

ALFIYA AVZALOVA

Memories



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The book is dedicated to the great Tatar singer Alfiya Avzalovna, who was a prize winner and she was awarded a lot of titles. She was the founder of the Tatar pop vocal art, who performed songs in 17 languages of the world. Her life and career deserves respect and memory of the people she lived for.

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Rustam Minnikhanov President of the Republic of Tatarstan

Dear friends, distinguished compatriots!

You are holding memories of Alfiya Avzalova, Honorary Artist of Russia, People's Artist of Tatarstan.

Alfiya Avzalova is a renowned singer, who relentlessly served our nation. Her repertoire includes old and modern folk songs, pieces of Sultan Gabashi, Aleksandr Klyucharev, Mansur Muzaffarov, Zakhid Khabibullin and the other composers. She performed songs in 17 languages of the world.

She is a singer with a unique voice who dedicated her life to promote our culture and musical art. Alfiya Avzalova was a leading singer of the Republic of Tatarstan. She worked in the State Song and Dance Ensemble and became a well-known lead singer of the Tatar State Philharmonic Hall named after G.Tukay where she worked for more than 50 years.

A lot of events in her honor such as the International Festival Contest named after Alfiya Avzalova. A. Avzalova's Tribute Concert at the Tatar State Philharmonic Hall named after G. Tukay and others are held annually in Tatarstan, Russia and overseas countries. We also published her memories, recorded the audio album and made a documentary about her life.

I believe these memories will contribute to understand how great and dedicated to folk art Alfiya Avzalova was.

Introduction

People often ask me about my childhood, my youth, how I became a singer and how I am doing nowadays. They are also interested in that plaintive melody which characterizes Tatar folk songs and how songs come to be. The fact that people express such interest shows their regard and love towards people of arts. It gives me pleasure to acknowledge such regard but I still must answer those questions and it is a responsible task. I have taken up this responsibility and in the last fifteen or twenty years I have been trying to answer some of the questions, very shortly, while standing on the stage during my concerts. If you ask me, it seems like such conversation with the performances somehow. It enables for the invisible barrier between the singer and the audience to disappear and true friendship and sincerity settle in. However, a concert is a concert after all and it is impossible to answer all the questions from the audience. I was a little criticized for alternating my songs with the stories from my personal life. Some can blame me for this and can write critical articles in the newspaper. I suppose not all my stories were accepted by the audience. Some liked my stories, others did not. Any way at my concerts I am utterly sincere about what I usually tell. The audience actually wants to know more. They are full of questions. Keeping that in mind, I have come to a decision to write about my personal life and career, especially for my younger audience.

As you are aware, I am not a writer or a journalist. Even though I have a lot to tell, I have a hard time expressing it in a refined manner. Nevertheless, as the saying goes, life grants nothing to us mortals without hard work. Thus being motivated I took a pen and started writing.

Whatever is on the inside comes to the surface that is my nature. With this virtue I started writing. The episodes from my childhood, my youth and my whole life flash in front of my eyes one after another and surround me just like movie frames.

I read the drafts to my friends who had experience in writing. Some episodes I preferred to tell verbally. My friends put it all in order, corrected, added and edited my manuscript. As a result, this piece of work was produced. It looks like I have succeeded with the help of my friends.

My dear reader, allow me to apologize from the very beginning. I did my best to put it all in writing. I thank in advance those who will read and enjoy this book. Also, no hard feelings toward those who preferred not to read it.

A black and white portrait of a woman with dark hair pulled back, smiling gently at the camera. She is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored collared shirt. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

ALFIYA AVZALOVA
MEMORIES

Swallowing Sorrow From An Early Age...

I went outside in the morning and saw
The nearby mountain was covered with snow.
Get used to hide my sorrow since my youth
My heart is still bleeding.

(Tatar folk song)

I remember my childhood since I was five years old. My Mom died when I turned five. I remember her quite clearly while she was still alive, maybe not in all details. So, I suppose I was only four then. I am writing everything that happened before my mother had died.

I remember a village called «Kaban»¹ very well. We were living in a small house with low ceiling, two small windows, and a thatched roof. Once my Dad came home drunk. Such days were very frequent. That day he did not even shut the door, so it became cold inside. I was sitting on the mitch (brick stove with an oven) and with my two-year-old sister Flyura. Our clothes were poor. That evening Mom braided our hair and gave us a rag doll she had sewed herself. We were playing dolls with my sister. When Dad came home we looked at him, shrinking from the cold coming in through the door. Dad began to swear and spit, blubbing his eyes out. Mom quickly ran to us, climbed the stove and hid behind the pile of firewood. Dad dragged her down and began to beat her. He must have seen her hiding or I, being a child, might have shown where she was. I began to cry and so did my sister. Dad was beating Mom and at the same time he was trying quite us. He hung a string of bagels around my neck. I kept crying anyway, «Do not hurt Mom, do not hurt her!...». But he continued beating Mom and pulling her hair. He punched her on the head and kicked her in the belly (As I am writing these lines, tears are trickling down and I can feel a lump in my throat). He beat Mom very often.

One day Dad beat Mom, then took our cow away, sold it and came back drunk. I remember crying and shouting at him: «Bring our cow back! Bring her back! What did you do to our cow?! She was so beautiful, why did you take her away?».

My Dad, named Avzal, was an infamous idler in the village. The villagers called him Lazy Avzal. In addition to his laziness, he was also a pathetic, bad-mannered drunkard. Mom was much upset that he sold the cow and that we can die from starving. She would hug us and wept. That time the cow was the main source of food, the villages depended on. There harvest was poor harvest that year, so the

¹ Kaban – a village in Kaltasinskiy District (now Krasnokamskiy) of the Bashkir ASSR

village people did not have enough bread, I suppose. Sometimes milk was the only food so they could survive by it. We were left without any source of milk. My Dad could not care less. He was always drunk and fought with Mom. As if it was not enough, he took to playing cards and became a gambler. I do not know where this game came from to our village. So he would play cards somewhere, lose and then sell household items to pay back. We lost our cow because of this game. I probably could not understand it at the time. There were days when Dad even lost his clothes in a card game.

I remember it well, once Dad lost his trouser at cards and came back in a skirt. I do not know how he was not ashamed to walk down the street in the worn and darned dress. The more I think about it, the more I am astonished about his behavior. (It is not nice to write about your own father in such a light, of course. So, I do not feel good about it, but still, it does not change the fact.) I remember him wearing a skirt for long periods of time.

Nevertheless, sometimes we had the days when my father was sober. As if in a dream, I remember him weaving bast shoes and softly humming some melodic tunes. Sometimes I think he could have been a decent person if he worked and did not drink. But, unfortunately, vodka did its trick with our Dad as it usually does with any decent men.

My poor Mommy was so unhappy to get married to such a person as my Dad. After they got married, the father's relatives and the neighbors of my father loved my Mom very much. She was a nice pretty and gentle woman. Her name was Min-yamal, which means beauty, so it suited her perfectly.

I can still see her alive standing nearby with her dark-curly-hair, dark-brown eyes, round face and a slim body. She was very charming. She liked singing, slow tempo songs and had a gentle voice. I wonder what tunes she sang to my little sisters as a lullaby? Unfortunately, I was not old enough to memorize a tune back then.

My Mom was a gentle woman and she was polite to everyone. Otherwise, she would have resisted our drunken Dad, would not let him beat herself like that. However, what could a young woman like Mommy do against a drunken man?! Mom realized that she had gotten herself into that terrible life as soon as they got married. After five months of living together, she left Dad and returned to Aktan– ysh. She tried to escape from his beatings. Mom was already pregnant with me that time. I had been in her womb for four months. So, I was born in Aktanysh. But Dad came to Aktanysh to take us back and promised Mom that he would not drink and fight anymore. Mommy believed him and they got back together again. But, unfortunately, Dad did not change his habits. He continued to drink and play cards, didn't work and did not think about raising children or helping Mom either.

After a while my younger sisters Flyura and Gulsirin were born. Yes, we girls were born to this bright world but were greeted by dark days and sinister nights. Black clouds of orphanhood and starvation were looming above our heads.

If Mommy were alive and well, perhaps we would not have felt orphaned and hungry under her caring wings. But, unfortunately, Mom's life was too short. She died at the age of 26 from typhoid, which was raging in our region in the mid-30s and claimed many people's lives.

I clearly remember that days when my Mommy sick and then died. We had two houses in our courtyard, our small house and another one was standing next to it. Dad's younger brother lived there with his family. We called him Shakert [Jaekert] abiy¹ [aby] and his wife Mulla jingey² [djiggej].. Shakert abiy was a very kind and generous man, but his wife Mulla jingey was a very mean woman. Whenever Shakert abiy treated us with some food, Mulla jingey stared at him as if she could kill him. My sister and I were scared to go into their house. However, we were relatives and they lived just next door, so there must have been some interaction, I suppose.

One day we were lying on a sake³ [saeke-plank bed) all together covered by the old blanket. Mommy and Flyura were by my sides and a faltering ball of ragged pieces of clothing was next to Mom. It was our one-week-old sister Gulsirin and she was crying. Mom's body was as hot as an iron stove which kept me very warm, I even was hot. That moment, Dad and Shakert abiy came in. Dad lifted Mom out of bed and carried her outside. He put Mom in a horse open sleigh standing at the gate and led her away down the street. Three of us were left to lie on the bed under the old blanket. Then I stood up at the windowsill, melted the icy glass and I looked after the sledge. I began to cry, wondering where they took Mom. Flyura was crying too. Gulsirin's crying was also heard from under the blanket. The house was cold and miserable. The sinister wind was whistling outside.

Some time later Shakert abiy and Mulla jingey took us to their house. Neither do I remember what we ate nor what they talked to us about, but I remember some moments that still hurt my heart.

We were playing with Flyura while jingey was breastfeeding. She also had a baby at the time, which was much older than Gulsirin. I looked at them and saw her baby was poking our baby's eye! I started crying out of pity for Gulsirin. Jingey got mad at me. She was taking care of and breastfeeding her baby. Our little sister was hungry and was looking for some milk. But no one breastfed her... Probably, because I was crying or jingay felt pity, she gave milkless breast to Gulsirin. My poor small sister was tired of crying and started to suck jingey's empty breasts... She sucked like there was no tomorrow. As soon as the baby calmed down a little bit, jingey stopped breastfeeding her. That day I cried my eyes out.

Dad did not return home for a long time. We stayed at our relatives' home. Once I heard the talk about Mommy. I understood that she was very ill and she was

¹abiy [aby] – uncle, the word is used when someone addresses an elder brother or a man (from Tatar)

²jingey [djirgej] – aunt, uncle's wife (from Tatar)

³sake [stoke] – a wide wooden bad in a house (from Tatar)

in the hospital. Our aunt, mother's sister Zakira apa¹ [apa] from Aktanysh found out about Mom's illness and came to us. (We called her Jyrakay² [jerakai], My daughters Guzel and Zulfiya also called her Jyrakay.) Zakira apa – Jyrakay took us to our home and stayed with us for three or four days, as I remember. I still remember her saying «I pray the Allah, my little babies. I pray that your Mom will be cured and could raise you. I hope you will not be orphans...», she said.

I did not know what the word «orphanhood» meant, so I did not understand it. I could not even pronounce that word, but it scared me. I imagined it as something gloomy and it felt like falling into a deep and dark pit. I was scaring trembling and moved closer to Zakira apa.

