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The Musical Culture of the Tatars of the Early 20th Century: Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkazarzsky

The present article examines the artistic engagements of the brilliant representative of early 20th century Tatar stage art Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkarazsky. Analysis is made of performances of the musical-theatrical troupe which under his leadership combined theatrical and concert divertissements with performances of vocal, instrumental and dance numbers; the troupe's concert tour activities are described. For the first time in modern scholarship the author highlights Kudashev-Ashkezarzsky's musical art. Special attention is given to analysis of gramophone recordings of Tatar melodies in the performance of musician (harmonist) Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkarazsky, on the basis of gramophone records of the "Gramophone" company, which have been brought into scholarly use for the first time.

Keywords: Tatar musical culture, theatrical troupe, divertissement, musician, Tatar gramophone recording, "Gramophone," gramophone record, Tatar folksong, instrumental solo.

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Музыкальная культура татар начала XX века: Ильясбек Кудашев-Ашказарский

В настоящей статье рассматриваются художественные занятия блестящего представителя татарского сценического искусства начала XX века Ильясбека Кудашева-Ашказарского. Анализируются выступления музыкально-театральной труппы, которая под его руководством объединила театральные и концертные постановки с исполнением вокальных, инструментальных и танцевальных номеров; описывается концертно-гастрольная деятельность труппы. Впервые в современной науке автор обращает внимание на музыкальное творчество Кудашева-Ашказарского. Особое внимание уделено анализу грамофонных записей татарских мелодий в исполнении музыканта (гармониста) Ильясбека Кудашева-Ашказарского. Исследование проводилось на основе грамофонных пластинок фирмы «Грамофон», которые автором впервые были введены в научный оборот.

Ключевые слова: татарская музыкальная культура, театральная группа, дивертисмент, музыкант, татарская грамофонная запись, фирма «Грамофон», грамофонная пластинка, татарская народная песня, инструментальное соло.

The social and societal changes which occurred in the early 20th century became a breakthrough moment not only in the political and economic spheres, but also in the domain of culture. These changes found their reflection in all the spheres of the urban Tatars' artistic activities: the national literature was elevated onto a new level, national theater emerged, musical and literary clubs appeared, the concert life and touring activities of Tatar musicians were inactivated, and the first gramophone recordings were created.

The history of the early 20th century Tatar musical culture has been elucidated in contemporary research works, however a number of blank spots has remained which require further study. The aim of the present article is to analyze the artistic activities of the pathfinder of the Tatar theatrical stage art Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkarazsky (1884–1942). The topicality of this research stems from the fact that the activities of the actor, producer and organizer of the first national musical spectacular performances Kudashev-Ashkazarsky have been insufficiently studied. The sphere of musical interests of Kudashev-Ashkazarsky, whom his contemporaries characterized as a brilliant musician – harmonist and violinist, – has remained beyond the scope of previous research works. The novelty of this work is stipulated by the incorporation of archival documents, periodicals, posters, concert programs, reviews of concerts and evenings, which have been brought by the author into scholarly use. Gramophone records with recordings of musical compositions in Kudashev-Ashkazarsky's performances are examined here for the first time.

Ilyasbek Batyrgareyevich Kudashev-Ashkazarsky was born in Orenburg, and in 1899 he graduated from the madrasah "Khusainia." Having been a shakird of the madrasah, Kudashev-Ashkazarsky was

distinguished by his virtuosic performance on the harmonica and violin and his expressive recitation of poems by Tatar and Russian poets. During his studies at the Tatar tutorial school in Kazan, in 1902, while being a student, Kudashev-Ashkadarsky created his first amateur theatrical group [1, p. 6]. After completing studies in 1904, Kudashev-Ashkazarsky returned to Orenburg. In 1905, as documented by the well-known Tatar theater researcher Khasan Gubaidullin, Kudashev-Ashkazarsky, who considered it his sacred duty to create a Tatar theatrical troupe, attracted competent, goal-oriented young people eager to become artists¹. The troupe bore the name of "The First Mobile Troupe of Muslim Dramatic Artists of Ilyazbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky." The imprint of a stamp of this troupe's directory placed on one of Kudashev-Ashkazarsky's letters confirms the exactness of the troupe's legal name². The year 1907 saw the beginning of the tour activities of Kudashev-Ashkazarsky's troupe through many cities in Russia, the Caucasus, Crimea, Central Asia and Finland.

