

## Azerbaijan films

Two years after the birth of cinematograph, the performance of "moving cartoons" by brothers Lumier in Paris, in 1898, the photographer from Baku, Aleksandr Mishon shoots film stories on oilfields and organizes the first public film performance. It took place in Baku in August 2, 1898, and the inhabitants of Baku having seen the life of their city (*Fire on Bibi-Heybat*, *Oil fountain in the Field Balakhani-Sabunchu*, *Caucasian Dance*, *I Stumbled* and so on) on the screen for the first time, unwillingly became the witnesses of an historical event - the birth of cinematograph in Azerbaijan.

Starting from this moment photograph-cameramen shoot the stories on various subjects. And in 1916 Pirone brothers, the entrepreneurs, place cinematograph on production basis. They establish in Baku a joint-stock company "Film", where they launch the production of feature films. One of the first films shot in this studio is *In the Realm of Oil and Millions* (Boris Svetlov), after the same named novel by Azerbaijani writer I.Musabayov.

After the occupation of Azerbaijan by the XI Red Army and the establishment of soviet regime in the country in 1920, all film and photo enterprises were nationalized. And in 1923 Azerbaijani Photo-Film Administration - APFA was established. In the same year State Film-factory started to shoot the film *Maiden tower* (Vladimir Balluzec, 1924). The film was orientated on the exotic demonstration of the East, on the details of ethnographical characteristics.

The most interesting feature films shot in State Film-factory for the period from 1920 through 1930s are the following: *In the Name of God* (Bismillah, 1925) and *Haji Gara* (1928), where the director, Abbas Mirza Sharifzada truly narrates the tragic fates of people under the realm of religious fanaticism. In the film after the play by J.Jabbarli *Sevil* (1929, Amo Beknazarov), the character of Azerbaijani woman, struggling for her equal rights in the society had its artistic embodiment. The director, in the films *Letif* (1930) and *Ismet* (1934), Mikayil Mikayilov makes an attempt of adopting modern theme. The first Azerbaijani director, with professional education got in Moscow, Samed Mardanov together with Boris Barnet, in 1936 shoots the first sound-film *On blue seashore* (which is sometimes included to the list of the best films of ever in the writings of some well-known film theorists). In 1939 Samed Mardanov starts the production of the film *The peasants*. But the director could not see the opening night of his film. His life was tragically cut short. However, in what he had time to make, the language of professional cinematographic stylistics, aspiration for the poetical reflection of the reality, the realistic interpretation of the characters were clearly seen.

In 1945 the directors, Rza Tahmasib and Lev Leshenko, made a screen version of the musical comedy *Arshin mal alan* (*The cloth peddler*) by Uzeir Hadjibeyov. It is interesting that the film faced with the harsh criticism. Meanwhile, cheerfulness, humor and national coloring made it very popular not only in Azerbaijan, but also far beyond its borders. The film was honored with one of the highest awards of that time, USSR State award.

In the late 40s the film production decreased. Only documentaries were produced. The only feature film shot in this period was *Fatali-khan* by the director, Y.L.Dzigan.

The 50s-60s revealed such directors as Tofiq Tagizada, Hasan Seyidbayli, Ajdar Ibrahimov, Habib Ismailov, Huseyn Seyidzada, Latif Safarov, Alisettar Atakishiyev, Shamil Mahmudbayov and so on in Azerbaijani cinematography. The increase in the number of films brought to the expansion of the theme: *Bakhtiyar* by the director Letif Safarov (1956); *If not that one, that one* (1956) and *The invincible battalion* (1965) by the director Huseyn Seyidzada; *Two from the same district* by the director I.Gurin and A.Ibrahimov (1957); *On distant shores* by Tofiq Tagizada (1958); *Stepmother* by Habib Ismailov (1958); *The telephone operator* (1962) and *Why*

*do you remain silent?* (1967) by Hasan Seyidbayli; *The secret of a mountain* (1959) and *The magic khalat* (1964) by the director Alisattar Atakishiyev.

From the second half of the 60s and the beginning of the 70s new names of different directors appeared in Azerbaijani film: Eldar Guliyev, Rasim Ojagov, Arif Babayev, Ogtay Mirgasimov, Yalchin Efendiyev, Tofiq Ismailov, Gulbaniz Azimzada, Teymur Bekirzada, Yuli Gousman, Zaur Maharramov and others. Scriptwriters: Anar, Alla Akhundova, Rustam and Magsud Ibrahimbayovs, Isa Huseynov, Yusif Samedoglu, Ramiz Fataliyev and others. In this period of the Azerbaijani film the films on the contemporaneity are still in the leading places. The main subject became the reflection of a personality, with problems in front of him, requiring artistic investigation. The film director, Eldar Guliyev's film, *In a southern town* (1969), distinguished for the freshness of idea and for characteristics of national peculiarity, marked a new stage in the Azerbaijani cinematography. The film was greeted ambiguously. At first its demonstration was prohibited by the state administration.