Without telling us, Zakira apa secretly visited Mom at the hospital. We were still staying in our house. One day I think because Zakira apa was stay in with us Mulla jingey and the others villagers came in one day and talked about Mom and cried, discussing our future, «Minyamal is seriously ill with typhoid, and she loses consciousness sometimes... She cries for her kids, wants to escape from the hospital... But doctors tied her with a rope to bed. Her chest is full of milk and she wants to feed Gulsirin...» they said.

Soon Zakira apa went back to Aktanysh. How could she leave us – three small kids alone in a cold house – I do not know. Do you call this kinship? Now when I think all about it, I am getting so astonished. So, we were left alone and Dad did not come back.

The next day someone came to jingey and said, «Afzal's wife is feeling well today. She wants to see Alfiya». We immediately went to the hospital. When we rushed into the hospital, one nurse met us and said, «Don't go there, Minyamal has passed away». I did not understand those words, but jingey started crying. When I asked why we were going back home, jingey started sobbing and said, «Your Mommy is dead!». I did not understand the full meaning of the word «dead» at that moment. My child's mind could not grasp the fact that a dead person goes forever.

We went back to jingey's house and I played with empty matchboxes on a windowsill. Suddenly I looked out of the window, and saw Daddy riding his horse home. I realized that he brought Mommy home. I ran outside to meet her. They brought Mom home and put her on the floor. My sister Flyura and I climbed the sake and started staring at Mom. Mom did not have hair on the head as she was shaved with a penknife. Her eyes were slightly ajar.

The neighbors came in, people gathered, everyone was weeing. We were playing with my sister, not realizing that Mom was dead. In the evening, for some reason, I wanted to reach for the lamp over Mom's body. But the lamp went out and I fell on Mommy's body in darkness. Mommy's iciness raked my flesh, her body was

¹ apa [apa] – aunt, the word is used when someone addresses an elder sister or a woman (from Tatar)

² Jyrakay [djir.vkaj] – aunt, who lives far away (from Tatar)

as cold as ice. Then I began to cry. That day I understood the meaning of the word «death». I could not stop crying for a long time and hugging Mommy's cold body.

I do not remember what happened later.

The next day Mommy's body was washed. «Take the children away, they will get scared,» someone said. After a while, we were brought back home to say goodbye to Mommy. She was wrapped and laid on a wooden bench. There were a lot of old ladies in our house. They gave us money. «Why did you give Flyura big money and so little to me?!» I cried.

Then some people took Mommy and put her in the sleigh. The horse was waiting impatiently and it started moving slowly. People were talking, «Their aunt from Aktanysh did not come to bury her... What kind of a sibling is she?». Zakira apa might not have heard the news, probably. The distance between the villages was far.

«Poor children, three small kids, where and how would they live now?» someone asked.

«I have my own children, I can not take care of three children» jingey said. «I do not have enough milk even for my own baby,» she said.

They talked a lot, «Let's kill the baby!» they said. I couldn't imagine, «How? How to kill?»

I heard as Gulbanu apa said, «Let's make her drink some ice-cold milk». All agreed with her suggestion. What could I do against them? «No, no, leave my sister alone!» I began to cry.

«We will not hurt her, we will only give her some milk to drink,» they said. If I were older I would have stopped them. They brought a bottle of ice-cold milk from outside and gave it to Gulsirin. The baby turned into a stone. I do not know for how long she stayed alive, my dear Gulsirin?... The baby died... Gulsirin! Gulsirin! My dear, beautiful, beloved, sweet as a rose small sister! My alive doll! My heart is still aching!

«The baby died after a week later after the mother's death,» they said.

So, my poor sister lived only for a week after Mom was passed away. She was born for suffering. Dad took Gulsirin away and buried her near Mom. I never forgive Daddy for Gulsiri's death. Certainly our life was hard, but nevertheless, people lived, worked, ate and protected their families. If our Dad was not unemployed, lazy, did not beat Mom and hurt her a lot, Mom would not succumbed from typhoid disease so quickly. She could live, would not die and would not leave us alone. Hard-working person will never starve. His mediocrity was also bad for himself. And his life was short too. I will write about him later.

After Mom died, Dad went somewhere else. Maybe he went to look for a job, but we – two little girls – stayed at home alone. Someone was coming in and out. I do not remember what we ate and how we lived...

Winter passed and summer came. One day Dad brought home a new mother. Her name was Marhama. I remember her being a kind woman. For some reason, she didn't stay long. She took us in her arms, kissed us, stroke our heads and said, «Oh, little kids!...».



July, 1947

Then she left and never came back. Dad went away again. Perhaps he was hired for a job somewhere or was drunk and did not return home. I don't know. We had already started swelling from hunger. I do not remember exactly who it was, but once a woman came in and gave us a small bucket. «My little girls, you should go where people process milk. They will give you something, I hope, and will not let you starve to death,» she said. My sister Flyura and I went to the house where milk separator was located. We held a small bucket in our hands. Our clothes were very bad and thin. We were barefoot. I did not know whether it was spring or autumn, but it was very cold outside. Taking pity, women gave us some processed milk. We drank it at once. Cold milk hurt our stomach, it was painful, but we endured it. Our feet were swollen on the icy-cold stone floor. Still, we endured it nonetheless, because we were satisfying our hunger.

Women were talking, «Why are these children not sent to an orphanage? Their father went away somewhere too... They are not taken to the orphanage, because they actually have a father... What kind of law is that? Why does not the government do anything? It is better not to have such a father... Oh, poor kids, they are so alone in this world».

People from my father's native village New Kaban used to go to the market in Aktanysh their entire lifetime. The villagers would weave bast shoes and sell them at the Aktanysh market. One day Zakira apa came to the market and asked, «Is there anyone from New Kaban?». «Yes, we are here, we are from New Kaban», someone said. She asked about our well-being and asked villagers for a favor to bring us to Aktanysh. Next week one man put my sister Flyura and me in a sleigh, wrapped our hands and feet in linen sheets, covered us with straw and brought us to our aunt.

My aunt welcomed us weeping. I felt good as soon as we entered a small, but clean, cozy and warm house. We were standing at the door for a long time. My aunt had a husband. He was sitting at the table and was having a meal. He was an unpleasant person with sunken cheeks. He looked at us with anger and did not invite us to the table. Zakira apa loved children very much, although she had never had one of her own. She felt pity for us and stood crying. However jizniy¹ [djiznij] seemed to have a heart of stone. It was written on his face. He did not utter a word to us. Our aunt was afraid of him and did not invite us in, so we stood at the door for a long time. She did not invite us in, so we stood at the door for a long time. Aunt must have been scared as this was her second marriage. After her husband died she got married to his younger brother. Her second husband was younger than she and probably, for that reason, was arrogant. They also argued about our arrival, I suppose.

After standing on the doorstep for a long time our aunt took us to a small kitchen room and seated us on a wooden bench. She washed us and then gave us some food. There were jacket potatoes, baked in a stove oven, katyk² [katyk] in a bowl, slices of brown bread baked with orach. We gobbled up everything in a heartbeat. Our aunt was looking at us and crying and wiping the tears streaming down her cheeks with an apron.

Thus, we began to live with our aunt and her husband. The small kitchen room was a dining room and a bedroom for us. We never entered the lounge, where jizniy lived. He did not like us. He frowned every time he saw us eating. We were afraid to hold our spoons in his presence because we felt like he would take them away. My sister always started crying out of fear. I felt upset too, but tried to refrain from crying.

Zakira apa was a cleaner in the savings bank, and that man who was supposed to be our jizniy was a security guard there. He used to spend nights at his workplace during his shifts. Those nights of his working shifts were happy for us. Those evenings, we – Zakira apa, my sister and I – all together we talked a lot. Although we were upset because of our mother's death, after all, we were kids and often asked our aunt to tell us fairy tales. Aunt's kindness and joyful words cheered us up. It was hard for her, perhaps. Their salary was low and the food was very scarce. Moreover we were considered to be extra mouths to feed for jizniy. They often argued because of us. Therefore, my aunt asked the Director of the savings bank Najiya apa Bashirova to help her and send us to the orphanage.

«Do you want to give up both of them?» Najiya apa asked.

«Only Flyura, but Alfiya will stay with me!» Zakira apa replied, crying and breathing heavily.

Thus, my sister Flyura was sent to the orphanage. I stayed with my aunt. Despite my jizniy looked at me fiercely, I was with my aunt in a warm house.

¹ jizniy [djiznij] – aunt's husband (from Tatar)

² katyk [katyk] – sour milk (from Tatar)

I went to the first grade in 1939. I wore a dress, tinted in blue and that was hand-sewn from the auntie's old dress and my school bag was made of linen. In the bag I had a few notebooks and a pencil. Someone from the savings bank gave them to Zakira apa and asked to give it to me. That sunny September day when I started my school holding a handbag and met kind and smiling teachers left only pleasant memories.. Those times were filled with a kind of sweet mystery and bright hope.

My teacher Nafisa apa Akmalova liked me very much. She used to stroke my hair and pat my back. Once we had a music lesson. Nafisa apa taught us a very cheerful and beautiful song that went as follows «Meow, meow, my kitty!». (Later, I found out that the tune was written by Jawdat Fayzi on Musa Jalil's lyrics, famous Tatar composer and poet).

The next day Nafisa apa said, «Alfiya, stand up and sing us the song we learned yesterday, please». I stood up and sang. I remembered the tune and the lyrics and sang it correctly. Nafisa apa listened with admiration and praised me in front of the whole class. «Did you guys hear that? How beautiful it was! She has a beautiful voice and a good memory too. She made no mistake. Good job to you, Alfiya, well done!» she said.

I also loved Bashkir music in the first grade. Later on, I found out it was a song of a girl named Karlygach¹ [karlygach] in the similarly named play:

The round lake will be beautiful,
Only if it's full of water.
Let girls be born by mothers,
If only they are happy...

Everyone liked that song, which was usually performed very melodiously. But Nafisa apa changed its words:

Let girls be born by mothers,
If only they are good students.

It was common at that time to change the lyrics of folk songs to convey a different meaning, to create an image of «happy childhood».

Since then, Nafisa apa would come to our house and taught me singing. Winter came around. It began to snow. I did not have any warm clothes to wear outside. Zakira apa found some kind of old aziam², beshmet³, which must have belonged to her husband. I wore bast shoes on my feet and an old, patched all around, long beshmet.

¹karlygach [kArllgAtf] – swallow (from Tatar)

²aziam – sort of long caftan worn by peasants (from Tatar)

³beshmet – kind of quilted jacket (from Tatar)

Nafisa apa also brought me some old headscarf and socks. I wore old clothes and sang a lot. Whenever I stayed at home alone, I sang as if a gramophone was playing. I used to «give stage performances». I sang the songs which Nafisa apa taught me: «Shahta» (*Mine*), «Al Marfuga, gul Marfuga», «Nuriya» (the titles of Tatar folk songs). The songs made me feel peaceful and let me forget about my orphanhood, hunger and cold, they gave me hope for the future...

1941 came. War... The villagers cried. Every day men went to war riding horses. They walked down the streets, singing under heartbreaking melodies of garmon. I still remember those songs:

If we don't walk the streets,
The geese wouldn't move.
If we are happy children,
Germany wouldn't move...
I'm leaving, I'm leaving,
I'm leaving, but you'll stay.
Who will love you up – a nightingale
When I'm gone away...

The older and younger generations – all villagers walked to the village border to see off those who were leaving for the war. It felt as if some terrible shroud hung above the village and filled all the streets with silence. Neither dogs barked, nor people chatted. I did not sing either. I could not sing. I felt like I had something bitter caught in my throat and it seemed it would be followed by bitter tears.

