

# OIL, TRADE, AND MUSIC: PENETRATION OF EUROPEAN MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND MUSIC TO AZERBAIJAN AND ITS SUBSEQUENCE

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## Abstract

Business has played its part in shaping Azerbaijan's musical culture. The influx of money and Europeans to Baku during the oil boom of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries generated demand for Western musical instruments and paved the way for their diffusion in Azerbaijan. Therefore, when speaking of the rapid development of music education and professional music-making of the Western tradition in Azerbaijan, one should not lose sight of the fact that this would have been very difficult if there had not been sufficient saturation of the market with pianos, violins, etc. Materials from the collection of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan contain information on music shops in Baku, where gramophones, records, and sheet music were sold alongside musical instruments.

## Keywords

Oil, Music, Jindřich Jindříšek, Musical instruments, State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is one of the birthplaces of the oil industry. There is evidence of petroleum being used in trade as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Information on the production of oil on the Absheron Peninsula (where Azerbaijan's capital city of Baku is located) in the Caspian Sea can be found in the manuscripts of different authors, such as Venetian merchant and traveler Marco Polo (13<sup>th</sup> century), Turkish scientist and traveler Evliya Çelebi (17<sup>th</sup> century), German diplomat and traveler Adam Olearius Oehlschlegel (17<sup>th</sup> century), and Engelbert Kaempfer, Secretary of the Swedish Embassy to Persia (17<sup>th</sup> century).

However, real oil boom began in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1905, the English James Dodd Henry wrote: "Baku is greater than any other oil city in the world. If oil is king, Baku is its throne" (Henry, 1905: 5). Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky visited Baku in 1887 on his way to Tiflis (Tbilisi, Georgia, then also a part of the Russian Empire), where one of his younger brothers, Anatoly Tchaikovsky, was the prosecutor of the Tiflis District Court then. From Tiflis, on 30 May 1887, he wrote to his friend and benefactor Nadezhda Filaretovna von Meck:

"My dear Friend, ...This city, surprisingly for me, has been charming in all the senses, i.e. managed correctly and nice, clean, and at the same time very special, as an Eastern (namely Persian) element has been dominating there, and therefore you feel as you are somewhere at the opposite side of the Caspian sea. The only trouble is the lack of the green and verdure. Because of permanent drought and stony soil the brilliantly planned Mikhaylov Garden has become a sad view of withered trees and absolutely yellow grass. Swimming is wonderful. The next day I went to see areas where oil is produced and where hundreds of oil wells and fountains throw out hundreds of barrels of oil every minute. This is a grand, though grim spectacle. On the eve of my arrival a huge new gusher

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began to beat on the land owned by Rothschild...” (Zhdanov & Zhegin, 1936: 479, translated from Russian by the author).

Between 1898 and 1901, Baku produced more oil than the USA. By 1901, half of the world’s oil was produced from 1900 wells, located within 6 square miles (Blau & Rupnik, 2019: 34–43).



**Figure 1: Irina Zagivorcheva (Moscow), ‘The Opera and Ballet Theatre in Baku’. Watercolour on paper, 37 × 47 cm, 2009. (Courtesy of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan).**

The exploration of Azerbaijan’s rich oil deposits in the 19th century – the beginning of the 20th century and fast development of oil industry – helped drive a rapid economic boom and attract large numbers of Europeans, inspired by the possibility of rapid enrichment. This became very attractive not only for local oil barons but also for foreigners, for example, the Rothschilds, a Swedish businessman; industrialist and investor Robert Nobel; and others.

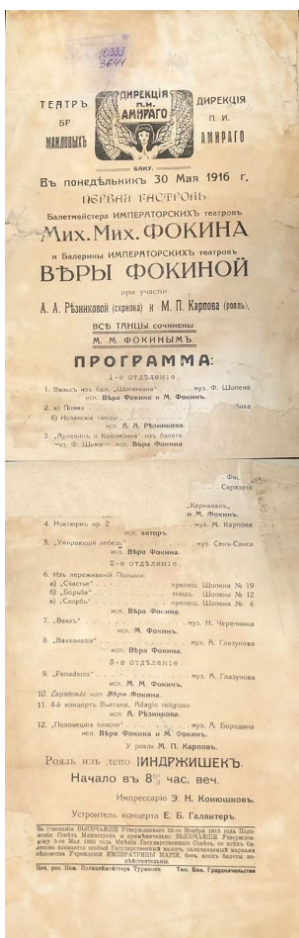
Robert Nobel arrived in Baku in March 1873, where he bought an oil refinery, and in 1875, purchased a large portion of the Balakhani Oil Field, where he built a new refinery. Together with his brothers Ludwig and Albert, he established the Nobel Brothers Petroleum Production Company in 1877, Branobel in 1879, which in a short period of time became one of the best known in Russia and Europe in the production, refining, and transport of oil products (Baku oil), and in the sale of paraffin it pushed the American firm Standard Oil completely out of the European market (Seyidzade, 2011). So, Robert Nobel became the pioneer in the Russian oil industry, when Azerbaijan was part of the Russian Empire. Huseynova writes:

