

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Voices from the East: Azerbaijan & Turkmenistan

Sunday 19 May 2024, 1pm | Royal Festival Hall

Classical music is an incredible, centuries-long story. As we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – share that story with the world today, we're creating as many ways for as many different people as possible to experience this wonderful art form.

Whether this is your first encounter with classical music or one of many, I'm absolutely thrilled that you're joining us for more powerful human experiences. Welcome to Classical Music: Spring/Summer 2024.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

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| Franghiz Ali-Zadeh Nagillar (Fairy Tales) | 14' |
| Nurymov Symphony No.2 | 18' |
| Garayev Selection from Seven Beauties Ballet Suite | 26' |

Performers

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra
Kirill Karabits *conductor*
Tom Service *presenter*

This performance lasts approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes without an interval.

Franghiz Ali-Zadeh (b. 1947)

Nagillar (Fairy Tales)

This opening *Voices from the East* concert takes us the furthest east we'll travel today: to Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, countries either side of the Caspian Sea, both of which border Iran to the south. Indeed, Western-style classical music pretty much stops at Turkmenistan: neither of its neighbours Iran and Afghanistan have orchestral traditions of their own.

The concert begins in Azerbaijan – like all of the countries represented today, a former Soviet Socialist Republic that declared independence following the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Born in 1947, Franghiz Ali-Zadeh lived through those tumultuous times. She is widely regarded as one of her country's most prominent and influential classical composers, and is also a renowned pianist – she gave the Azerbaijani premieres of piano music by Cage, Crumb, Messiaen and others, bringing avant-garde Western repertoire (as well as works by Soviet composers including Schnittke and Gubaidulina) to greater prominence as official strictures relaxed. And like that of many composers featured in today's three concerts, her music represents a fascinating fusion of Western-style classical elements with strong influences from the musical traditions of her homeland. Ali-Zadeh studied with elder Azerbaijani composer Gara Garayev (whose *Seven Beauties Suite* closes the concert), who had himself studied with Dmitri Shostakovich. From her birth country, however, Ali-Zadeh brings in strong influences from *mugham*, the classical music of Azerbaijan, which has strong connections to Arabic and Persian traditional musical forms.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ali-Zadeh moved to Turkey and then to Germany, where she has mainly lived since the start of the millennium. In 1999, she became the first woman composer in residence at the Lucerne Festival, and it was for that same festival that she wrote *Nagillar* in 2002. The piece's title means 'fairy tales' in Azerbaijani, and in her own programme note, Ali-Zadeh explains her inspirations in the classic tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*: 'Miraculous transformations, incredible monsters and stormy seas await us here, but also islands that hold untold riches'. A magic carpet lifts into the sky at the piece's dramatic opening, leaving us

Voices from the East is a project with profound personal resonances for the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor Kirill Karabits, and one he feels deeply passionate about. Born in Kyiv, Karabits is the son of eminent Ukrainian composer Ivan Karabits, who himself maintained strong professional and personal relationships with many of the composers whose music is featured in today's concerts. 'I remember growing up in this musical environment,' Kirill Karabits explains, 'and that this music from the former Soviet republics was absolutely fascinating. But for many different geopolitical reasons, audiences probably have absolutely no idea about what's been happening musically in these countries. When I first came to the Orchestra in 2008, I felt strongly that they wanted me to propose a very personal project, and one I could take forward and develop over the coming years.' *Voices from the East* began the following year, and has since then travelled widely through countries and little-known repertoire across live performances and well-received recordings.

Also being performed today:

Voices from the East: Georgia & Armenia
4pm | Royal Festival Hall

Voices from the East: Ukraine
7.30pm | Royal Festival Hall

suspended in the thin air high above the Earth. We get glimpses of sorcerers and monsters, dervishes and mysterious labyrinths on the carpet's dashing journey, before a heroic prince rescues a kidnapped princess at the piece's glittering, celebratory ending.

Chary Nurymov (1940–93)

Symphony No.2

Across the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan has long served as a crossroads between Asia and Europe, and formed a historic trading and cultural centre on the Silk Road. Born during the Second World War, composer Chary Nurymov was fiercely proud of his country's heritage, and sought ways to incorporate its distinctive musical sounds into modern orchestral music, which he'd studied at Moscow's prestigious Gnessin Institute with several prominent Soviet composers. He held high-profile roles in state organisations – for many years he headed the official Union of Composers of Turkmenistan – but nonetheless pushed against Soviet strictures, bringing in daringly modernist elements into his music. He was a widely known and influential figure, and counted among his friends fellow composer Ivan Karabits, father of today's conductor Kirill: indeed, the Nurymov and Karabits families remain close.