A particular trait of Kudashev-Ashkazarsky's touring troupe is that the artists by no means limited themselves merely to giving performances in Tatar and Russian. The programs of the evenings consisted in several portions featuring a theatrical performance, either a concert of national music or an international divertissement, sometimes with the inclusion of Russian and foreign artists, demonstrations of "live pictures" and cinematic shows. All this diversity of musical and spectacular theatrical performances found its reflection in the posters preserved up to our days and the programs of the evenings, informing the public that the function of their organizer was carried out by "the directory of Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky." These divertissements were given varying titles.

Thus, in Kazan Kudashev-Ashkazarsky's troupe, when performing in a program of a closed theater in the "Arcadia" garden on June 13, 1907, presented in the last part of the evening a Gala-Divertissement-Variety Show³. According to the information given in another poster, "The troupe of Ilyazbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky in the summer theater of the Vladimirsky Theater of Simbirsk on June 24, 1907 is giving a performance in Tatar and Russian ...<...> and in the fourth section of the concert – a Divertissement (i.e., a musical-vocal divertissement). The theatrical play in the Tatar language is acted out in national costumes and with the incorporation of Eastern-style scenery. During the intermissions an orchestra of military music plays during the intermissions"⁴.

It must be noted that Kudashev-Ashkazarsky knew Russian very well and was himself a highly educated man. With the aim of providing the Tatars exposure to Russian culture, his troupe gave performances in Russian, in addition to their Tatar productions, in this case, in Simbirsk, of plays by Anton Chekhov. The preserved posters also provide information that "during the intermissions there will be a Little Russian chorus singing, while the orchestra will play several Eastern pieces"⁵. The participation of the Little Russian (i.e. Ukrainian) chorus (cappella) demonstrates Kudashev-Ashkazarsky's aspiration to familiarize the Tatar viewer with the musical culture of the Ukrainian people.

The troupe also participated in the entertainment programs at the famous Nizhny-Novgorod fair. Thus, in the "Follet Berger" carnival theater the troupe gave a number of performances in Tatar⁶. According to the dates of the newspaper issues, during the period between August 23 and September 3, along with the theater performances, there was a benefit performance of Ilyasbek

Kudashev-Ashkazarsky and a farewell performance organized there. On one of the posters we read: "The third Eastern night. The Nizhny-Novgorod Fair. 1907. The 'Follet Berger' Garden-Theater. On Sunday, August 26, the first Mobile Troupe of Muslim Dramatic Artists, under the direction of Ilyazbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky, the first troupe of its kind in Russia, will give its third performance in Tatar 'Ukaz balyasy,' a comedy in 4 acts by Khakim Zabiroy. During the intermissions on the open garden stage a splendid divertissement concert was held with the participation of foreign and Russian artists"⁷. The newspaper "Volgar" wrote: "After the farewell performance, which attracted rather a large amount of audience, a heartfelt speech was addressed to the head of the troupe Ashkazarsky, and a present was given to him: a golden dinnerware set and silver objects"⁸. Next comes an itinerary of the troupe's subsequent tours: Kasimov, Yaroslavl, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Crimea, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Khiva, Bukhara, Turkestan.