I did not understand the whole tragedy of the war that time. Although I felt that war was like a terrible black cloud spread over our village. The wind of heart breaking war came to our house too – jizniy was taken to the war. Zakira apa cried, wiping her tears on the rim of her headscarf, and filled a go-bag for him. Jizniy went away. Zakira apa cried her eyes out. I stood in silence. Although I felt sorry for all the villagers who went to war, for some reason, I did not feel sorry for jizniy at all. I did not cry. Apparently, his mean glances and his considering me being an extra spoon must have upset me and my feelings toward him turned into ice. Oddly enough, but I was very glad he left. I was happy to stay with my aunt alone. It was not good to feel satisfied because jizniy had gone to war, but what could I do. Being a child, I did not consider it from a moral standpoint.

Despite being poor, we lived in peace and harmony with Zakira apa. There were no disagreements in the house and nobody considered me a burden. Perhaps, it was fair to feel sorry for jizniy, but I did not. He died in the war at a young age, falling victim of the war. I forgave him a long time ago, may he rest in peace in the Garden of Eden.

Our school was located in the old mosque of Aktanysh where we studied from

Alfiya Avzalova and
Khamit Rayanov,
musician. 1948



the first to the fourth grades. I was looking forward to music lessons. I sang during the lesson and other schoolchildren used to come and listen to me. Thus, I started to sing on stage at school concerts when I was in the third and fourth grades. After finishing the fourth grade, I was included in the propaganda team of Aktanysh district and began to perform songs at concerts in villages. Our propaganda group was in the field during the spring sowing season, haymaking period and harvesting time. There were girls older than me, and several young men in our team. We sang, danced, declaimed poems and we also sang in the choir. During the day we performed in the fields and in the evenings we sang at the clubs. Our performances gathered full houses though the clubs were poorly lit by oil lamps.

I sang the songs I mentioned above, «Shahta», «Al Marfuga, gul Marfuga», «Nuriya». I had also memorized one song called «Oy artynda shomyrtym» (*«Bird cherry tree is behind my home»*), which had been recently released, havilg heard it on the radio. This song was very popular for many years to follow. People began to call it «My bird cherry». It became my favorite song.

There is a bird cherry behind the house,
A blackberry is growing nearby.
And charming as that blackberry,
My country blooms.

The war was terrible... There was not enough food. Our clothes were ragged. Death letters with black seals on them arrived in the village every day. But the lyrics of the current songs were along the lines of «my country blooms and flourishes». How could that be?! The black clouds of the war were brewing over the country... But I sang, I did not think about the lyrics. If I did, I would not have understood it, anyway. I realized it so clearly afterward. It turned out we had to show life in bright colors in art, especially in songs of those years. It is called «varnishing» in art. The reality needed to be shown in a decorated and polished way.

A very popular singer of those years Zifa Basyrova sang a song on the radio. Later on, when I became a singer, I found out that song was recorded from the people by a famous bayanist Rokiya Ibragimova and singer Zifa Basyrova during their concert tours. Zifa Basyrova wrote its lyrics about «blooming country» herself later on. The songs had to be joyful and optimistic. Such requirements were made by top-level officials. The singers had to be cheerful too.

I think Zifa apa felt sorrow because her beloved husband Geniy Republicanes¹ was arrested as a public enemy and sent to prison in Siberia during the repressions of 1937. Zifa apa was left alone with a little son, she also was persecuted in different ways as the wife of a public enemy. As for Geniy Republicanes, he was a very educated and hard working man. He was the one who set up museums dedicated to Lenin. He also opened one in Kazan and as a faithful communist devoted it to the Soviet power... And such a nobleman died in prison, losing his mind... And his beloved wife was forced to sing about «blooming country», a country which murdered her husband.

There was no kerosene to put into lanterns, but our agitation group kept singing about «blooming country». On the one hand, such songs were necessary to raise the spirit of the people, I suppose. At least, the villagers needed to relax and forget about the suffering that the war had inflicted. They needed to be encouraged to work. Although the lyrics of the song were cheerful, the melody was still sad. I felt sadness singing the song and the audience was also absorbed by its thoughts listening to me. At the end of the concert people from the audience used to come and thank me, patting me on the back. We were welcomed, well-fed and taken care of during our agitation tours. Thus, I sang for many years with the agitation team and people in the district knew me well.

There was a radio receiver on the main street in the center of Aktanysh which was heard everywhere. The concerts were often broadcasted on the radio from Kazan. Beautiful songs and music were sounded from the round loudspeaker, set at the top of

¹ This unusual name was given to him in that orphanage.

pole. What a surprise it was, I used to memorize the songs on the first hearing and would immediately begin to sing them. I always listened to the songs of Tatar singers such as Gulsum apa Suleymanova, Zifa apa Basyrova, Rashit abiy Vagapov on the radio.

They were the most popular singers of those years. People waited for their songs on the radio and enjoyed listening to them very much. They were very close to the people with their soulful voices and wonderful songs. They were famous singers, talented people who deserved the great love of their listeners.

I consider them my teachers and mentors as I have learned and sung their songs since my childhood. I did not know what «mentor» meant in the fourth grade, but I cherished them, studied them a lot and tried to sing like they, using grace music. Their songs, mysterious and magical, inspired me and it seemed they held me with invisible hands, took me somewhere higher, toward the stars...

Our propaganda team did not go to the villages during winter. Concerts were shown only in Aktanysh. I attended school classes and mostly stayed at home. It was getting harder to live day by day. The war was not over. All men who were able to work in kolkhoz¹ went to the front line. Only women, children and old people were left in the villages. The farm fields covered with weeds. We had a poor harvest that year. There were not enough men to harvest the fields properly, even in the past years, when the fields were fertile. Harvest was left in the fields. The starvation swallowed people in the village, making their eyes bulge out and cheek sunken.

Zakira apa and I had no food. She had no farm animals and her salary was also small. You had to pay the entire monthly salary if you wanted to buy rye flour, which could be cooked once or twice a week. One day we had not a single spoonful of flour. The potatoes in the cellar were frozen because of the cold winter and were rotten. We did not eat a single meal for two or three days, we starved. Zakira apa could not hold her tears and said to me, «Alfiya, my daughter, what can we do, we might die starving! Your face becomes yellow, my little one, your eyes are sunken, how can I save you?».

I could not cry, I was so hungry, my stomach ached. Everything went dark and I started feeling dizzy. After a while, Zakira apa gave me a small bag and said, «Go, my child, beg! As they say, people are kind and good people are everywhere. We live in a big country, someone must give you something, they will not turn you away. There is no sin in begging, times are tough. What should we do when we are pinned down by starvation, the only way is to beg... Somebody will give you something to eat, I hope. Maybe I will also get a chance to bite a small piece...».

My aunt showed me the houses where I could go and where families were not so stingy and mean. I went outside, holding the bag and stopped by the houses which my aunt mentioned. Someone gave me two potatoes and the other one a half of potato kelje¹ [kaddp], There was no bread at all. I was not sure if anybody ate bread in the village at all. I walked for a long time. I entered the houses where

¹ kelje [kaeldjo] - pancakes made from a mixture of rotten potatoes and saltbush flour (from-Tatar)

smoke was coming from the chimney. Another orphan girl joined me on the street. We were too embarrassed to hold our bags. We were the fourth-grade schoolgirls. I was known among the villagers, because I sang at concerts being in the agitation team but now I had to go and beg...

I did not think about singing, it seemed I forgot all the songs... And I had no voice... it was difficult even to open my mouth to speak... There were no thoughts in my head except the desire to eat... It turned out it was very hard to beg. Especially when you are exhausted all the time. Now, when I think about it, I am getting goose bumps all over my body.

We came to a woman's house who had six children. Their father was at the front and there was no news about him. Children were sick and were lying on a sack. The house was cold, there was no any food at all. Their mother was at work in kolkhoz¹. We went to someone else, they were in the same situation. The children were also sick, only their blind grandmother was at home. We did not enter the other houses and went back home. Our bags were empty, we were hungry. I was so hungry that I struggled not to fall down. I thought about those sick children a lot. There was blood coming out of their mouths. All six of them died eventually. (Nine children all together died on one street that day.) I went to the cemetery with people, though I had no strength. I saw with my own eyes as they dug a big hole and laid nine children in a row, covering them with bast, and buried them in one grave. A lot of children and many adults died of starvation during those years.

I realized that we could die, but it was impossible to beg. I explained it to Zakira apa. We wept a little and thought we may probably die, but we would not beg anymore. We tried to keep us alive, cooking rotten potatoes from the cellar.

Out of a clear sky, two more hungry mouths, my mothers' sister Masrura apa from Leningrad and her little child, joined us. They returned escaping from the Siege of Leningrad, begging all over the country. When they arrived at Aktanysh, they were swollen from starving. We tried to feed my aunt and her daughter Insoya and tried to get them back on their legs. We ate the rotten potato porridge dividing one or two spoons per head... Masrura apa sold her dresses from Leningrad. I do not remember how and where from my aunts brought home somebody's cow from. We began to eat better. But soon, we had to sell that cow, because we did not have the strength to make enough hay for it. Zakira apa started to work for the cooperative². She sewed large pockets in her dress and pants. She used to bring wheat, rye, and peas from the field in those pockets.

We dried it in the stove, milled it in the dark cellar, made cereals and cooked soup. It was said that children were not checked, Jyrakay decided to take me with her to the field and fill my pants with the grain. She tied my pants above my knees

¹ kolkhoz - a collective farm (from Russian)

² cooperative- a farm, business, or other organization which is owned and run jointly by its members, who share the profits or benefits (from Russian)

with a rope and filled them from the top. My pants became «thick» and were not seen under my wide dress, although it was too hard to walk. My legs were pricked by awns, I cried. «If you do not want to die by starvation, stop crying,» Jyrakay told me. For several days I would fill my pants and bring home a lot of wheat. Not only us but also many collective farmers were forced to pick up seeds from the fields those years. What was left for us to do we were trying to survive? We cooked soup, mixing cereals and potatoes. It was quite enough not to feel hunger.

It was 1944, I think... I would go to school being hungry... I did not eat anything at school and came home also feeling hungry... My sister, who had returned with her mom from Leningrad, grew up, started to speak. «We have already had dinner. Grandma washed the dishes», she said one of those days. It was so hard to hear those words. I was upset and exhausted, feeling only the smell of that soup in the house. There was nobody to ask me if I had eaten something that day, nobody who would take care of me. No one needed an orphan. The aunts were my mother's siblings, but they did not give birth to me, so I was not their child. They were not able to be my own mom. If my mom were alive, she would leave me some food... I cried a lot and thought it would have been better if I was also sent to the orphanage with my little sister Flyura. I had no news about Flyura. I was angry with my aunts Zakira apa and Masrura apa for the most of the days. I looked forward to the end of the winter. I went on to the fifth grade, but I did not think about schooling, I was waiting for spring. Our propaganda team did not go to the villages in winter and I was starving, but as soon as spring came, we used to go to the villages and perform concerts in the fields. I was well-fed during spring and summertime.