Nurymov wrote the second of his three symphonies in 1984, driven to commemorate the assassination earlier that year of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, killed by her two Sikh bodyguards in revenge for her use of Indian armed forces to storm the Golden Temple at Amritsar, Sikhism's holiest site. As the composer explained in his own programme note: 'There is only one way to preserve peace for future generations – to live in peace, seek ways of cooperation, strive to solve problems through goodwill. And, I think, art can play a significant role in this. It always broke the barriers with the outstretched hand of friendship.'

The Symphony's single span of music is divided into two large-scale sections, each of which is again subdivided in two. The Symphony opens in mourning, with icy strings, bells and chiming piano introducing a lamenting bassoon melody, interrupted by a sudden explosion of anguish or violence that ushers in the urgent, energetic string rhythms, offset by snarling brass, of the second subsection. Both ideas return, their themes and emotions developed to even greater heights, before a brief closing episode takes us right back to the Symphony's opening. Is this a plea for the cycles of violence to end, or a lament that they will inevitably continue?

'I hope we can widen listeners' vision of the music and the cultures we experience in concert halls. As a conductor, you constantly face the dilemma of directing standard concert repertoire, or exploring something interesting and fresh that has seldom been heard before. By performing this music, I hope we can remind people that we should all be curious about the things we do.'

Kirill Karabits

Gara Garayev (1918–82)

Selection from Seven Beauties Ballet Suite

2 Adagio

The Seven Portraits:

4 Introduction –

5 The Indian Beauty –

6 The Byzantine Beauty –

9 The Maghrebian Beauty –

10 The Chinese Beauty –

11 The Most Beautiful of the Beauties

12 The Procession

1 Waltz

We return to Azerbaijan for the concert's closing piece, and to one of its founding fathers of Western-style classical music. As well as teaching Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, Gara Garayev was a revered composer of symphonies, ballets and operas, alongside patriotic songs and marches, and a prominent figure within Soviet music, as First Secretary of the Azerbaijan Composers' Union, and later President of the Composers' Union of the USSR. Nonetheless, he was a deeply progressive figure, encouraging the study of Azerbaijani musical traditions during his many years teaching at the Baku Conservatory, and daringly introducing jazz references into his music.

Seven Beauties was one of Garayev's earliest successes, first staged in Baku in 1952, and the first full-length ballet composed by an Azerbaijani composer. Its storyline comes from verse written in 1197 by poet Nizami Ganjavi, considered one of the greatest figures in Persian literature, who lived throughout his life in what's now Azerbaijan. The ballet's plot revolves around the beautiful Aysha and her brother Mansar, ordinary people struggling under the regime of the corrupt Shah Bahram. The Shah, however, falls deeply in love with Aysha after encountering the seven beauties of the work's title as portraits of women from around the world, drawn on the walls of an ancient castle.

Today's selection of movements from the Suite that Garayev drew from his ballet score begins with the Shah and Aysha's first meeting in a tender 'Adagio'. The bulk of the Suite is devoted to the beauties themselves, who come to life and dance with the Shah when he first encounters them. Among them – after a mysterious 'Introduction' – a flute solo represents 'The Indian Beauty', while 'The Byzantine Beauty' offers dashing strings and glittering tambourine, and castanet rhythms clatter through memories of Moorish Spain in 'The Maghrebian Beauty'. A gentle pentatonic melody trips through the nimble 'The Chinese Beauty', and 'The Most Beautiful of the Beauties' adds a luscious oboe melody to the mysterious harmonies of the introduction. Garayev's finale brings drama and spectacle: an innocuous little tune for flute and piccolo grows into a grand, swaggering march in 'The Procession', in which the Shah's evil Vizier uses his army to put down resistance from the population. By the time of the Suite's 'Waltz', the Shah has been spurned by Aysha, and returns to the castle hoping to view the beauties again. They seem to materialise from their portraits, and dance a distinctly sinister, Shostakovich-like waltz with him.

Programme notes © David Kettle, 2021

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