We find out about yet another tour made by the troupe to the Nizhny-Novgorod fair from a preserved advertisement telegram, which notifies us that in the "Brazilian Electric Theater" in the garden across from the Figner Theater "...During the course of one evening the troupe shall present a dramatic performance, a cinema show, and a multifarious divertissement with international dances"⁹. It must be noticed that the initial name of the troupe "The First Mobile Theater of Muslim Dramatic Artists, the First in Russia" is complemented with the addition of "...and Vocal Musical Artists (my italics, I.G.) from the Private Theatrical Enterprise of the Famous Artist Ilyazbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky." This name of the troupe remained unchanged in the posters and programs of the troupe's tours of the years 1912–1914.

The posters and programs indicate that the divertissement concert of Kudashev-Ashkazarsky's troupe proper consisted of vocal, instrumental and dance numbers. Thus, the program of the evening held by the troupe after its performance in Aktyubinsk (January 13, 1912) included the following participants and genres: G. Khudoyar-Khanov – solo singing, G. Gazizov – storytelling, Fakhriya Ibatovna Arskaya – solo singing, Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky – solo on a 5-button Viennese accordion¹⁰. Information about the forthcoming divertissement-concert and theatrical performance (Galiascar Kamal's drama "Uinash") by the troupe in St. Petersburg on September 22, 1913 was also given in an announcement published in the "Musulmanskaya gazeta" ["Muslim Newspaper"]¹¹.

In 1913 Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky's troupe, "... having travelled through the length and breadth of Russia, already gave a performance in St. Petersburg at the Chebeco Hall on December 31, close to the New Year"¹². Starting from January 1, 1914, the troupe begin their tour in Finland, and from January 24, "...passing from the Trans-Caspian oblast and the Turkestan region, through St. Petersburg, into Finland, having come upon the request of the Muslim public for the second time to St. Petersburg..." is giving a performance in Tatar¹³. The names of the participants of the performance are listed – they are: Fakhri khanum Arskaya, mademoiselle Ashraf, G. Aisanovskaya, Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky, and Sabirbek Gasprinsky. Information is also given of a performance by "the musical orchestra" during the intermissions and dances.

During the course of the tours through Central Asia in the electric theater "Svet" ["Light"] of the urban part in the city of Namangan the troupe gave a performance

with the title of "Grandiose Eastern Evening" in eight parts. The program of the divertissement performance in one of the concert's sections "...especially for this evening consists of a mass of diverse Tatar, Russian, Sartov literary-musical vocal numbers and chorus"¹⁴, while during the intermissions the military orchestra performed Eastern pieces.

Of special interest is information drawn from the biography of actress and singer Fakhriya Ibatovna Arskaya-Kudasheva (Akhmetova) (1880–1956), the wife of Kudashev-Ashkazarsky. She received her first invitation to join Kudashev-Ashkazarsky's troupe in 1907, but only after several years of work in the Tatar theatrical troupe "Saiyar," during the 1911–1912 season she began her activities with Kudashev-Ashkazarsky. After that, she combined her work in both of these troupes. The leading actress of the troupe performed as the "famous Muslim artist of the Orenburg and Kazan theaters Fakhri khanum Arskaya." As she wrote in her memoirs, "...besides the professional work in drama, I had to present myself as an initiator of performances from the stage, both as a singer and a performer of Tatar dances among the Tatar population of Russia, which has also been noted numerous times by the criticism in the Tatar press, during the first years of my work on the Tatar stage, since in those days Tatar women stood aloof performing on stage, not only with songs and dances, but even appearing masked (in makeup) and in theater, considering this to be shameful and sinful for themselves"¹⁵. As far back as in 1907 the Moscow newspaper "Russkoye slovo" ["The Russian Word"] wrote regarding the appearance of Tatar women on the theater stage: "Performances of the visiting Muslim troupe of Mr. Ashkazarsky began at the 'Aquarium.' The troupe consists of young people who

have achieved good team work and set as their goal to struggle against the ignorance and backwardness of the lower classes of the Muslim population. The troupe has several Mohammedan women artists, which presents a rather brave protest against the Muslim custom which forbids women to appear in public, especially on stage”¹⁶.