When I was in the sixth grade, my aunt and her daughter, who came from Leningrad, went to Kazan with her daughter, where she began working at the linen factory. We stayed together alone with Jyrakay. We started eating better. Jyrakay often came filling her pockets from the field. But that satiety did not last long... One day my aunt was caught with pockets full of wheat. Four kilograms of wheat was taken out of her pockets. She was taken to court. The leaders of the collective farm were very strict with that case. They said those pests who stoles from the state grain should be put in prison. I was afraid for Jyrakay. You would be called pest if you brought grain in your pocket! The collective farm did not give anything at all. They promised that hundred grams of flour over the working day would be given when harvest started. How should a person survive until those days? You may become either a «thief» or a «pest» unwittingly! Jyrakay was worried about the fact that she could be taken away any day now. She decided to set me up somewhere before she would be put in prison. She decided to send me to the orphanage in Yana¹ [jʌŋʌ] Alim village after consulting with Najiya apa Bashirova. Najiya apa prepared all necessary certificates and

¹yana [jʌŋʌ] – new (from Tatar)

documents for me. I went to the neighboring village of Yana Alim, which was six kilometers away from Aktanysh. I had a bag made of old oilcloth in my hands. I put only several notebooks and books into it but no food. There was a woman's bast shoe on one of my feet and man's on the other. I did not remember where I took them. I wore old bishmet and old bast shoes.

Jyrakay did not seem to cry when I left the house. I do not remember her crying. I stopped and looked back when I went out of Aktanysh and reached the top of the hill. I saw auntie's house. It looked to be too small and miserable... There was no smoke coming out of the chimney. I was hungry and my legs were weak to climb a hill. I stood there looking around for a long time.

I wonder why Jyrakay did not walk me all the way up that hill? She was not so merciless, was she? I did not understand what happened to her? The reason was she faced serious sadness, the prison was waiting for her...

The war was still going on and on. It seemed it was not so difficult at the beginning of the war. The war had lasted for three or four years, it had devastated the country. From year to year it became more and more difficult. The desire to eat made me forget resentment toward Jyrakay.

There was snow all around, white snow. I looked for a single straw stuck out of the snow to chew on while I was walking. The Yana Alim was not seen anywhere near. I walked along the road alone. It was only the beginning of winter. The day was not too cold, fortunately. Nevertheless, there was a lot of snow.

Despite people were so hungry those years, you would rarely hear about beatings, robbery or murder. There was no particular fear for a girl like me to go on a trip alone. It might be more dangerous nowadays. I continued walking along the road that stretched across flat fields that had been covered by white snow. Even so, I got scared sometimes. There were rumors about prison escapees those years.

Terrible things were said about those who hid from the war in the woods. Although I was told that the escapees did not bother anyone. It was dangerous for them to be noticed by someone. As they said, police could have caught and shipped them into exile to Siberia.

It seemed as if some black shades were moving around in the distance. It could not be escapees in winter, I thought. There were a lot of wolves those years in our region. All men were at the front and wolves had not been shot. They did not hear gunshots for a long time, so they thrived. That time wolves often came to a village and bite sheep. I thought that those moving shades might be wolves. What would I do if they came and surrounded me? It made my heart pound. I was gasping. I walked hastily and run stumbling in. Then I just got up and ran again.

I remembered a story about a girl who was eaten by wolves on her way to grandma's village and only her bones were left. I was nauseated. I was scared but continued walking toward the village. I thought even if wolves appeared, they would be afraid of dogs whose barking could be heard from the village.

Eventually, I reached Yana Alim. Although it was called Yana (meaning new in Tatar), the houses were old there and most of them had thatched roofs.

«Where is the orphanage? a gathering place for children?» I asked the women I met on the street.

«Do you see that house with a thatched roof, without a yard over there? That is our orphanage,» they said.

I went to that house. «Oh, poor child! She might be an orphan... If she was not, she would not come here. Look at how her bast shoes are worn out. Did she come from far away?» women were talking and following me with their eyes on the street.

I reached so-called orphanage building. I stood for a while looking at children who went outside undressed and barefoot to pee on the front porch and ran back into the house. I opened the heavy door and entered the house. I could not believe my eyes when I saw Gulseyde apa, who taught me in Aktanysh. As soon as she saw me, she began to cry and hugged me. «Oh, Alfiya, my little girl! You also got here. Oh, my orphan!» she said, patting me on the back and helping to undress. She warmed up my frozen hands with her breath. It turned out my favorite teacher came to this orphanage as an educator with her three children, in order not to starve to death.

I was so glad as if I grew wings. The house was full of children. I looked at the top of the brick stove (mitch) and saw three-four-five-year-old children sitting in a warm place, leaning on each other. The children were sitting on a long sake. A boy in a canvas shirt and with worn-out trousers was sitting on one side of sake. I realized he was blind. I was very sorry for that boy named Gabdulhay. He did not talk at all. There were many girls of fifth-seventh grades. We became good friends. We used to go to school together. We also studied and did our assignments together. We played after school and it put me a good mood. The house was warm. Sharapov abiy was the director of the orphanage and his wife Rosa apa was an educator. They were very good people, they loved us and they felt compassion for us.

We started receiving some clothes in our orphanage. It was said that the clothing was sent from America. Those were not new clothes, of course, they were old, but they were beautiful. We liked wearing them. We used to go to another house. It was a dining house, I guess. The bedding was poor and we did not have white sheets. Canvas bags were filled with hay and straw was used as mattresses. Nevertheless, we did not complain. We lived together as children of a big, close family. I was given the patronage of blind Gabdulhay. I used to lead him to the school and to the canteen. Poor guy was not able to go anywhere without me. We walked everywhere together, holding the hands and we were not ashamed at that time because we were orphans, kids, probably.

Getting ahead of time, I would like to write about our meeting with that blind Gabdulhay in Central Asia, where I performed as a famous singer. He came to my concert. He came in from the back stage, we hugged and wept a little. He graduated from the university and held the position of a director at school for the blind. He was not lost and became a respected man. He started a family and was raising children. He was a very smart boy. He was blind, but he worked hard to learn and get education. He was humane and patient. We met with Gabdulhay every time I went to Tashkent. He used to invite me to his house and every time we cried and talked about our childhood and orphanhood. I cannot stop being happy for him.

I always remind myself of the times I lived in an orphanage. As soon as we started to do our homework, there were not enough pens for everyone, we stood in a line for a pen. Exercise books were also very few, so we did not waste any paper. If there were left white stripes at the edges of newspapers and magazines, we would cut them and use them too. Today's children and teenagers do not treasure the paper, do not care for notebooks. They might take some notes and throw them in the trash. I feel upset looking at discarded incomplete notebooks in trash cans. I resent the fact that adults are also careless about the paper. Anyone can use as much as they want these days. Although paper is something very valuable. How much wood material and human labor is used to make it. On the one hand, they say there is not enough paper to publish this or that book, on the other paper is widely used for everything.

It was fun and interesting to live in an orphanage in its own way. It was better to have a full belly, whatever you say. I wanted to sing again. We organized concerts and have fun in our own way. I was the initiator of all those activities. I sang, danced and also was the host of our concerts. The other children looked up to me and participated in the concerts too. Orphans, who came from different places, knew very beautiful and melodious songs from their lands.. We used to sing and feel sad in our free time after classes. The song «Hush, avylym» («*Good bye, my village*») was a very popular song in those days. Only later did I find out that its author was Salikh Saydashev, famous Tatar composer. Thus, Saydashev lived in our hearts since childhood:

My native land, beloved village,
You are so close to my soul.
Whatever countries I would live in,
I would not forget you all...
Goodbye my village, farewell!

We were all rural children. We missed our villages. I learned a lot of songs in the orphanage. It turned out most of them had been Tatar-Bashkir folk songs. Thus, I finished seventh grade. We had to leave the orphanage, as we had grown up. We were told to work at the kolkhoz and to pick up ripe ears of wheat in the fields.

In a couple of days I went to the orphan asylum Jyrakay was arrested. She was sentenced to five years in prison. She was sent to Sverdlovsk region. It turned out my Jyrakay was a «criminal» and suffered in jail. Rifkat abiy Gabitov worked in the Aktanysh people's court those years. His mother Marziya apa Gabitova was a wonderful woman who had worked as a teacher all her life. This family was very worried about my aunt and tried to help her. They wrote many letters to Kazan, informing the officials about her need to care about an orphan child. The appeal was signed by many people. Thus they did a great job. As a result, my aunt's sentence was reduced to two years instead of five.

When I left the orphanage, I decided to return to Aktanysh. Where else could I go? Anyway I did not know where to go. Jyrakay was in jail. I had no other relatives there. When I reached the top of the hill in Aktanysh I stood thinking who I could go to. Aktanysh seemed to be sad. I decided to go to our neighbor Hubbetdinova Gashiya apa. We were good friends with them.

Gashiya apa met me in a very friendly way, showing happiness on her face. There was samovar on the table. We talked, laughed and had tea with saltbush naan. Gashiya apa asked about the orphanage. I tried to tell her only and funny stories to make her more joyful and did not remind about sorrowful moments. Let me tell you one funny story I told Gashiya apa and made her laugh. Kids will always be kids. Even though we were orphans we were still kids, so we played and joked around. We also used to have fun, while the teachers did not notice. One evening I made a performance. I declaimed poems, sang songs and danced.

I put on a performance declaiming the poem «Taz» (*there are two meanings of the Tatar word «taz» in the poem: 1) a tray (basin) 2) baldheaded boy*) and performing as a «Taz boy» from Gabdulla Tukay's poem, putting a tray (basin) on my back. One boy played the role of a madrasa teacher hitting my tray back with a stick. I made a mustache using soot out of the oven for my role. I sang Tatar songs, standing in front of the girls and made the gesture twirling «my mustache»:

What a black mustache you have,
And how would you dare to kiss me?..

The concert could go on, but the kerosene in an oil lamp ran out that evening. The lights went out. I went to the sake feeling very tired. In the morning, before going to school, we used to wash our faces using kumgan¹ [kumɡan] pouring water for each other. I woke up late that morning and, without washing my face, hurried to school. The teacher looked at me and laughed heartily. She could not stop, and at last, came to me and put her round mirror in front of my nose. «Alfiya! Have you just come out of the chimney?» she asked. I looked in the mirror. «My mustache» was smeared all over my face.

¹ kumgan [kumɡan] – high pitcher with a spout (from Tatar)

Though I grew up orphaned and hungry, I loved to joke. I was playful. Perhaps, my pranks in childhood made me forget about my orphanhood. To tell the truth, pranks and mischiefs were my companions my whole life. At the tea-table I sang little ditties I had learned in Yana Alim and made Gashiya apa laugh.

It is not satin, nor silk – That you wear on.
Did it turn out to be a sparrow?
But you thought it was a nightingale...

I have a ring
Which is called Biktimir.
Thread your lovers and bite them as cracknel.

I am thirsty the water,
I won't be at your wedding,
I won't be there, and yet,
In your arms, I slept a lot.

Gashiya apa wondered where I had learned such funny songs. She was shocked. I said that I had made them up myself. I stayed with Gashiya apa's family. They divided everything equally among their children and me. They shared with me every piece of food, as if I was their child.