“Westerners streamed into the country, creating a demand for Western music and concert life. Simultaneously, a native-born bourgeoisie emerged who invested their fortunes in the development of national music and culture. Azerbaijan’s oil barons supported many projects that sought to bring the splendors of Western civilization to Azerbaijan. Businessmen brought in Russian and European architects, who designed hundreds of buildings [...] Among these buildings are the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic Hall, erected in 1911, and was the Azerbaijan State Opera and Ballet Theatre, which was constructed in 1911 and was the first opera house in the Middle East” (Huseynova, 2016: 9).

It should only be noted that the two mentioned buildings, ‘Azerbaijan State Philharmonic Hall’ and the ‘Azerbaijan State Opera and Ballet Theatre’, erected in the 1910s, were not called ‘state’ that time as it was yet the Russian Empire reigned by the tsar. The former building was called ‘Dvoryanskoye Sobraniye’ (The Nobility Gathering). After 1920 when the Soviet power was established in Azerbaijan which became a republic of the Soviet Union, The Nobility Gathering became ‘The Society of City and Village Union’ and only later acquired its last title – the State Philharmonic Hall. The Theatre also became ‘the state’ since the beginning of the 1920s (Figure 1).

Local oil magnates, also imbued with European culture, have contributed to the development of musical art. Haji Zeynalabdin Taghiyev (1838–1924), an Azerbaijani industrialist, millionaire, and patron of the arts, built a theatre and financed the vocal training of the talented young singer Shovkat Mammadova in Italy. On her return, she presented a recital in his Theatre in 1912, becoming the first Muslim female opera singer.

Baku’s “social and cultural life featured an impressive variety of concerts and recitals of Russian and European music... many Italian opera singers and French and German instrumentalists” (Huseynova, 2016: 12). In the first quarter of the 20th century, Baku was visited by a number of musicians and dancers who presented classical Western music. Most of them were from Russia – the outstanding Russian opera singer Feodor Chaliapin in 1891, 1900, 1903, 1910, and 1915; composer Sergei Rachmaninoff in 1911, 1913, and 1915; ballet dancers of imperial theatres such as ballerina Yekaterina Geltzer in 1915; the father of modern ballet Michail Fokin; Michel Fokine and his wife ballerina Vera Fokina in 1916; one of the greatest pianists of the 20th century, Vladimir Horowitz in 1924; and many others (Figure 2).



**Figure 2: Mikhail and Vera Fokin's tour programme in Baku, 30 May 1916, noting that the piano is from Jindřich Jindřišek's depot. (Courtesy of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan).**

Baku was also visited by other European and American musicians and dancers. The American dancer Isadora Duncan was one of them, who appeared here in 1923, performing her dances accompanied with music by Gluck, Schubert, Brahms, and Chopin (Duncan & Macdougall, 1929: 226).

An excerpt from the book based on her memories presents a combination of intertwined topics of discussion, such as Baku, Oil, Westerners, and Western music and musical instruments:

“She decided to go on to Baku, the famous oil city that lies on the shores of the Caspian Sea. Arriving in Baku she went to the Hotel d’Europe. When she entered, the proprietor and his wife came forward to greet her in German and bid her welcome. Many, many years before, they said, they had both seen her in Germany. The dancing of the “schone” American girl was one of their most cherished memories. During her two weeks stay in the oil city, Isadora gave several performances with orchestral accompaniment. She found, however—as always—that most of the receipts went to pay the musicians. Yet she would not, if she could help it, dance to a piano. For one of her recitals in Baku she rehearsed with an eminent local pianist. The day of her performance, however, she decided that she must have orchestral support for her programme. Even the free performance which she gave for the workers of the oil-fields was to the accompaniment of a full-sized orchestra. This unforgettable performance was given in a workmen’s club in the Tchorny Gorod (Black Town). Into the long, low-ceilinged room two thousand men and women crowded; two thousand toil-worn humans with oil-grimed faces, who had never had the luxury of hearing a symphony orchestra. [...] Through the kindness of her German hosts at the hotel, she obtained the little orchestra from the roof garden and with their accompaniment rehearsed Irma” (Duncan & Macdougall, 1929: 221–222).