Many programs of Kudashev-Ashkazarsky’s troupe have been preserved in which information is given for the public about the concert life of the evening and about the performed songs. The famous theater researcher Khasan Gubaidullin in his manuscript “*Bashlap yorucheler*” (“The Instigators”) cites the programs for the evenings on May 9 and 18, 1914 in St. Petersburg¹⁷: the theatrical performance itself, the concert and the dances lasting until 3 at night. The program of the concert compiled by Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky offers a classification of the performed songs grouped as follows¹⁸: the first part of the concerts consists of sacred melodies (*munadjats*); the second part includes the following Tatar folk songs and tunes: “Zilyaylyuk” (“*Zilyaylyuk*”), “Gaisha” (“*Keleu Gaishe*”), “Yakub’s Melody” (“*Yakub koe*”), “On the River” (“*Su oste*”), “The Top of the Tree” (“*Agach bashy*”), and “The River Uil” (“*Uel*”). It is also reported that this same part of the concert would also include the performances of Bashkir historical songs popular among the urban Tatars – “Ashkazar” (“*Ashkazar*”) “Tefitlyau” (“*Teftiliau*”), and Sakmar (“*Sakmar*”). The third part of the concert consists of vernacular Tatar songs, motives pertaining to popular genres, contemporary songs and melodies: “Did you put on your apparel?” (“*Asyl kidenme sin?*”), “Fatikh” (“*Fatyikh*,” a man’s name), “Pearl-Sapphire” (“*Zheuhar-yakut*”), “Kazan Man – Fine Fellow” (“*Kazanets-maladets*”), “The Times” (“*Zamana*”). Here also the

following songs would be sung: “A Child of Mishkin” (“*Balamishkin*”), “Black Bullrush” (“*Kara kamysh*”), “Wayfaring” (“*Sefer*”), “Friday” (“*Zhomga*”), “The Old Woman Gizzelbanat” (“*Gyizzelbannat kortka*”) accompanied on the violin, piano and mandolin. This repertoire corresponds to the particularities of entertainment music of early 20th century urban Tatars.

In the compilation of that evening’s program Kudashev-Ashkazarsky demonstrated himself as a true connoisseur of Tatar folk music, which was familiar to him from childhood. He performed folk songs and melodies from his youthful years on the accordion and the violin with love. Kudashev-Ashkazarsky’s profound knowledge in the sphere of the Tatars’ musical culture gave him the opportunity to convey to the audiences the information about the areal of dissemination of the adjudicated songs. The musician’s serious attitude toward the Tatar people’s musical culture, his concernment with their future, have found reflection in his utterances about the recordings of Tatar songs on gramophone records. The question concerns a rough draft of a letter from May 22, 1908 addressed to a Moscow-based agent of one of the gramophone companies, Gustav Kemmler: “My Dear Sir! <...> ... I cannot remain silent about the following occurrence. Having read your letter, I learned that the recording, as it turns out, shall be carried out not under your personal control, but that merely technicians shall come to Kazan for that aim”¹⁹. “Your people are not Mohammedans, in all likelihood, they are people who are very little, and maybe even not at all familiar with Tatar life, their everyday traditions, literature, music, their merits and limitations and stories. After all, such a state of affairs leads me, as a person interested in this affair, towards certain considerations, and I apologize beforehand

for my boldness to utter to you, My Dear Sir, here are my ‘particular thoughts’ about this affair. The thing is that Your Company has begun to deal with the recordings of music of Tatars from Kazan, Orenburg, Crimea, the Caucasus and other places for almost the first time, and for this reason I am absolutely sure that in the adjudication of the merits and the flaws of the aforementioned Tatar literature, poetry and music your technicians have not acquired enough knowledge and experience, and, consequently, I could not make sure of the validity of the course of business of this kind of recording and the prevention of a similar gross mistake which was allowed thereby in the Company of the ‘Gramophone’ Society, namely: the first time, having discovered the (path towards) recording of Tat.[ar] rec.[ords], I threw myself headlong into the process, recording everything without exception which I could place my hands on, all sorts of trash, and thereby polluted my extensive repertoire by such Tatar songs. <...>. Subsequently, certain records turned out to have such ultra-piquant words, that there is cause to feel uneasy...”²⁰.