After returning from the orphanage, I went on to the eighth grade. Three or four months later Jyrakay returned home from prison. The Lord had created her body beautiful and slim. She had a round white face, dark black eyes, black eye brows and dark curly hair. In addition to all these, she had a genuine charm of a Tatar woman. But she came back emaciated. Her round face somehow got longer and was sunken. It seemed she became smaller and began to stoop in walking. I felt very sorry for her. I forgot about my resentment towards her foe when she did not walk with me when I went to the orphanage in Yana Alim. We hugged and cried. We entered our house with a thatched roof, no yard. Our house seemed to be orphaned as we were. It was leaning. Nevertheless it still had a soul – a cricket was singing behind the brick stove. Have you ever heard how cricket sings? It sings so melodiously. It utters heartrending sounds. It sings in the poor old houses, where the orphans live. Oh, it was probably waiting for us. We sat down on the sake and cried again when we heard the cricket singing. Someone had taken down the fence and probably used it as firewood. They dismantled the stairs, ceiling boards and even floors. It was not possible to live in the house. Even so we tried to live there with Jyrakay for several months. When we finally realized it was impossible to live in it, we moved to Gashiya apa's house. We became very close to their family. She had a daughter named Sajida, who was a year older than me. We always used to play with

Sajida as neighbors. Sajida married a man named Vagiz. Vagiz abiy Ilyasov turned out to be a very good man – a front-line soldier. Vagiz abiy was kind and helpful to me and to Jyrakay, as if we were his relatives. We lived as a close family, eating at one table, sharing pain and bitterness.

I used to sing a lot at the concerts with the propaganda team those years. There would be no concert without my participation. That was the beginning of my working life, I began to earn my bread. The first secretary of the Aktanysh district communist party committee Sahabi abiy Kamaliyev loved me very much. He used to call me «my talented daughter.» When I was going on sixteen Kamaliev abiy and the head of the District department of culture Karima apa Rayanova thought «this girl is reaching adulthood, let her dress up a little bit,» and they got me a job at a small club of Aktanysh Machine and tractor station (MTS). There was a reading room – a library at that club, where I lent out books to MTS employees and organized concerts.

There were very good bayanists in Aktanysh those years. One of these beautiful bayanists was Marziya apa Yunusova, who also worked as a photographer. She used to invite me to her house and taught me different beautiful melodies. What beautiful melodies she has taught me! «Alluki», «Zileyluk», «UyeL», «Kekuk», «Guljamal»... Where had Marziya apa learned so many tunes from? She played bay– an amazingly beautifully. Where, how and who taught her to play so wonderfully and melodiously, I do not know. I did not ask her, because I was young and she did not tell me either. Now when I think about her I am still amazed by her. She was a woman – photographer and a woman – bayanist! It was not common neither in rural nor in urban areas. Such talented women as herself took up photo cameras and bayans in wartime and in postwar years because men were in short supply perhaps. I do not know, but Marziya apa was surprisingly talented, skillful and a diligent woman. I was happy to have met her when I was a teenager. It turned out that she opened up to me a whole world of our folk music, taught me music education. There were no music schools in the countryside that time. (They are very few nowadays too). Music education was not available in rural areas. Marziya apa, with no musical education whatsoever, inadvertently revealed to me the biggest treasure and a very significant thing – folk melodies. I am greatly thankful to her! Not only did she teach me folk melodies but also songs by contemporary composers. The songs «Yuksynu» (music by Sh. Mazitov, lyrics by S. Hakim), «Sagynu» (music by Z. Khabibullin, lyrics by M. Jalil) were also taught by Marziya apa. Marziya apa taught me such folk melodies as «Su buylap» (*«By the water»*), «Koshlar kebek» (*«Like birds»*), «Ramay» and all contemporary songs that came out then. She worked with me all days long, sparing neither time nor effort. I had an extensive and varied repertoire to sing at the propaganda work concerts. It could last mean hour of performance on stage. During concert tours I ate well and also managed to bring something home for my aunt. As soon as I could afford it, we bought some

new clothes. The orphans were given clothes, sent from America again, I suppose. District leaders gave me one coat and two dresses. They were not new, but still, I was very happy. I recall my childhood girlfriends Sajida, Manfusa, Gelusa, Leysan, Demfira, Nakiya with warm feelings. They were very clever and modest girls. I was influenced by their well behavior so I never went astray. I was able to support myself and started my adult life.

At the end of 1950 Kamaliev abiy persuaded me to go to to Kazan. «Do not lose your talent, daughter, go to Kazan and study,» he said. Khamit abiy Gafarov took me to the Kazan music college. Unfortunately the college did not have dormitory so I had to rent an apartment. Where could I get money to pay for the apartment? I could not study and returned to Aktanysh. I continued to sing with our propaganda team. I was always on the stage. The famous artists – Rashit Vagapov, Zifa Basyrova, Azal Yagudin, Gani Valiev, Sara Sadykova, Rokia Ibragimova often came to our district and concertized. They used to listen to my singing and said, «This girl will be a singer, do not let her lose the talent, send her to Kazan». Once I sang to Zifa apa, may she rest in peace and patting me on the back she said, «You are a singer from birth, my girl!». «You should definitely go to Kazan and become a singer!», said Azal Yagudin. I did not want to leave Aktanysh for some reason. Once Marsel'eza Gazetdinova, the secretary of Aktanysh district Komsomol (*Young Communist League*) committee, invited me and began to persuade me to go to Kazan. «I talked to the Regional Committee of the Komsomol. You will be taken to the Ensemble of song and dance in Kazan. Zuleykha Akhmetova, the head of the ensemble has agreed and is waiting for you. Get yourself packed, Alfiya. Your future should be on the big stage,» she said. My countryman famous writer Riza Ishmuratov watched our concert while he was on vacation in his native village Urazaevo of Aktanysh district. He also gave me some advice and said he would see the right people in Kazan. I thought a lot and decided to go to Kazan. I decided that my future should be on the stage. Because song always inspired me. Singing is the beacon of my life. I always sing, I always learn new songs and think only about singing. I am not interested in another job at all.

I am very thankful to Aktanysh people. I feel that I owe them something, because they always helped me. Everyone helped me as much as they could. The neighbors Sajida, Vagiz abiy, Bibinur apa, Jannat apa put themselves in my shoes and tried to please me, knowing I was an orphan. Aktanysh seemed to me the most beautiful place even during the difficult war years. People in Aktanysh are remembered as one of the good-natured people in the world. I miss them, remembering each of them. There were other families with the same surname as mine in Aktanysh. They treated me as one of their own. Zeytuna and Nasima apa for instance. Nasima apa Avzalova taught us at school. Her father was a foreman on the collective farm. I visited them almost every day. They had a decent life. Nasima apa was very humane. She could tell looking at my eyes that I was hungry and invited me to their



Alfiya Avzalova and girlfriends

house to feed me. We studied together with her sister Zeytuna and were friends. We fetched spring water together. If I went to the spring alone, she would see me from the window and would tell me on my way back, «Why did you go to the spring without me?». Then she would jokingly put mud into my buckets so that I had to go to the spring with her again.

Zeytuna was such a cheerful girl and had a very sweet soul. She would often lead me by hand into their closet and feed me dry bread. She also nibbled pieces of dry toasts with me. Once we cut up the bag and crunched all dry toasts. I clearly remember Zeytuna gave me the bigger pieces. As it turned out the dried toasts were prepared for her brother who was at the frontline. We were both afraid we would be punished for eating them. Fortunately, we got only a scolding. Because of the news her brother was alive we were forgiven. They also gave me some clothes and felt boots. Although they were soled, I was very happy. They were very nice to me. Nasima apa Avzalova worked as a teacher her whole life and retired. Now she lives in Kukmor (It is a district in Tatarstan). She is well and lives well. We meet often as we are relatives and we always cry when we depart.

Naziba apa Gayazova was also very close to me in Aktanysh. Before leaving for Kazan I was walking down the street, Naziba apa's windows opened and someone grabbed me. It was Naziba apa. «I have heard, my dear Alfiya, that you are going to Kazan. You are going to be a singer. Come in, I have something for you», she said, shining like a sun. At home Naziba apa opened her chest. «Let this bring you luck in becoming a singer! It is my gift to you!» she said and gave me her white as sugar batiste shirt. I tried that white, beautifully embroidered shirt. It seemed liked it had a soul. I could not believe it. That shirt fit me very well! As the saying goes a tree is beautiful with its leaves and a man with his clothes. I had never dreamed that I would wear such beautiful clothes. We had some tea together. «Alfiya, you sing

beautifully, God gave you a wonderful voice, so sing, be a singer, but do not forget us! Please, do not turn your nose up», she said, waving after me. I remember her being kind, sympathetic and a generous woman! This is how I remember Aktanysh people.

Aktanysh is always in my heart with its district leaders, teachers and ordinary people. It is placed in my heart as the kindest and the dearest motherland and the source of my songs, my melodies. It was hard to leave Aktanysh. I did not even want to leave but somehow Kazan drew me to itself but still leaving Aktanysh caused despondency. It was also difficult to leave Jyrakay. «If I get a good job, I will help you. I will come after you as soon as I find a good apartment!» I said to my aunt, trying to put her at ease.

«My baby, I will be happy if you can feed yourself. The world is no good without good people, I will live, will work. We will live together with neighbors. Let Gashiya, Sajida, Vagis, and others be alive», said my aunty, wishing me a good trip.

Oh, Aktanysh! Melodious Aktanysh! Farewell, goodbye to you! Good-bye, my babyhood, my orphan childhood... Good-bye, my orphan teenage years! Good-bye, my friends! Farewell, Agydel (Belaya River)! May you flow tenderly by Aktanysh, beautiful Agydel (Belaya River)!

My favorite song that I used to sing at concerts was «Farewell, my village». It was always inside of my soul and I bid farewell to Aktanysh singing it:

Farewell my village, goodbye to you,
You'll hear from me in the morning zephyr.
I'll sing a lot, missing you,
When I have nostalgia for you...

A Candle Only Burns In Candlesticks...

My first steps on the big stage

The candle burns only in the candlesticks,
Gulzhamal,
Mature girls spin linen yarn...

(From an old Tatar folk song)

Not only in candlesticks but also in my heart do candles burn. It is eternal light... I went to Kazan with my heart afire. Will Kazan light me up and embrace me in a warm hug? Kazan is a high-souled candlestick of the Tatar world!

It was 1951. I came to Kazan, where Tukay's and Saidash's songs were composed. Please, hold me – the orphan! What awaits me in Kazan? Will it be possible to become a singer or will I get lost in this big city? There was intense anticipation in my soul.

I came to the State Song and Dance Ensemble of Tatarstan. The Artistic Director of the ensemble Zuleykha Akhmetova greeted me warmly. That day the ensemble actors, beautiful women and handsome men were lined up and were ready to start the rehearsal. Everyone was looking at me. They knew me as a girl from Aktanysh and decided to listen to my singing.



September, 1952

«Which song will you sing, my daughter?» Zuleykha apa asked.

«I will sing «Kakkuk» (cuckoo) or «Gulzhamal,» I said confidently.

They looked at each other, surprisingly. As it turned out, the composer Alexander Klyucharev also worked in the ensemble. He sat down at the piano and was going to accompany me. I sang the songs and everyone applauded me approvingly. Thus, in September of 1951 I was accepted into the ensemble.

«Who taught you these tunes?» Alexander Klyucharev asked me. I told him that I had been taught by a famous accordion player from Aktanysh Marziya Yunusova.

«Did she teach you to sing with correct breathing and mouth positioning?» Zuleykha apa asked.

«Yes,» I replied shyly.

«Thanks to her. She taught you to breathe and sing correctly!», Klyucharev said. «You came to Kazan as a prepared singer! Well done!» he continued. He said it in the Tatar language. Klyucharev spoke Tatar well although he was Russian. My whole life I admired the way he spoke Tatar correctly and beautifully.