Tchorny Gorod is Russian, meaning Black Town. It is the name of the eastern district of Baku, formerly its suburbs, where the Nobel brothers’ oil industry was concentrated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early

20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The name comes from the fact that the land there and the walls of the houses were black of oil.

Of course, all concert activities could only take place with enough musical instruments of the Western tradition. European musical instruments such as pianos, harmoniums, mandolins, accordions, and others began to arrive in Baku and other Azerbaijani cities, and many music shops opened, selling printed sheet music, gramophones, and gramophone records with recordings of famous musicians, both local and foreign. All this led to the creation of a new culture of music-making in Azerbaijan. One of the visiting businessmen was Jindřich Jindříšek (1857–1924), who already had his own business in Kiev, established it also in Baku, opening the depo of musical instruments and the shop (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Envelope of records sold in Jindřich Jindříšek's shops in Kiev and Baku. (Courtesy of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan).**

The store often provided C. Bechstein concert grand pianos for concerts held in the Baku Public Assembly and St. Nina's Institution, which is noted in the programmes. The following brands of harmoniums were available for sale: D. Karl, Vivre Organ Co., Estey Co., Nidgem, and Ginkem. The store had a workshop for mending, polishing and tuning pianos, and uprights and harmoniums "under the supervision of a master specialist" (Kaspiy, 1907). In addition to instruments, Jindříšek sold sheet music, gramophones, accessories, and records.

The *Catalogue of Devices and Accessories* of the Parisian company, the 'Pathé Brothers', advertised a novelty - gramophones without horns:

"In view of the fact that, up to the present time, many buyers and lovers of talking machines have a certain distaste for horns and have a prejudice against the external form of the cases, we ... willingly join the new trend, the new salon instruments, ... which, in appearance, are difficult to mistake for talking machines. In these apparatuses the horns are concealed in the housings, so that they serve both as sound amplifiers and resonators... By opening and closing the door of the apparatus the sound can be amplified or attenuated as desired. (Catalogue of Devices and Accessories Manufactured by the Company 'Pathé Brothers'" 1910/1911 DK No. 14128, page 18).

Foreign companies such as Pathé Records, Gramophone Records, Sportrecords, Extraphon, and others, driven by commercial interests, recorded Azerbaijani musicians, thereby intending to preserve their voices for future generations. These same companies produced, along with European music, records of Azerbaijani Mughams (Naroditskaya, 2005) and excerpts from the first stage works of Azerbaijani composers, such as Zulfugar Hajibeyov's (1884–1950) musical comedies 'The Fifty-Year-Old Youngster' (1909) and 'The Married Bachelor' (1911), as well as devices for listening to them. All this was sold also in shops, such as 'The Oriental Lyre' [Восточная лира] in Baku and

‘America’ [Америка] in Baku and another Azerbaijani city, Quba, which offered a large selection of guitars, violins, and grand pianos from various European and American firms: C. M. Schroeder, J. Becker, Diederichs Brothers, F. Mühlbach, K. Bechstein, J. Feyrich, Rud. Ibach Sohn, or Görs & Kallmann (Figures 4–7).