Kudashev-Ashkazarsky’s own recordings on gramophone recordings of the Stock Corporation of the “Gramophone” Company on gramophone records present a significant contribution to the history of Tatar gramophone recording. According to the data of “Vostochny katalog” [“The Eastern Catalogue”] of the “Gramophone” company and the British discographer, Doctor Alan Kelly, these recordings were made in Moscow in February 1908 by one of the leading experts of the “Gramophone” company Franz Gampe²¹.

Kudashev-Ashkazarsky discography is comprised by speech recordings – dramatic monologues, poems, short theatrical scenes, as well as instrumental solos. In the “Eastern Catalogue” his recordings were indicated

the following way: “Satirical short-stories, scenes and poems (odes) performed by the famous artist from the first and only wandering (mobile) troupe of Muslim artists in Russia under the direction of Ilyas Bek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky, Kazan.”

According to the template (production) numbers of the records from the “Eastern Catalogue,” the author was able to establish the successive order of recordings of the performer’s present session: in the “speech” section he includes 8 recordings of the oral genre for the format of the “Mignon” record, some of which are preserved in the funds of the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan. The following recordings are also made in “Mignon” format – Kudashev-Ashkazarsky’s instrumental solo on the harmonica: the piece “Kaban usti” (“Kaban oste,” “On the Kaban Lake”) (2932k) and “Khrriat” (“*Khorriat*,” “Freedom”) (2933k). In that same session for the records of the “grand” format Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkazarsky fixates monologues and poems. It must be noted that Kudashev-Ashkazarsky was the first to make gramophone recordings of the great Tatar poet Gabdulla Tukay “Eulogy of Tatar Girls” (“*Tatar kyzlaryna. Soyam de, soimim de...*”) (No.65651).

The group of Tatar recordings in the “speech” section is concluded by Kudashev-Ashkazarsky’s “scene,” listed as No.6578L, “Young Tree” (“*Yash agach*”), while in the musical section of the present session he recorded three numbers of the “harmonica solo” – “Taftilyau” (“*Teftileu*,” “Taftilyau”) (No.6589L), “Zilyaylyuk” (“*Zileylyuk*,” “Zilyaylyuk”) (No.6590L) and “Rekruti” (“*Rekrutlar*,” “Recruits”) (No.6591L).

Thereby, in the present Moscow session of the “Gramophone” company, Kudashev-Ashkazarsky made fourteen recordings in the “recitation” section and five recordings in the “harmonica performance” section. In

the published catalogues and in the records of the “Gramophone” company Kudashev-Ashkazarzsky is presented as a performer of “violin and Italian harmonica solos,” however, in the “Eastern Catalogue” there was no “violin solos” discovered.

The gramophone records with the recordings of Kudashev-Ashkazarzsky’s instrumental solos on the Italian harmonica disclosed by the author in the funds of the National Museum of the Republic of Tatarstan are essential for the study of the musician’s manner of performance.

These are recordings of examples of Tatar plangent lyrical songs: “Teftilyau” (“*Teftileu*”) (No.X-109121), “Zilyaylyuk” (“*Zileyluk*”) (No.X-109122), “Recruits” (“*Rekrut*”) (No.X-109124) and another recording – a tune, popular among the Tatars in the early 20th century, “Khriyat” (“*Khorriyat*”) (No.109105).

