny the importance of the family as such. His criticism is directed primarily against those social norms that deprive young people of the opportunity to determine their own destinies. This issue is particularly vividly explored through the character of Gulchochra.

The heroine dreams of love, but realizes that her personal desires may be powerless against her father’s will. Her struggles reflect the broader issue of women’s status in a patriarchal society, where a young woman’s fate was often determined by her relatives. The play’s conclusion affirms the possibility of overcoming social conflicts. Once Asker’s true situation is revealed, the misunderstandings are resolved, and the lovers are given the chance to be together. The happy ending follows the conventions of the comedy genre, yet its significance extends beyond a mere plot resolution: it expresses the author’s belief in the need to reform social relations. Thus, the libretto of “Arshin Mal Alan” combines an entertaining plot, comedic intrigue, and social themes. Humor allows the author to critique outdated customs without excessive moralizing, while the love story lends the work emotional coherence.

3. The System of Literary Imagery and Characterization. One of the most significant strengths of “Arshin Mal Alan” is its vivid cast of characters. Each character possesses unique personality traits that are revealed not only through spoken dialogue but also through musical characterization. As a result, the characters come across as living representatives of a specific social milieu, and their actions shed light on various aspects of social life. Asker is the central character of the play, a young merchant in search of true love. At the beginning of the comedy, he feels an inner dissatisfaction despite his material prosperity. His situation demonstrates that wealth alone does not bring a person peace of mind. Asker seeks emotional closeness, sincerity, and the opportunity to determine his own future. His decision to disguise himself as a merchant demonstrates his resourcefulness, determination, and willingness to break the usual rules for the sake of love. Asker’s musical characterization combines lyricism, emotional openness, and elements of comedic expressiveness. His vocal passages convey the transition from initial anguish to the joy of a newfound love. Through the character’s musical portrayal, the composer explores the idea of the inner superiority of sincere human aspirations over external conventions. Gulchokhra is the lyrical center of the

work. Her character is linked to the themes of love, hope, and the desire for independence. The heroine refuses to accept marriage as a predetermined obligation and dreams of meeting her future husband before the wedding. Her meeting with Asker becomes the most significant event in her life, yet the joy of their mutual feelings is accompanied by anxiety about the future. Gulchokhra's musical characterization is dominated by melodic expressiveness, soft intonations, and emotional richness. Her lyrical numbers reveal the young woman's inner world, her doubts, and her anxieties. Thanks to the musical language, the character gains psychological depth and becomes an expressive embodiment of a woman's quest for personal happiness. Sultanbek represents a generation for whom traditional norms and social standing hold particular significance. He cares for his family, yet his views on marriage are limited by his desire to preserve his social status. The character's comic appeal stems from the contradiction between his confidence in his own righteousness and his inability to understand his daughter's true feelings. Jahan, Asker's aunt, embodies practicality and a kind-hearted attitude toward those around her. She strives to arrange her nephew's family life in accordance with traditional expectations, but gradually becomes embroiled in events that reveal the limitations of traditional approaches to resolving marital issues. Suleiman, Asker's friend, plays an important role in the plot. His advice to disguise himself as a merchant sets the main plot in motion. Thanks to Suleiman's resourcefulness, the conflict takes a comedic turn, and the character himself acts as a sort of mediator between the protagonist's desires and existing social constraints. Asya and Telli round out the female cast of characters. Their lines, interactions with Gulchochra, and involvement in comedic situations lend the work liveliness and variety. Through these characters, the composer broadens the picture of everyday life, depicting various reactions to love, family rules, and social expectations. Veli, Asker's servant, is one of the main sources of comic action. His behavior and interactions with the other characters create a contrast between the lofty emotions of the main couple and the mundane, often amusing situations. His character embodies folk spontaneity, vitality, and the desire for a happy resolution to conflicts—a hallmark of comedy. Together, the characters form a multifaceted system in which lyrical and comic images complement one another. This structure allows Gadzhibekov to reveal not only the characters' individual experiences but also the social relationships that shape their behavior.

