

The Art of Azerbaijani Ashiq

Ashiqs combines poetry, storytelling, dance and vocal and instrumental music into a traditional performance art that stands as a symbol of Azerbaijani culture. Characterized by the accompaniment of the saz, a stringed musical instrument, the classical repertoire includes 200 songs, 150 literary-musical compositions known as dastans, nearly 2,000 poems in different traditional poetic forms and numerous stories.

The regional variations may include other musical instruments, but all are united by a common national language and artistic history. Ashiqs take part in weddings, friendly parties and festive events throughout the Caucasus and appear on concert stages, radio and television, sometimes synthesizing classical melodies with contemporary ones as they continue to recreate their repertoire.

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Their art is considered an emblem of national identity and the guardian of Azerbaijani language, literature and music. Even as Ashiqs represent the consciousness of a people, they also help to promote cultural exchange and dialogue: Kurds, Lezhins, Talishes, Tats and other ethnic groups living in the country often perform the Ashiqs' art, and their poems and songs have spread across the region.

The art of Azerbaijani ashigs unites musical and poetic art and performing arts. In its best manifestations the ashig acts as a poet, composer, singer and saz performer, as an actor-narrator, sometimes even as a dancer at the same time. The sources of Ashiq art are in the art of Turkic ozans who created the prominent literary monument - "Book of Dede Gorgud" 1300 years ago, and also in ecstatic acts of early Sufi dervishes who were called "haqq ashigi" (lovers of truth) in the Turkic world.

Today the total number of Azerbaijani Ashiqs in the world makes up to three thousand people. Ashiqs take part in weddings, friendly parties, in folk festive events. Since 20th century they also perform on concert stages, on the radio and television. Starting from the 16th century Azerbaijani ashigs have been the bearers and guardians of the national language, music and national identity.

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