In this year the films, where the directors tried to reveal the social layer of the community, its contradictions, started to be produced. The moral problems also are in the focus. These films are: *The last night of childhood* (1970) and *A day has past* (1971) by the director Arif Babayev; *Our Jabish teacher* (1970) and *The price of happiness* (1976) by the director Hasan Seyidbayli; *The birthday party* (1977) and *Interrogation* (1979) by the director Rasim Ojagov; *Shared bread* by the director Shamil Mahmudbayov (1970) and others.

In this period more successful films dedicated to the historical past of our nation were produced. In 1974 the director Hasan Seyidbayli shot the film *Nasimi*. This monumental movie is dedicated to the life, the creative work and the tragic death of the great Azerbaijani poet and philosopher of the XIV century, Imameddin Nasimi. By the motives of Azerbaijani epos *Dede Gorgud* the film director Tofiq Tagizada shoots the same named film (1977). The film *Babek* about the legendary leader of the IX century people's liberation movement was shot by Eldar Guliyev (1980). In the films *The tempestuous Kura* by the director Huseyn Seyidzada (1969), *Seven sons of mine* by the director Tofiq Tagizada (1970), *The last mountain pass* by the director Kamil Rustambayov (1971), which are "historical-revolutionary" genres of that time, the sympathy of the authors of these films towards the "negative heroes", the revolutionary era can be clearly tracked. In some cases their characters even exceed by significance the characters of the revolutionists themselves. In the final episode of the film *The tempestuous Kura* the hero Jahandar Aga shoots the soldiers of the Tsar's Russia, who boldly occupied his lands. Moscow, accepting all the films produced in our country made the director of the film, Hasan Seyidzada, reshoot the finale of the film. And only after this, the film was accepted. So far it has been unclear why the film *Baku lights* by the directors I. Heyfits, A. Zarkhi, R. Tahmasib, produced in 1950 has not been released, though several times there were changes and abridgements to the film. The film *Fatali-khan*, shot in 1949, was allowed for the demonstration ten years after the production, and that with big abridgements. Such cases in Azerbaijani film were many enough, as all the film production passed through the censorship of the communists both in Baku and in Moscow. The films were reshaped, altered, and re-shot.

In the 80s the record number of films were produced. They covered all genres of cinematography. They were also distinguished for the diversity of subjects. The more interesting ones are - for children: *You can not take only island* (1980) by the director Gulbeniz Azimzada, *Asif, Vasif, Agasif* (1981) by the director Rasim Ismailov, *The music teacher* (1983) by the director Tofiq Ismailov; comedies: *The road story* (1981) by the director Teymur Bakirzada, *I wanna get marry* (1983) by the director Jahangir Mehdiyev, *The kidnapping of fiance* (1985) by the directors Jeyhun Mirzayev, Vagif Mustafayev; musicals: *Don't afraid, I'm with you* (1981) by the director

Yuli Gousman, *The seven beauties* (1982 - ballet) by the director F.Slidovker; historical: *Nizami* (1982) by the director Eldar Guliyev, *Golden precipice* (1981) by the director Fikret Aliyev, *Uzeyir's life* (1981) by the director Anar, *Saddle these horses* (1983) by the directors Abdul Mahmudov, Hasanaga Turabov; psychological dramas: *Park* (1983) and *Strange life* (1987) by the director Rasim Ojagov, *A most ordinary story* (1988) by the director Jamil Guliyev; social dramas: *In front of a closed door* (1981) by the director Rasim Ojagov, *Endless night* (1989) by the director Shahmar Alakbarov, *The shameless* (1988) by the director Vagif Mustafayev, *The joke* (1989) by the director Yefim Abramov, Nizami Musayev; detectives: *The day after tomorrow at midnight* (1981) by the director Arif Babayev, *An additional trace* (1981) by the director Teymur Bekirzada, *The preservation of secret* (1986) by the director Farhad Yusubov, *Devil in front of my eyes* (1988) by the director Ogtay Mirgasimov; films-profiles: *The window of the sadness* (1986) by the director Anar, *I endlessly love you* (1985) by the director Rasim Ismailov, *Wait for the Signal from sea* (1986) by the director Jeyhun Mirzayev; parable: *Our grandpa's grandpas's grandpa* (1982) by the director Tofiq Tagizada, *The pain of a baby tooth* (1988) by the director Huseyn Mehdiyev.