4. Musical Playwriting and National Distinctiveness. The musical drama "Arshin Mal Alan" is of particular interest from the perspective of the development of Azerbaijani musical theater. The composer creates a work in which music is not merely an accompaniment to the action on stage. It plays a role in revealing characters, conveying psychological states, shaping comedic situations, and developing the central conflict. One of the most important features of the musical language of the comedy is its reliance on national melody. The work employs melodic phrases, rhythmic patterns, intonational formulas, and expressive devices characteristic of Azerbaijani folk music and associated with the national vocal tradition. At the same time, the composer does not limit himself to a literal reproduction of folk models, but creatively reworks them in accordance with the demands of musical dramaturgy. The national character of the music is manifested first and foremost in the natural flow of melodic development, the expressiveness of the vocal lines, and the close connection between the musical material and speech intonation. The melodies are memorable and accessible, which allows them to take on a life of their own beyond the theater stage. The interplay between lyrical and comedic episodes plays an important role. Lyrical numbers reveal the characters' inner worlds, while ensembles and dynamic stage episodes help drive the plot forward. The alternation of emotionally contrasting musical passages ensures the work's cohesion and sustains the listener's interest. The vocal characteristics of Asker and Gulchochra are of particular importance. Their musical parts reflect the development of their love—from the initial longing for closeness to the joy of mutual recognition and the anguish of a possible separation. The individualization of the vocal lines allows the characters' personalities to be distinguished while simultaneously emphasizing the commonality of their emotional world. The musical characterizations of the secondary characters serve an equally important function. Their comedic expressiveness is based on rhythmic agility, specific intonation, and the alignment of the music with their on-stage behavior. Thanks to this, the characters are easily recognizable, and individual episodes acquire their own artistic completeness. The work reveals an interplay between national musical tradition and the principles of European musical theater. From the European operetta, the composer draws upon dynamic plot development, the alternation of solo and ensemble numbers, comedic misunderstandings, and a happy ending. National distinctiveness is evident in the melodic language, depictions of everyday life, the intonational structure of the vocal parts, and the nature of musical expression. Arias, arioso passages, duets, and ensembles occupy a special place. They not only create musical variety but also facilitate the transition from external action to the characters' inner worlds. Researchers note that the significant role of arias and arioso passages distinguishes "Arshin Mal Alan" from Gadzhibekov's earlier musical comedies and brings the work closer to the principles of comic opera. Thus, the musical dramaturgy

of the comedy is based on the organic interplay of national melos, lyrical expressiveness, and theatrical dynamics. It is precisely this combination that has ensured the work's enduring popularity and allowed it to occupy an important place in the history of Azerbaijani musical culture.

5. The Role of Fizuli's Poetry in the Artistic Concept of the Work. The connection between "Arshin Mal Alan" and classical Eastern literature is of particular significance for understanding its artistic nature. The poetic foundation of certain vocal episodes draws on the verses of Muhammad Fizuli—an outstanding 16th-century poet whose work occupies an important place in the history of Azerbaijani literature. Fizuli is known for the depth of his lyrical sentiment, his philosophical reflection on human destiny, and his focus on the inner world of the individual. In his poetry, love is not merely an emotional experience but also a unique way of comprehending human relationships, inner conflicts, and spiritual values. Hajibekov's adaptation of Fizuli's verses allows him to combine a stage comedy—modern for the early 20th century—with a centuries-old poetic tradition. The literary legacy of this classic poet lends the lyrical episodes additional expressiveness and broadens the emotional range of the work. The poetic text helps reveal the characters' inner lives, creating a contrast between lofty emotions and the comical circumstances of the plot. It is particularly important that the poetic lines do not exist in the comedy in isolation from the music. Their artistic impact is revealed through vocal performance, intonation, and interaction with the stage situation. Musical interpretation allows for a fresh presentation of classical poetry, preserving its emotional depth while simultaneously subjecting it to the laws of theatrical dramaturgy. At the same time, it is important to distinguish between the authorship of the libretto and the literary sources of the vocal texts. The libretto for *Arshin Mal Alan* was written by Uzeir Hajibekov, who independently developed the plot, dialogues, and cast of characters. Fizuli's verses are used as poetic material for individual musical episodes. This combination of original dramaturgy and classical poetry reflects Hajibekov's characteristic approach to national culture. The composer does not pit contemporary performing arts against tradition but rather seeks to reveal its new expressive possibilities. As a result, the work acquires a multi-layered quality: the comedic plot draws on everyday life, while the poetic material links it to the philosophical and aesthetic ideas of classical literature. Consequently, Fizuli's role in the artistic concept of *Arshin Mal Alan* is defined first and foremost by poetic expressiveness and cultural continuity. His poems enrich the lyrical aspect of the work, while Gadzhibekov's musical interpretation demonstrates the potential for the synthesis of literature and music in national theater.

