

No.2 rather than world première: that was given three years previously in Germany, where Clarke has been especially well-received). It would be good to hear more works from this highly original composer performed within these shores, as he attempts to reconcile his freshly cleansed palette from the *Untitled* pieces with more intricate, fiery material as encountered in his recent Second String Quartet: the incorporation and working-out of these two extremes within future single compositions should make for some exciting, unpredictable results.

Paul Conway

Baku: Qara Qarayev Festival

When you arrive in Baku today, many things impress you immediately. Even five years ago the city was still very much a 'Soviet' one, with numerous buildings half-destroyed or not very well-appointed. The Muslim culture was chaotically coexisting with the heritage of Communism. Soviet-style areas were found next door to new skyscrapers designed by fashionable Western architects, including Norman Foster. Today the range of building works in the city is simply incomparable with any other country. The old town is well preserved and excellently redecorated, but the old districts, full of the flavour of 1930s life, are gradually disappearing: if you want to see them, you should make your trip to Baku immediately. Soon this will be one of the most luxurious, and probably most expensive, world capitals.

Today Azerbaijan is one of the richest countries of the Muslim world, and one of the most culturally aware; it is certainly the richest of all former republics of the Soviet Union. Its cultural orientation has two clear directions. Looking West, Azerbaijan is trying to attract Western specialists, designers, experts and investors. Looking east, it tries to define and to preserve its national identity.

Azerbaijan does have a very complicated cultural history. A typical Arabic country of the 19th century, with Persian characters in use until the 1920s, it became a part of the Soviet Union in the 1920s. The Cyrillic alphabet and Cyrillic transliteration were the norm for the seven decades of the Soviet era, until the 1990s. From the moment of the collapse of the Soviet Union and up to now, Azerbaijan has been using the Latin alphabet, not least in order to get closer to the Western world. But the language itself is typically Turkic, very similar to Turkish. Links with Turkey are very strong. The TV programmes list 12 Turkish channels, nine Russian, six local Azeri channels,

two from the United Arab Emirates, three from Germany, two from France, one Chinese, one Italian and one British (BBC World). This listing speaks for itself. On the other hand, Azerbaijan still has very strong ties with Russia, and also very important connexions with the Arabic world, particularly Iran. All Iranian poets, including the Sufi, Jalal ad-Din Rumi, are listed as 'national' ones with their portraits displayed in the central square in Baku. Indeed it is hard to draw a distinct cultural or even geographic 'border' between the two countries. Religiously and culturally (despite the difference in languages), they are much closer than Azerbaijan is to Turkey, and hundreds of thousands of Azeri people traditionally live in North Iran.

At present Baku is home to several important festivals (including the International piano festival/competition and the Rostropovich Festival). A new, beautifully designed concert hall is being built for the next Eurovision Song Contest, which is to happen in Baku. The Philharmonic Hall is rather small, but truly beautiful and acoustically perfect. This hall was the main venue in April for a recently re-established Festival in memory of the greatest 20th-century Azeri composer, Qara Qaraev (or, in traditional Russian transliteration, Kara Karaev). Qaraev (1918–1982) was one of the most interesting Soviet composers, a friend and a pupil of Dmitri Shostakovich; he spent his late years in Moscow. In his last compositions he attempted to bring together traditional values of national identity and Western idioms and aesthetics. He is remembered for composing the very first Soviet Symphony with explicit dodecaphonic technique – then forbidden in the Soviet Union – his Symphony No. 3.

Qarayev's son, Faradzh Karaev (b. 1943), one of the most significant contemporary Azeri composers, runs this music festival in memory of his father. The festival was originally established in 1988, but was later abandoned for more than 20 years. It is good to see it re-established and at a full steam now.

Faradzh Karaev (who is half-Russian) lives and works in Moscow. He is a professor at the Moscow Conservatoire, but is often in Baku where he is the artistic director of the State Chamber Orchestra. His music has been performed widely in Russia and in the West. When you listen to it, you will hardly recognize any national Azeri idioms. Karaev's aesthetics – in line with his father's ideas – goes further west. His favourite composer is Alban Berg (Karaev's version of Berg's Violin Concerto for violin and chamber orchestra was brilliantly performed at the festival by Swiss violinist Patricia Kopatchinskaja). Karaev's

arrangement of Schoenberg's *Erwartung* for chamber forces is often performed. James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, Emily Dickinson, Gyorgy Ligeti, and George Crumb have inspired his own compositions. Karaev's style is a perfect example of a new universal language rooted in both national traditions and in Western aesthetics without too direct a demonstration of any particular stylistic priorities. His latest work – a Violin Concerto, premièred in Switzerland a year ago – shows his stylistic orientations very clearly. A long and intense composition, it develops from a 'toy'-like, multi-stylistic world of various quotations (Haydn, Mendelssohn) to extreme intensity, with a long climax at the end based on the energy of very gradual organic changes typical of Azeri (and Arabic) Maqam. This brilliant piece was performed by its dedicatee, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, with the Azerbaijan State Philharmonic orchestra under its Music Director Rauf Abdullayev.