I want to tell about him while I have a chance. A. Klyucharev was a Russian composer, who served a lot to the Tatar people. He was an outstanding composer who composed many songs in the tradition of famous composers – talented sons of the Tatar people S. Saidashev, M. Muzaffarov, N. Zhiganov. Z. Fayzi. Z. Khabibulin and worked with the first Tatar female composer S. Sadykova. He was a very business-like man who collected and processed Tatar and Bashkir folk music, compiled hundreds of folk tunes into big collections for the State song and dance ensemble. These melodies were kept in the ensemble repertoire for many years. I was the first to perform many tunes that he brought from his tours where Tatars lived, as well as many songs written by him. Later, A. Klyucharev also composed songs, especially for me. One of those songs «Watanimnin gadi ber kizi min» (*«I am an ordinary daughter of my country»*). This song has its own history.

Once A. Klyucharev stopped me and said, «Alfiyushka, I want to write a song especially for you, so I need lyrics».

«Let's suggest it to my friend and a poet Gulshat Zaynasheva,» I replied. Klyucharev was also a friend of hers. «Let's go to Gulshatka!» he said smiling.

We explained the idea to Gulshat Zaynasheva. She promised to write lyrics reflecting my background and a few days later she gave me this poem:

I am an ordinary daughter of my country,
Born and raised in the Volga region.
I picked flowers in the velvet meadows,
I learned to sing at the Sabantuy...

Alfiya Avzalova and
Khamit Rayanov, musician,
May, 1953



We liked this poem very much. A. Klyucharev composed beautiful music to these lyrics. It was similar to the folk melodies and at the same time, professionally perfect and a very original piece of music. I sang it with love and pleasure and eventually recorded it. Composer Klyucharev always paid great attention to me. He always defended me against those who humiliated me and criticized my singing at the meetings of the Arts council. There were those who tried to put me down because I had not graduated from a Conservatory and had no proper higher education. (I will write about it later.)

«Alfiya is a unique person raised on Aktanysh land!» Klyucharev would say reply in such cases.

Zuleykha apa Akhmetova liked me as if I was her daughter. She played a great role in my becoming a singer. She was my first mentor who took me into the world of music education. I am grateful to her for the fact that she took me into the ensemble without any probation and showed me the way onto the big stage!

It was not easy to start a new life in Kazan. The ensemble did not have a dormitory. They found a very nice apartment for me. My landlady was a very kind woman named Khazar. I used to 15 rubles rent out of my 45-ruble monthly salary (the price for currency in 80-ies). The remaining 30 rubles I spent on clothes and food. That money was tight, of course. I helped a lot to my landlady about the house: cleaned it, mopped the floors, and delivered water. Khazar apa loved me and used to tell half in earnest, half in jest, I might become their daughter-in-law. They had a son who served in the army. They thought I might become his bride and always treated me as their child. We lived having fun together.

The ensemble was planning a tour to Siberia, but I stayed in Kazan, because I did not know their repertoire yet. The famous singer Suleyman Yusupov's wife, singer Raisa Yusupova went on maternity leave and also stayed in Kazan. I was assigned to learn the repertoire from her. My voice was recognized as the first Alto. I learned all the songs from the ensemble's repertoire before the team arrived from Siberia. Zuleykha apa listened to my singing and hugged me, praising me in front of the entire team. Most of the singers were happy for me and smiled, but some of



Alfiya Avzalova and K. Nizamiev,
musician, September, 1953

them were frowning because of the fact that I had learned all the songs in such a short time. I tried not to notice such glances, I was happy to know that most of them were kind to me.

I want to write particularly about Raziya apa Timerkhanova, who sincerely loved me. She was a singer with a beautiful soprano voice who had worked in the ensemble since its foundation. She added folk melismas to her singing in a thin but very clear and creamy voice. Her music memory and diction were also very good. She was born and raised in Kazan and graduated from a music school. She used to sit at the piano and play any music with pleasure. I liked her. She was a very slim woman with blue eyes and a white-skinned round face. She liked to have fun and laugh. I liked her as if she was my own sister. Not only did Raziya apa help me to learn new songs but she also gave me some of her outfits saying «I have grown out of them..». When I put on those beautiful clothes I felt like I had become a real singer! Once Raziya apa gave me her fashionable light brown overcoat. I was very grateful and happy to wear that coat for a long time. I also wanted to do something for her and decided to help her with the housework. Raziya apa had only sons, and all household chores were on her. She had to take care of two kids and at the same time to learn new songs. I used to come and clean the house, mop the floors. Her husband Sabir abiy was also a very good man and was kind to me. I liked to spend time with them and felt like they were my relatives. Raziya apa also found time to teach me musical education and read sheet music. She was my mentor and my elder friend in the ensemble. We had become friends ever since. Today we live as a close family with Raziya apa.

The ensemble dancer Faytuna Abdullina also became my friend. Despite the fact that Faytuna was older, she was very kind to me. She was also a girl from Kazan, who dressed beautifully in an urban style. She was a very beautiful and charming woman. Faytuna danced like a butterfly as if her legs did not touch the floor during the dance. If we were on a tour, she always invited me to be her roommate and shared delicious dishes she had brought from home. Faytuna and I became friends forever. Later, when I set up my own band, Faytuna worked as a dancer in my team for several years. The audience loved her dancing very much.

Young singers joined the ensemble. Ramziya, Gulzikhan also had the same voice as mine. I felt energized. I could not help being happy. I was working in an ensemble and was accepted into a team very soon. I did not like when the city girls spoke Russian. I did not know Russian at all. If they started to speak Russian, I thought they wanted to hide something from me.

In the summer of 1952 our ensemble (now I call it our ensemble!) went on a tour to Leningrad. I sang solo the folk song called «Sarman» there. That was the first time I sang with such a large choir – ensemble. It was a very responsible task. I was very anxious and worried if I would sing it well. The audience listened with pleasure. Zuleykha apa was also satisfied. We stayed in Leningrad for a long time.



November, 1952

To sing on the stage as an ensemble singer and live in such a large, well-known city of our country was a big event for me. Although I wore the clothes provided by Raziya apa, I was so proud to walk on the streets of Leningrad and felt as if I was a famous singer. My eyes shined, my cheeks flushed and I looked around wondering if people and fellows passing by were looking at me too. When I was passing by the stores, I liked to look in large shop windows and showcases as into mirrors. I was not tall but was grown up and looked like a marriageable girl now. Then we went to Kronshtadt and gave a concert. The sailors surrounded us after the concert. Most of them were Tatars and Bashkirs... The most beautiful dancers of the ensemble Faytuna and Lala quickly got acquainted with those sailors and began to chat with them. One guy got interested in me! He was a Tatar from Bashkortostan, named Khamit. He was a very likeable guy with a dimpled smile.

It was noticeable from the conversation that he was a smart guy. He was the captain of II rank... I liked the guy, but I was too shy to talk. He went with me to the hotel door but he was also shy and did not dare to hold my hand. Thus, we went out together for several days. I liked military guys very much. When we were young girls we loved military men, especially sailors. I was not sure if I fell in love with Khamit but I liked him. I gave him my address in Kazan. He came to Kazan when



June, 1953

he was on vacation and found me. He asked for a permission from my landlady to invite me to walk down the street. We walked with him down the street, went to the park, talked a lot and ate ice cream. We did not discuss anything serious and promised nothing to each other. We both were very young.

There were several people who often used to tell me that although I had a nice voice and sang beautifully, I would have no future without musical education. They were mostly the leaders of the Philharmonic Society who also notified me that I might be fired without professional education, despite the fact that the head of the ensemble, my line manager Zuleykha apa liked me and was satisfied with my singing. I was also worried that I had no musical education. It was not easy having always to explain to everyone that I was raised in an orphanage and the rural girls like me had no opportunity to study at a music school. I decided to get a professional education. In 1953 I went to the Kazan music school and studied there for about two years. I had different vocal teachers and each of them taught me to sing in a different way. One of them wanted me to sing in a folk manner, the others wanted to make me an opera singer. I began to lose my natural voice. It scared me. It turned out the Director of the music school, the famous conductor Ilyas abiy Aukhadiev had also some thoughts about that fact. Once he invited me and said, «Alfiya, how about you



September, 1955

continue to sing in your natural voice? It is good to study but your natural voice is nice and it would be better to keep it... You might increase your musical knowledge on your own, you will work hard on yourself. You have a great natural voice, so do not let the vocal teachers change it».

I returned to work to Philharmonic Hall. I was taken to the Variety department and was appointed to a team under the leadership of Gani Valiev. Gani Valiev was a well-known accordionist and a skilled organizer, administrator. I toured with the band for several years. The audience enjoyed our concerts. Gani abiy taught me a lot as he was a professional musician. He was an excellent accompanist. I had a good experience singing to his bayan accompaniment. We were a very closely-knit team during the tours and had fun. There were no cars on the roads in those years, if only in the summertime. In winter we used horses to get to the villages and got into a sleigh wearing sheepskin coats that were given by the villagers. I could not walk when I wore sheepskin coats and Gani abiy laughed at me. Sometimes the dancer and I would get into that sheepskin coat together.

Mikhail Bogolyubov was the Director of Philharmonic Hall in those years. He was Russian by nationality and respectful and tolerant for all nationalities. He did not miss any of our concerts, which were held in Kazan. He knew how to distinguish a talented person and knew the value of a hard-working person. Although

artistic director often used to pick on me I did not complain about it to Bogolyubov, I was patient. Later I joined a variety team under the leadership of our outstanding singer Usman abiy Almeyev. It turned out Usman abiy kept an eye on me from the first steps on the stage and became convinced of my abilities. He was happy to invite me to the team. We made a new program with him and went on a long tour to the Central Asian countries. I am very thankful to Usman abiy, he believed in me and took me to a big tour program. He taught me how to behave on stage and how to choose a repertoire.

During our tours, I sang such songs as «Kara urman» («*Blackforest*»), «Aktanysh basmalary» («*The bridges of Aktanysh*»), «Shomirtym» («*My bird cherry tree*»), «Kekkek» («*Cuckoo*»). The audience greeted me warmly. I wanted to sing «Gulzhamal» during the tour very much. People enjoyed listening to «Gulzhamal» with great pleasure in those days. Usman abiy used to sing that song himself. It seemed to me the audience applauded less to his performing that song than to his other songs. The song «Gulzhamal» seemed to be performed by girls rather than by men. I do not know how I dared to ask, but once after the concert I said, «Usman abiy, I really want to sing «Gulzhamal» myself, please, let me sing it solo!...».

Usman abiy was surprised but agreed. Oh, my God, was it courage or my disobedience but I still feel ashamed in front of Usman abiy. Thus, I began to sing solo «Gulzhamal». The audience liked it. I recall with nostalgia the times when we had tours with Usman abiy. It was fun. We did not even notice how joyfully life passed.

One day I got food poisoning. I had a very bad stomach ache and fever. I was exhausted. We were in a village in the middle of nowhere. There was no doctor.

«You will not visit the doctor, they might hospitalize you for ten or fifteen days and our concerts will not be held in time then,» Usman abiy told me. He decided to take care of me himself, and gave me various medications. Someone suggested that and I needed to pump my stomach and be given an enema. I was the only female member of our team. Who could give me an enema? Now when I recall that situation in my mind I do not know whether I should laugh or cry because Usman abiy gave me an enema himself!.. I was so ashamed and did not want him to do that but Usman abiy got angry and said, «You are only a child to me, do not be ashamed!». I was against it. «Do you want to die in this village?.. Should our concerts be canceled?..» he said and gave me an enema. After a few days, I recovered and got back on my feet and we continued to give concerts. That was the actors life. Usman abiy was a very responsible and helpful person.