The films of this period, *Dissonance* by Teymur Bekirzada, *The birthday party* and *Interrogation* by Rasim Ojagov, *You can not take only island* by Gulbaniz Azimzada, *Devil in front of my eyes* by Ogtay Mirgasimov and so on were honored the highest prizes in All-Union film festivals.

The era of perestroika (reconstruction), the 80s, finished up with the independence of former Soviet Republics. Like in other fields, in cinematography as well, the elements of private sector started to appear. The films are shot by resources of entrepreneurs. Film directors open their independent film studios: Rasim Ojagov - the studio "Ojag", Eldar Guliyev - the studio "Gaya Film", Ogtay Mirgasimov - the studio "Yeni Film", Zaur Maharramov - the studio "Yaddash", Firangiz Gurbanova - the studio "Birlik", Firudin Humbatov - the studio "Metropol" and so on. In 1991 Joint Stock Bank "Vahidbank" founded the studio "Vahid" that roughly developed. They bought modern film equipment and several fiction films started to be produced. But later, as the manager of the Bank was put into custody, the studio fell apart. In the period from 1990 to 1995, actually, there was no infusion of state money (budget) to the cinematography and all films were produced through the money of entrepreneurs. For this period, more than 40 feature films and more than 125 documentaries had been produced. The years 1990 and 1991 are the years of the peak record number of produced films - about 10 feature films and more than 40 documentaries; 90% of financial flow was at the expense of private investments.

The 90s disclosed such directors as Ayaz Salayev, Vagif Mustafayev, Huseyn Mehdiyev, Yaver Rzayev, Jamil Guliyev, Shahmar Alakbarov, Ramiz Azizbayli, such scriptwriters as Ramiz Rovshan, Orkhan Fikretoglu, Natig Rasulzada, Aydin Dadashov.

The significant films of this period are: *Murder in the night train* (1990) by the director Abdul Mahmudov, *Execution day* (1990) by the director Gulbaniz Azimzada and *The Witness* (1990) by the director Huseyn Mehdiyev (in "Universal Bank"). The film *The ring of happiness* (1991) was produced in the studio *Gara Gaya Film* by the director Ramiz Azizbayli, producer Sadraddin Dashdamirov. The studio "Vahid" produced the film *Gazalkhan* (1991) by the director Shahmar Alakbarov, the producer Huseynaga Gasimov. The film *Misfit* (1991) by the director Vagif Mustafayev, the producer Vagif Asadullayev; *Cry* (1993) studio "Ashkar film" - by the director Jeyhun Mirzayev, producer Nazim Abdullayev; *Tahmina* (1993) and *Oh, Istanbul* (1994), the production of the studio "Ojag", by the director Rasim Ojagov, the producer Rasul Guliyev; *Yarasa* (1995) - the production of the studio "Inter Turan", by the director Ayaz Salayev, the producer Saday Ahmadov.

Of the above mentioned films it is worth to point out two: the first is *Ring of happiness* by the director Ramiz Azizbayli and producer Sadraddin Dashdamirov. It was the first film of independent Azerbaijan, observing all canons of a commercial film. The film attracted such number of viewers that it helped to cover all expenditures of the film production and to get a profit. And the second film by the director Ayaz Salayev and the producer Saday Ahmadov, *Yarasa* was the first "swallow" that took Azerbaijani film to the world arena. The film was awarded "Grand Pris" of Angers Festival (France) and took part in more than 20 International Film Festivals.

In 1996 the film *Strange time* by the director and producer Huseyn Mehdiyev was released. The film was awarded for "The best direction" and "The best young actress" in the I Madrid IFF, and got many other awards in many festivals. In 1997 the film by the director Vagif Mustafayev and by the producer Rafiq Guliyev, *All to the best* gets award in Oberkhauzen IFF. In 1998 the film *Yellow bride* by the director Yaver Rzayev receives American award "Freedom" in IFF in Karlovi Vari and for "The best script" in IFF "Kinoshock".

Getting independence and transition to the market economy, implying democratic and legal relations, not only brought to the establishment and appearance of independent-private studios, but also required the creation of new relations between authors and producers. That is why in May 17, 1999, 32 film directors, gathered in the foyer of State Film Fund founded Guild of Professional Film-directors of Azerbaijan. The main objective of this organization is the protection of author's, social and economic rights of audio-visual authors.

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