6. The Social Significance and Historical Role of the Musical Comedy. The social focus of *Arshin Mal Alan* is one of the main reasons for its artistic significance. The comedy reflects social contradictions related to family relationships, social status, marriage customs, and restrictions on personal freedom. Gadzhibekov uses humor as a means of critically examining reality. Comic situations arise not only from external circumstances but also from the discrepancy between the characters' perceptions of life and the actual state of affairs. It is precisely this discrepancy that allows the author to reveal societal contradictions without direct moralizing. The issue of choosing a spouse independently proves to be particularly relevant. In the work, the traditional matchmaking process is viewed from the perspective of young people who seek mutual affection and a personal role in determining their own destinies. Through the story of Asker and Gyulchokhra, the idea is reinforced that family happiness must be based on sincerity, mutual respect, and voluntary consent. At the same time, the comedy is not limited solely to a critique of old customs. It shows that social norms can change when people begin to recognize the value of personal feelings and reevaluate their traditional beliefs. The happy ending has become a symbol of this renewal, although the comedic form naturally softens the sharpness of real social contradictions. The work's significance is also evident in its impact on the development of national musical theater. Hajibekov created a stage form in which the national musical language is organically combined with a sophisticated system of vocal characterizations and dynamic dramaturgy. This expanded the artistic possibilities of musical comedy and contributed to the formation of enduring traditions in Azerbaijani professional theater. The work's international popularity attests to its ability to transcend national and linguistic boundaries. Although the plot is based on specific historical and social circumstances, the themes of love, freedom of choice, and human dignity are universal in nature. Thanks to this, the comedy has found a life on stage beyond Azerbaijan's borders, has been adapted for the screen on multiple occasions, and has become part of the cultural memory of several generations of audiences. In the modern context, "Arshin Mal Alan" retains its significance not only as a monument to musical culture but also as a work that prompts reflection on the relationship between tradition and personal freedom. Its artistic value is defined by the unity of music, drama, national flavor, and humanistic content.

Conclusion. Uzeyir Hajibeyov's musical comedy *Arshin Mal Alan* is an outstanding work of Azerbaijani musical theater, in which national artistic traditions have been further developed. The composer