Later I also got a lot of experience, working in a team under renowned accordionist Gali Zemlikhanov. I began to feel confident on the stage and song bravely. I tried to find myself on the stage, to determine my own way. The audience began to recognize me. Songs that I sang also began to become popular among the people. Such songs as «Yash naratlar» («*Young pine trees*») (music by Z. Fayzi, lyrics by I.

Yuzeev), «*Kaytam inde*» («*I am returning after all*») (music by S. Sadykova, lyrics by I. Yuzeev), «*Yashlegemnen kaynar hislare*» («*Warm feelings of my youth*») (music by Sh. Mazitov, lyrics by G. Sagidullin), «*Pochtalyon*» («*Postman*») (music by T. Karimov, lyrics by Sh. Nasyrov), «*Sine soydem, guzelem*» («*I loved you my beauty*») (music by T. Valiev, lyrics by F. Akhmadeev.) were loved by the audience. Wherever I went it was nice to know these songs became popular. I managed to find my own way on the stage and such Bashkir folk melodies as «*Elmaluk*», «*Shal bayladem*» and Tatar songs «*Garmunchi bulsin yarin*», «*Toyma-toyma*» and others helped me a lot. I have slowly overcome all the difficulties of life and the stage. Slowly I found my own path of art. Now I think about it and realized that in my opinion. Kazan, which was a great candlestick of all the Tatar people, lit up my life path with its bright lights and raised me on the stage. My childhood fears were for nothing and I did not get lost and my friends, mentors and kind elderly artists did not let me get lost. Thus, I started a big life of a singer, went on a big and wide path and made the first strong steps on it. Thank you all good people who helped me to step on this great path. I am walking under the candle lights you have lit! I'm happy!

I would like to express my feelings using the words from my favorite song of those years:

When you are alone in the desert,
The wind plays with the hair.
After all, remember, my friends –
Happiness loves Only pure hearts!

My Blossoming Youth

My initial steps to success

When my youth bloomed,
I loved you, my beauty!
But only I knew,
My heart was broken...

In previous chapters, I wrote about my life and career on stage, now I should write about love, those whom I fell in love with and whom I got married to. Otherwise, only one side of the coin would be shown. Love has its place in our lives. As you probably know, artistic people have a very delicate soul and passionate nature. They know everything about the burning flames of love and swim in the sea of love swaying on the waves. Dozens of songs in my repertoire appealed to the feeling of love in the hearts of my listeners. My soul was full of love and passion, besides, I was young. It was the time when I was flying on the wings of hope and composed songs full of mystery. (Maybe it was not love itself, but the desire to love and to be loved. Young hearts beat faster dreaming about love!)

The moon is smiling in the sky,
Giving energy to our hearts.
You are alone, so am I,
Only the moon sees us from the sky.

A lovely melody accompanied these words. (Music by F. Akhmadiev, lyrics by M. Latifullin.) It was a heart-stirring song about love. I have sung so many love songs in my life! If there was not such a good feeling as love in my heart, and if its flame did not burn me, could I sing such fiery love songs? My love-filled soul accompanied the songs my entire life. Yes, I have experienced a lot on the scene of love.

I hear a lot of exaggerated stories about my love life indeed. Oddly enough, some people like to gossip a lot about celebrities, especially about their private lives. Please, do not believe rumors. I decided to write honestly about my life and my career as a singer combining them with my love affairs. Apparently, I am not a young lady anymore, so why should I keep a secret? My youth has passed, and love has also passed with it... Love is the companion of youth. As they say, youth passes, and love withers. Now I can write, remembering the past times... But I think, when you are young it is impossible to tell your beloved person «I love you» and write about it when you are burning with love. Love is the most intimate, the most sacred feeling in your heart. It is the fire, which is known only to yourself...



September, 1955

And now, when those feelings are in the past, I can share some personal counts on paper... It is said that love occurs in someone's life only once. I do not know; maybe some people love only once. There are probably those who love and worship one person their whole life. Those are lucky, of course. If I said I loved only one person my entire life, you would not believe me. So I am not going to write it. It would be boasting. I loved several men, but one guy I have loved sincerely and faithfully for more than twenty years. He must have been my true love. I will write about him a bit later.

Now I want to write about how I got married, how I started a family. I did not even notice how it happened. I had an intention, and in a few days, I got married. I did not know whether I loved him or not. I should underline that I wanted to love.

I made the decision so quickly that it might seem like a foolish behavior of my youth. That sailor from Kronshtadt¹, he came to Kazan and found me. I did like him, but it was not true love. He did not make me a proposal. I think he was not courageous enough to do it. He just disappeared into thin air.

Then Z. appeared in my life. That fellow Z. from Bilyarsk was about ten years older than me, and as it turned out, he was fearless. He had been to the war and went through thick and thin. One day he came to my apartment. I thought he was an officer because he was wearing a uniform. We loved the officers. The landlord of my apartment asked him to take his raincoat off, but for some reason, he did not.

¹ Kronshtadt - a city close to Saint-Petersburg in Russia

The standard shoulder straps were visible when he undid his coat after all. I followed him to the door, and we became engaged. He neither drank nor smoked and was an amiable young man. When I came in, the landlord told me that he was a private. I was upset a little bit, of course. The landlady laughed at me as I thought him to be an officer. I hesitated but decided not to break my promise and let him be an ordinary soldier. I was not sure if I loved him or not, but I wanted to get married. I wanted to cuddle with somebody and to live with someone sharing secrets. I was scared of loneliness. It was also hard to live with strangers. When we were young, it was considered decent to get married «on time» instead of going the wrong alley. Hence I decided to get engaged «on time». It turned out the groom had also been renting a tiny room. I got so upset when I found out about that. I began to think about canceling the engagement. I ventured upon a new step in my life with the hope that the living conditions would get better, and I would love my husband.

One day Z. came to pick me up. Nobody was at home. It seemed they had known about his arrival in advance and left the house. No one saw me off wishing me all the best. Z. and I went together. Z. was an engineer at a factory, and the employers liked his work. He was a handsome, neat person and had a well-balanced mind. Who else did I need? I thought he was my destiny. I did not fall in love with him. It turned out I had not met my beloved person at the time yet. I met my true love later.



December, 1955



Alfiya Avzalova and her older daughter Guzel, October 1957

We lived in an apartment Z. had rented. It was very hard not to have a place of my own. My daughter Guzel was born in 1956. I brought my aunt from Aktanysh to take care of her when I was away on tours. My sister Flyura left me her daughter Svetlana to take care of. She got married and went to Sverdlovsk (modern Yekaterinburg). It was challenging to live in a rented room with such a big family. I started looking for a separate apartment or a small house to rent. The owners I found wanted to rent out only to singles or a married couple. I did not know how to live... It never occurred to me to ask for accommodation from the Tatar State Philharmonic Society. They could not even help a more accomplished and famous actors, let alone myself. The same situation was at the factory where my husband worked. Thousands of people had been queuing for apartments for twenty, thirty years. I had been raised an orphan, and growing up did not change much. I still could not reach a considerable quality of life. My spirit was getting down, and I felt utterly discouraged. In the meantime, I needed to learn new songs. Life was becoming more and more difficult. We lived a poor life.

One day, I took a shoulder-yoke, the buckets, and went to fetch some water in the street water-fountain. One slim woman was pouring water in front of me.



First Husband Zinnur Bikkin and older daughter Guzel, first cousin
Zulfat, September, 1966

She recognized me and said, smiling, «You are the singer Alfiya, aren't you? I saw you once at the concert. Why are you so upset? Do you have any trouble?».

I told her I was looking for an apartment or a small house called «sypushka»¹ [syɤʃkʌ]. I said we would be pleased to find anything suitable. Thanks to her, we moved into a tiny detached house on Goncharov street of Kirov district in Kazan. The landlords were very kind people. They had lived in the same house until they built a bigger one. The landlords left us enough furniture: three beds, a wardrobe, a table, and chairs. It was a small house, but at least we lived separately.

My daughter Guzel was growing up, and Jyrakay was happy. Only my heart was empty... I do not know if Z. noticed, but my hope that I would get to love him did not come true. My soul was empty. There were no feelings, no hatred, and no love in my heart. Although I have to pay tribute, it was peaceful at home... There was no love, though. It was a sad life... I was afraid to think about it and kept it a secret. I did not know if it was my mistake or my fate.

A great event – the Tatar Art Decade was held in Moscow in 1957 with great success. I was re-joined with the ensemble. I was given a responsible task to sing «Kakkuk» («*Cuckoo*») solo at the beginning of the performance. I was happy and

¹ sypushka [syɤʃkʌ] – a type of a house (from Russian)

a little afraid at the same time. Thank God I sang well, and the Moscow audience applauded me for a long time.

Cuckoo sounds beautiful,
Coo-coo, coo-coo!.
There is love for you in my heart.
Listen to cuckoo's voice,
Only once, my sweetheart,
Coo-coo, coo-coo!.

I was so happy to sing on Moscow stages! The heads of the Tatar State Philharmonic Hall and our government administration – all of them congratulated me and appreciated my singing. I returned to Kazan enthusiastic. I was very pleased and so glad as if I grew wings. However, when I returned to our low, small, three-by-three-meter house, smelled its heavy air, and saw my daughter playing on wet floor, I got very upset. Jyrakay and I cried complaining about life and wondering if we would ever live in a good apartment. An article was published about me in the newspaper «Sovet Tatarstany» («Soviet Tatarstan») after we came back from the festival (Moscow). It was written by the writer Garif Akhunov and a young critic Ildus Akhunzyanov. They praised my voice and had great expectations of me. By



In the first row, left to right: H.Salimjanov, Alfiya Avzalova, F.Kudasheva, B.Gaysin; in the second row, left to right: I.Shakirov, J.Saifieva, R.Galiev, October, 1957

the way, the writer Garif Akhunov, who was very attentive to my work from my first steps on stage, was always kind to me. A few years later, when he became the head of the Almet'yevsk writers' organization, he wrote about my concert again in a positive way and evaluated my stage activity. I respected his work and loved songs written on his lyrics.

After returning from Moscow, I realized my marriage had not met my expectations. It was the wrong decision to get married without loving your future husband. I am writing the truth as a cautionary tale for young people. I did not fall in love with Z. We never fought or yelled at each other at all. We parted ways as friends. Sometimes I perceive him as my brother. He was a good father to my daughter Guzel and always supported her. As a father, he transferred the corresponding money to our daughter's savings account every month. Z. married another woman, of course. They were happy with his new wife, Tanzilya. We were friends with her and lived helping each other just like relatives. Tanzilya was a skilled and very responsive woman and was like a sister to me. Unfortunately, she died unexpectedly in a tragic way in 1993. Z. was left alone with two adult sons.

It was the 1960s. The leaders of Tatar State Philharmonic created a new youth team for Ilham Shakirov and me called «Youth on Stage». Beautiful posters were made especially for this occasion. A talented young violinist Marat Akhmetov, a young host Raphael Galiev and a young bayanist Rifkat Gumerov were also members of the team. We started our first concerts in Kazan with a lot of posters all



Alfiya Avzalova and
Zinnur Gubaidullin,
musician,
December, 1962

around the city. We gathered full houses. We were thrilled. Ilham and I became a sensation.