In Kudashev-Ashkazarzsky’s performance it is possible to sense a sense of devotedness to the performance tradition of the folk musicians at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century, namely, the conjunction of two melodies of different characters and genres into one musical number: after the plangent melodies of the songs “Teftilyau” and “Zilyaylyuk” we hear a short tune in a fast tempo. During the course of the aural analysis of the recordings of the performance by harmonica player Kudashev-Ashkazarzsky, the musician’s characteristic traits are revealed: improvisational qualities, emotionality, and an original rendition of

melodies which are popular among the Tatars.

Thereby, the preserved concert programs, posters, the memoirs of contemporaries, the geography of the itinerary of the concert tours and the revealed gramophone recordings of Kudashev-Ashkazarzsky’s performances make it possible to evaluate his contribution to the history of 20th century Tatar culture and, in particular, the history of Tatar gramophone recording. The present work presupposes the need for further studies of Kudashev-Ashkazarzsky’s musical activities, the deciphering of his instrumental recordings secured on gramophone records. The demonstrated gramophone recordings provide the opportunity for carrying out comparative analysis of the melodic material and the musical specimens of the folk songs published in compilations in the early 20th century, as well as to compare them with the other demonstrated recordings of other Tatar performers.

Ilyasbek Kudashev-Ashkazarzsky continued his artistic activities during the Soviet period: he directed Red Army concert groups, worked in cultural and artistic institutions of the Tatar ASSR, continued his active concert engagements, performing with programs of artistic recitation, and also in the role of a violinist²². He was awarded the title of “Hero of Labor” in 1926 [2, p. 255]. In 2012 Kudashev-Ashkazarzsky’s violin was donated by his relatives to the Galiascar Kamal Museum of the State Tatar Academic Theater.

NOTES

¹ Archive of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the G. Ibragimov Institute of Language, Literature and Art of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tatarstan (ILLA AS RT, Kazan). Fund 185. Inventory 1, item 63.

² Archive of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the G. Ibragimov ILLAAS RT (Kazan). Fund 185. Inventory 3, unit 9.

³ Ibid., unit 26.

⁴ Ibid., unit 25.



- ⁵ Ibid., unit 7.
- ⁶ Nizhegorodskiy listok. “Teatr i muzyka” [The Nizhny-Novgorod Newspaper. “Theater and Music”]. 1907. August 23, No. 205.
- ⁷ Archive of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the G. Ibragimov ILLAAS RT (Kazan). Fund 185. Inventory 3, unit 26.
- ⁸ Volgar' [Volgar]. 1907. September 5, No. 207.
- ⁹ Archive of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the G. Ibragimov ILLAAS RT (Kazan). Fund 185. Inventory 3, unit 30.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., unit 28.
- ¹¹ Musul'manskaya gazeta [Muslim Newspaper]. 1913. No. 24. St. Petersburg.
- ¹² Musul'manskaya gazeta [Muslim Newspaper]. 1914. No. 1. St. Petersburg.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Archive of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the G. Ibragimov ILLAAS RT (Kazan). Fund 185. Inventory 3, unit 29.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., unit 35, l. 1.
- ¹⁶ Russkoye slovo. “Teatr i muzyka” [The Russian Word. “Theater and Music”]. November 11, 1907, No. 260.
- ¹⁷ Archive of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the G. Ibragimov ILLAAS RT (Kazan). Fund 185. Inventory 1, unit 63, p. 6.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., unit 63, p. 7.
- ¹⁹ Archive of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the G. Ibragimov ILLAAS RT (Kazan). Fund 185. Inventory 3, unit 9, l. 1.
- ²⁰ Ibid., unit 9, p. 2.
- ²¹ The Gramophone Company Limited ZONOPHONE RECORDS. THE ORIENT CATALOGUE [Electronic resource]. Compiled and edited by Alan Kelly. March, 2000. CD-ROM.
- ²² Kudashev-Ashkazarsky, Ilyasbek Batyrgareyevich. Entsiklopedia Bashkirii [Encyclopedia of Bashkiria]. URL: http://ufa-gid.com/encyclopedia/kudash_shk.html (17.10.2018).

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