The week-long festival included several orchestral and chamber concerts with the programmes alternating Azeri contemporary music (Qara Qarayev, Faradzh Karaev, Arif Malikov, Hayam Mirzazade, Firudin Allahverdi, Rufat Halilov, Elmir Mirzoev) and contemporary Western music, presented by the Freiburg Percussion Ensemble (Nicolaus Huber, Steve Reich, Emmanuel Sejourne, Javier Alvarez) and by the 'Reconcile Vienna Modern' ensemble directed by Ronald Freisitzer (Gerard Grisey, Manuela Kreger, Alexander Wagendristel). The Ensemble Ascolta from Germany, conducted by Tutus Engel, played film music from movies of the 1920s and 30s by René Char, Hans Richter, Oscar Fischinger and Luis Bunuel. The 20th-century classics included works of Webern, Berg, Messiaen, Xenakis, Takemitsu, Lutos awski, with special events dedicated to the music and the ideas of Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Two orchestra programmes (conducted by Rauf Abdullayev and Vladimir Runchak) featured works by two major Russian composers of today: Alexander Raskatov's *Xenia* and Vladimir Tarnopolsky's Cello Concerto *Le vent des mots qu'il n'a pas dits* (soloist Alexander Ivashkin). Both compositions show new directions of post-Soviet music (similar in Russia and in Azerbaijan) in a search for de-contextualisation of the simplest elements of musical language, without clear priorities for any particular stylistic identities.

This second Qara Qarayev festival in Baku was a most stimulating forum, enhancing our knowledge about the diverse cultural life of this dynamic post-Soviet country, with its own old and rich Muslim traditions.

Alexander Ivashkin

London: St George's Church, Bloomsbury: Benjamin Ellen's 'Siksika'

Wailing chants of the Siksika, or Blackfoot Indian tribe in Canada formed the musical inspiration for a striking new Viola Concerto, *Siksika*, by the British composer Benjamin Ellin, which received its European première by Rivka Golani on 15 March 2011. The concerto formed the centre-piece of an imaginatively-conceived programme entitled 'Postcard From ...', which explored the interaction of traditional/regional and contemporary/ international elements in music from Australia, Poland, Estonia, the UK and Hungary, all of it beautifully performed concert by the String Ensemble of the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, a student orchestra conducted by Nic Pendlebury, to a capacity audience at St George's Church, Bloomsbury. The richly resonant acoustics of this, one of Hawksmoor's six London churches, enhanced the String Ensemble's vivid sonorities, whilst the complex and demanding contemporary programme underlined their professionalism and enthusiasm.

Benjamin Ellin composed his concerto *Siksika* for Rivka Golani who premièred it at the Fort Macleod International Festival in Alberta, Canada in 2010. (A new commission was in preparation for the next festival in May 2011, which also featured a world première by Stephen Montague). The ravishing colours, rhapsodic lyricism, the contrasts between inwardly poetic moments and dramatic sections, searing clashes between solo and orchestral harmonies, all reflect what the composer explained as his three sources of inspiration connected to the Blackfoot tribe: namely its geography, heritage and history. First, the vast expanses of Canadian landscapes, with their aspiration to a more individual spirituality, are conveyed in the contrast between sustained harmonic textures, at times coloured with an almost Wagnerian richness, and the soloist's mainly high, chant-like melodic lyricism in the first section. Second, the musical styles of indigenous chants (absorbed from field recordings) permeate the entire musical discourse: the three sections gather impressive momentum through Ellin's economic manipulation of three thematic and harmonic ideas, introduced in an eloquent initial meditation for viola and subdued strings: these are, in turn, a rising seventh gesture, a chromatic falling motif based on the augmented second and a rising minor third motif. The three elements appear to generate much of the material within an engaging and varied sound-tapestry, full of changes of mood, enriched by the addition of oboe and clarinet to the strings. The third source was the historical