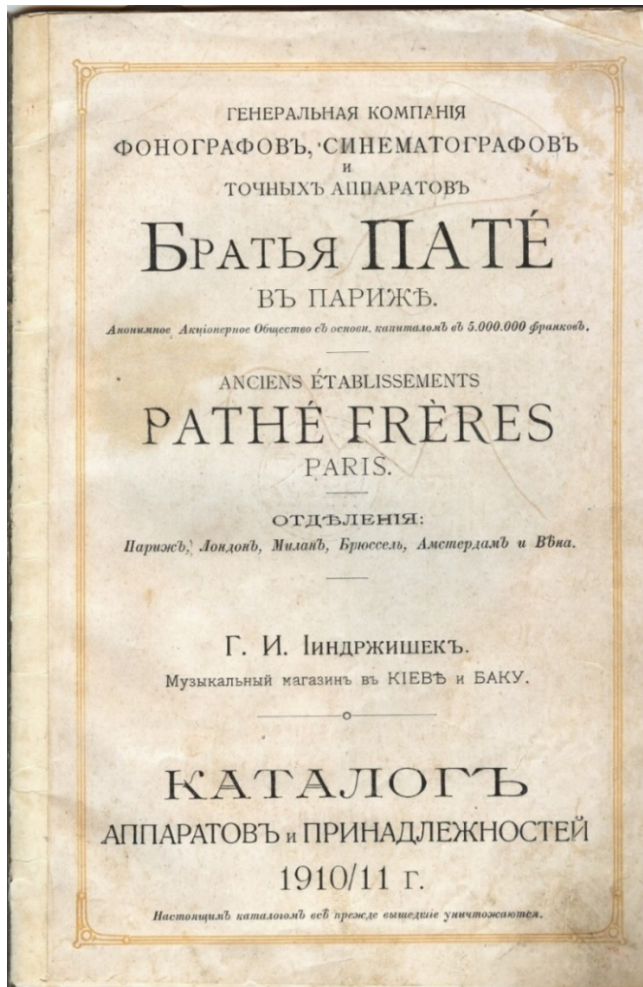


Figure 4 (to the left): Catalogue of sound reproduction devices by Pathé Frères (Paris) sold in J. Jindříšek’s shops in Baku and Kiev, 1910. Figure 5 (to the right): Gramophone Records audio playback unit (with hidden “horn”), 1910s.



Figure 6 (to the left): Record envelope of *Oriental Lyre* shop where gramophones, sheet music, violins, guitars, balalaikas, pianos, and grand pianos were also sold. Figure 7 (to the right): Record envelope of America shops in Baku and Quba. (Photographs on this page by courtesy of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan).

The first pianists, especially Muslim women, appeared, performing both European repertoire and the Azerbaijani Mughams on the piano. The saturation of the market with orchestral instruments paved the way for Azerbaijanis to quickly acquire the knowledge of the world musical culture and for the rapid development and vivid achievements of Azerbaijan's original school of composition, which, based on national traditions, was able to assimilate the centuries-long historical path of Western music within several decades.



Figure 8: Announcement in the newspaper *Kaspiy* (11 January 1908):

Opera in the Muslim language  
G. Z. A. Taghiyev Theatre

On Saturday, 12 January 1908, for the first time on the Muslim stage will be presented by the opera actors of the Theatre Section of the Society "Nijat" under the supervision of the authors and with the participation of amateurs for the first time in Muslim language the opera

*Leyli and Majnun*

In 5 acts and 6 scenes altered from Fizuli's poem and set to music by brothers U. and J. Hajibeyov. The Oriental orchestra is conducted by Kurban. With new settings and costumes sewn especially for this piece.

Closed boxes are available for Muslim ladies. Starts at 8½ p.m. sharp. Tickets are available on the day at the offices of *Nijat* prior to the event from 10-2 and from 5 until the end. [...] (Courtesy of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan).

The State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan holds in its collections many artifacts and documentary evidence relating to the indirect influence of the oil business on the formation of a new musical environment and education in Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani musicology has repeatedly noted that "Russian and Western European art began to intensively penetrate into Azerbaijan since the late nineteenth century and especially the twentieth century" (Abasova, 1960: 20). However, the issue of penetration of musical instruments of European tradition had remained unreported. For the first time, it was raised by me. The rapid spread of them and the development of the increasingly popular musical education system of the European tradition ran in parallel and had a mutual influence on each other. The existence of several music shops and a large number of musical instruments of various firms supplied to Baku, whose population in 1903 was only 154,256, and Azerbaijan bears witness to the fast cultural development, which was undoubtedly a consequence of unprecedented economic development.

This resulted in the achievements of the Azerbaijani music. Azerbaijan became the fatherland of the first opera in the wide territory of Muslim East, when composed by a 22-year-old Uzeyir Hajibeyov opera *Leyli and Majnun* was performed in Baku on 12 January 1908, which corresponds to the 25 January 1908, according to the modern calendar in use. U. Hajibeyov thus became the founder of the Azerbaijani composed music (Figures 8 and 9). His opera was also the second opera in the wider East, while the first was the Chinese phenomenon of the Beijing opera.



**Figure 9: Uzeyir Hajibeyov in 1916. Other spellings of his name and surname: Uzeyir Hajibeyov, or Hajibeyli. (Courtesy of the State Museum of Musical Culture of Azerbaijan).**

The first Muslim male and female singers trained in *bel canto* (in Italy) were also the Azerbaijani: Bulbul (1897–1961) and Shovkat Mammadova (1897–1981). The establishment of the State Conservatory in 1921 paved the way for further achievements of Azerbaijani art music and music performers, education of the traditional singers and instrumentalists, and the development of musicology and ethnomusicology. Many of these achievements might not have taken place, or would have come about later, had it not been for the economic preconditions (Seyidzade, 2011) which had ensured that Azerbaijan, and particularly Baku thanks to its oil production, was saturated with European-made musical instruments, and that society had the purchasing power to acquire them.

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