succeeded in combining an entertaining comedic plot, a vivid cast of characters, lyrical depth, and an original musical language, creating a work of significant artistic and social value. The analysis conducted leads to the conclusion that the drama of the comedy is based on the conflict between sincere human feelings and social norms that restrict individual freedom. The story of Asker and Gulchochra reveals the human desire to determine one's own destiny and to build family relationships based on love and mutual respect. Comedic situations serve as a means of critiquing outdated notions of marriage, social status, and the role of women in society. Musical dramaturgy is the most important element of the work's artistic concept. National melodies, expressive vocal parts, ensemble passages, and a blend of lyrical and comedic elements ensure a harmonious unity between the music and the stage action. Gadzhibekov does not merely use folk motifs; he creatively transforms them, creating a distinctive musical style in which national identity is combined with the principles of European musical theater. Equally significant is the work's connection to the classical poetry of Fizuli. The use of his verses in individual vocal episodes expands the emotional range of the comedy and underscores the continuity between the literary heritage of the past and the professional musical art of the early 20th century. The historical significance of *Arshin Mal Alan* lies in the play's contribution to the development of Azerbaijani musical comedy, the strengthening of national theatrical traditions, and the promotion of Azerbaijani culture abroad. The play's enduring popularity on stage attests to the universality of its humanistic ideas and the expressiveness of its musical language. Thus, "Arshin Mal Alan" should be viewed not only as a striking example of national musical comedy but also as a significant artistic statement about individual freedom, human dignity, and the transformative power of love. The work remains relevant, continuing to occupy an important place in Azerbaijan's musical heritage and global theatrical culture.

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Rezyume. Ushbu maqolada atoqli ozarbayjon bastakori, dramaturgi va jamoat arbobi Uzeyir Hojibekovning "Arshin mal alan" musiqali komediyasi haqida so'z boradi. Asar yaratilgan tarixiy va madaniy kontekst, libretto xususiyatlari, musiqali dramaturgiya, milliy ohanglar, badiiy obrazlar tizimi, komediyaning ijtimoiy va axloqiy mazmuniga asosiy e'tibor qaratiladi. Maqolada Sharq adabiyotining mumtoz namoyandasi Fuzuliy she'riy merosining asar lirik ta'sirchanligini shakllantirishdagi o'rni ko'rib chiqiladi. Maqolada kompozitorning Ozarbayjon musiqali teatrining o'ziga xos modelini yaratishga erishgan komediya harakati, vokal raqamlari va xalq musiqiy ohanglarining o'zaro ta'siri tahlil qilingan. Tanlash erkinligi, an'anaviy jamiyatda ayolning mavqei, eskirgan urf-odatlarga qarshilik ko'rsatish, insonning sevgi va shaxsiy baxtga bo'lgan huquqini tasdiqlash masalalariga alohida e'tibor qaratilgan."Arshina mal alan"ning milliy musiqa madaniyati rivojidagi tarixiy ahamiyati va uning jahon musiqali teatri kontekstida badiiy qimmati ta'kidlanadi.

Резюме. В данной статье рассматривается музыкальная комедия "Аршин мал алан" выдающегося азербайджанского композитора, драматурга и общественного деятеля Узеира

Гаджибекова. Основное внимание уделяется историческому и культурному контексту создания произведения, особенностям либретто, музыкальной драматургии, национальным мелодиям, системе художественных образов, а также социальному и нравственному содержанию комедии. В статье рассматривается роль поэтического наследия Физули, классика восточной литературы, в формировании лирической выразительности произведения. В статье анализируется взаимодействие комедийного действия, вокальных номеров и народно-музыкальных интонаций, благодаря чему композитору удалось создать уникальную модель азербайджанского музыкального театра. Особое внимание уделяется вопросам свободы выбора, статуса женщины в традиционном обществе, сопротивления устаревшим обычаям, утверждения права человека на любовь и личное счастье. Подчеркивается историческое значение “Аршина мал алана” в развитии национальной музыкальной культуры и его художественная ценность в контексте мирового музыкального театра.

Kalit so‘zlar: Uzeir Gajibekov, “Arshin Mal Alan”, musiqali komediya, ozarbayjon musiqasi, Fuzuliy, libretto, musiqali dramaturgiya, milliy kuy, xalq qo‘shig‘i, musiqali teatr, lirika, komediya qahramonlari, ijtimoiy muammolar, milliy an’analar.

Ключевые слова: Узеир Гаджибеков, “Аршин Маль Алан”, музыкальная комедия, азербайджанская музыка, Физули, либретто, музыкальная драматургия, национальная мелодия, народная песня, музыкальный театр, лирика, комедийные персонажи, социальные проблемы, национальные традиции.