In 1961 we went on a tour to Ufa. Ufa citizens had not known us yet. The concert halls were half-full the first day. Then, day by day, we managed to gather full-house. The tickets for our concerts were sold out. We went to Ufa again two years later and gave very successful performances. We went on a tour to Tashkent too. We were known well in Tashkent and were warmly welcomed at the train station. We were sold out for a concert hall of a thousand seats. Thus, Ilham and I worked as a team with great success and earned a lot of money for the State Philharmonia.

Some elder artists envied the fact that younger singers had performed with such great success. We tried not to pay attention to them. On the contrary, some actors such as Zifa Basyrova and Raziya Timerkhanova were happy for us. «We should be



April, 1965



Alfiya Avzalova and Ilham
Shakirov, October, 1957

happy for young talents who would replace us,» they said at the meetings. Our team was divided into two groups after Zifa apa's suggestion. That meant I would be able to give solo concerts on big stages with my own team. I was so happy and scared at the same time. I worried if the audience would like my shows and if I would meet the leaders' expectations or people would laugh at me. It was easy to work together with Ilham Shakirov. Ilham graduated from the Conservatory and sang very well. He had a loud, beautiful voice. The audience loved him. He became famous in a short time. I could rely on him at the concerts. He performed in a very professional manner all kinds of folk songs, old and modern melodies and beautiful contemporary songs of various composers. I personally was happy to give concerts with him!

Ilham had a tremendous impact on me. I learned many things from him. Due to his musical education, he helped me understand many things that I had not fully understood before. He taught me to discover soulful features of the songs, to find

the most subtle elements of music. I consider him my mentor. We worked very well together. We shared our thoughts and talked about everything. We were as siblings, eventually, I fell in love with him. I always thought about him. We were together everywhere, and I was sad if we did not see each other for a while. I just wanted to listen to him. I was not sure if I fell in love with him or with his magic voice. Probably, there was no Tatar woman who had not fallen in love with Ilham back then. They said about a woman Ilham rented a room from. She had a son of the same age who studied at the Conservatory with Ilham. They said that the woman was also in love with Ilham and took care of him better than of her son.

I just could not help myself but fall in love with him... I thought he was in love with me too. Maybe he behaved that way only in response. In short, our relationship was mysterious. We were in touch all the time and liked to talk a lot. There were rumours that we loved each other and were going to get married. Indeed, «Alfiya, let's get married!» Ilham said once. I did not know if he thought twice before the suggestion. I turned this proposal into a joke. Anyway, he was younger than me, and I was already a divorced woman with a child. I got my fingers burnt already. It was all for the best that we did not get married. We would have divorced anyway. As the saying goes, too many cooks spoil the broth! We were extremely competitive. The flame of love withered against such backdrop. We kept it to just being friends



April, 1966

and spent enjoyable days together. Ilham was a very helpful and cheerful person. I remember we joked, laughed, and had a lot of fun.

Once a funny story happened in one of our concerts. When I was young, I had a very gaunt figure. I looked like a child. We were on a concert tour in a village. The road was muddy, it was rainy, and we arrived late. Tickets had already been sold out. The ticket man at the club's entrance saw us and began inviting us into the club.

«Hey! The artists have arrived! Come in. You are welcome!» he said calling us into the club. First Ilham entered, then one by one the other artists followed him, and I stood alone at the end of the line. The hosts did not know me, and they did not think I was an artist. Also my clothes were not so good, of course.

«Where are you going, child? Children are not allowed to enter! Look, you had better go home, do your home task and do not be late for school tomorrow...» the man at the door said. I could not dare to say I was a singer Alfiya Avzalova and stood there blushing.

Ilham was listening to us, probably. «Let her come in. She is the youngest daughter of our host, and her mother sent her with us. She is going to show us the way back home after the concert,» he said

Thus, sometimes I was taken for a child. I remember different funny stories that happened to me. As I noted above, I was short and flat-chested. Though I wanted to look beautiful on stage though. I found a trick to enlarge my breast. I would wear a bra and fill both cups with cotton... Once, it was my turn to sing on stage, but I could not find the cotton to fill my bra. Someone said that Ilham took my cotton... Without much hesitation, I took his socks and put them into the bra cups, while Ilham was not looking. Thus, I went on stage and sang very well. I looked good, and my breasts were full. In the meantime, Ilham was looking for his socks all over the backstage...

So Ilham was not my real love. As I mentioned earlier, I found my true love later. I will tell you all about it soon.

When you are young, your heart always looks for love, and you do not pay attention to the fact of having been divorced and having a child. There were always handsome men on my path. Some of them seemed to be very good. A year or two later, I got married again!.. He was handsome, charming, cheerful, and a masterful speaker. After all, in just one or two dates my soul fell in love with him, damn it! Unfortunately, I had not found my true love or happiness again. My beautiful, charming, humorous man G. did not understand that I was a woman of fine arts, and I wanted to be a famous singer. I had a tremendously responsible job in front of the audience. He was pathologically jealous of me. After the concerts, he used to go backstage, yell and put his hand on me in public. I had to get a divorce again. I didn't even want to write about it. Let it be a cautionary tale for others. I want to get across the fact that you should only if you have met your true love. I started to sing a new song in 1991. Its lyrics were as follows:

Alfiya Avzalova and
Second husband
Gumar Zalaliev,
April, 1961



To fall in love doesn't stand for love,
True love throws you into the fire.
You'll meet your love,
It hasn't found you yet.
Do not be sad about it,
It'll come soon – your love, true love...

When you are young, you do not understand that falling in love does not mean real love. Maybe I also had to wait for my true love, as I sang in the song above, but when you are young, it is not easy to wait. There was one good thing that came out of my previous mistake – my second daughter Zulfiya was born.



Alfiya Avzalova and younger daughter Zulfiya, Rail Cadriev,
Raysa Bibarsova, Najia Minkina, June, 1972

Either I was lucky with love or not, I had to continue stage work and develop as a singer. These thoughts and goals never left my head even for a minute.

...In 1962, our band with Ilham was divided into two separate bands. I was very worried if people would attend my concerts as well as they did Ilham's. After all, Ilham graduated from the Conservatory. Moreover women attended his performances more often than men. Women loved man singers more. In the beginning, we somehow had to tour the same places as Ilham did. We also had full houses just after a day or two after Ilham's performance. The audience liked both of us. Thus, we began to work in two different bands.

A musicologist and choirmaster, Raisa Karimovna Volkova became the Artistic Director of Tatar State Philharmonia. She liked me and treated me very kindly. Raisa Karimovna tried to help me as much as possible to create conditions for me to grow as a singer. She volunteered to teach me musical notation. I had private music lessons and vocal exercises with her. I was grateful to her my whole life. R. Volkova was also a person who helped me to learn to sing in different languages. Here is how it happened. One day I went to see her with a request.

«Raisa apa, I want to sing in different languages. If I had a place to study, I would go and learn. I do not know the words, but I could sing the melodies,» I said. Raisa apa liked the idea. She talked to the Director of Tatar State Philharmonia, M. Bogolyubov, and they decided to send me to Moscow to study. Raisa Volkova

Alfiya Avzalova and «Kazan
Utlary» Vocal and Instrumental
Ensemble:
Clarinetist –Alexey Cherkasov,
I banish -ldar Jabbarov,
May, 1969



visited the Minister of culture, Mr. Rakhmatullin, and also got permission to send me to study to Moscow. Raisa Karimovna made all the arrangements herself. She went to Moscow and found me a teacher. Thus, I went to Moscow on a business trip. The Ministry covered all travel and hotel expenses. I studied very hard. My teacher was the Honorary Singer of the USSR, a skilled performer of various folk songs and famous teacher Irma Yaunzem. She enjoyed teaching me. We sang for two hours a day. Within almost a month, I learned to sing in 13 languages. It wasn't easy for a former village singer like me, of course. I was lucky to have had such a good teacher.

The meeting of the Art Council was held the next day after I returned to Kazan. The members of the Ministry of culture also participated in the meeting. They listened very attentively to my singing in different languages and gave high praise to me.

I had my own repertoire in those years. I sang such Tatar and Bashkir folk melodies as «Gulzhamal», «Shakhta» (Shaft), «Oy artynda shomirtim» (*Bird*



January, 1970

cherry tree behind the house»), «Bolyn» («Valley»), «Sarman», «Minzele», «Garmunchy bulsyn yarin» («Let your beloved be the accordionist»), «Shoma bas» («Dance well»), «Elmaluk», «Shal bayladem» («I knitted a shawl»), as well as the songs of the peoples of the world and the folk songs of the people of our country.

The songs were composed by A. Klyucharev, M. Muzaffarov, Z. Fayzi, R. Yakhin, S. Sadykov, Sh. Mazitov, and F. Akhmadiev, and songs of the peoples of the world, the folk songs of the people of our country.

That enrichment of my repertoire opened the way for the development of my stage art. My soul was also enriched, and my horizons were widened. Wherever we went on tours during these years, many praising articles about our concerts articles with admiration were published about our concerts in the republican mass media.

The song was on stage, and love was in my soul. But to whom? To an unknown person... I wanted to love and to be loved, but there was nobody on my path. The beautiful song «Zhiller, zhiller» («The winds») (music by F. Akhmadiev, lyrics by M. Latifullin) was popular in those years. I loved to sing that song. I was looking for real love as it was said in that song.

Pouring light from my eyes,
I'm looking for you, my beauty!
And the winds don't bring the news.
My heart is breaking.

I would fly to the stars,
If they said you're there.
Where are you?..
Where are you?.. -
Winds blow silently.

Those years I waited for my beloved person and sang the song «Kayda sin?» («Where are you?»). I sang folk songs to the accompaniment of accordion at the time. Zifa apa Basyrova was a role model for me. I learned from her how to sing on stage, looking at an accordion player and trying to create one ensemble with him. But I was not satisfied with it. My soul wanted something new, and I wanted to create my own style on stage, unlike Zifa apa or anyone else. Concerts of a young, beautiful and slim Edita Piekha a well-known Russian singer were of a great success on stages all around the country. I participated in the same festival concerts at the Moscow halls. She behaved so freely and beautifully on stage. Her voice was pleasant, and she had her own manner of singing. I stood behind the stage, looking at her and trying to mesmerize everything. I looked at her with admiration and burning with envy wishing. I could also sing like she did. I idolized Edita Piekha.

Those years, the songs accompanied with instrumental bands were heard all



June,
1959

over the world. New rhythms and new melodies sounded both on radio and TV. I also dreamed of organizing such ensembles on our Tatar stage. I wanted to perform in a new and modern way and change my stage image. I wanted to wear long fashionable dresses like Edita Piekha. We sewed stylish Tatar national dresses, adding new elements, taking samples from fashion magazines. I formed a small instrumental band after I have consulted with the leaders of Tatar State Philharmonia. At first, the group consisted of a simple trio: an accordion, a saxophone or a clarinet, and a guitar. A year or two later, double bass and a percussion instrument – a drum was added. As a result, a quartet, a quintet was formed. Thus, I started singing to the accompaniment of an instrumental group.

In 1961, I won the all-Russian competition of pop artists in Moscow and received the award and a diploma. In a short space of time, our government awarded me the honorary title of «Honored Artist of Tatarstan».

I started my tours singing to the accompaniment of the instrumental ensemble. It is well-known that each innovation has to overcome different obstacles. My instrumental ensemble was not the exception. Some audiences did not like the drums and yelled out from the seats, «Why are you beating the bottom of a bucket?...». I was worried about how Tatar audience, who got used to listening to the voice of tal'yan accordion (*singlerow button accordion*) and bayan, would become accustomed to a saxophone, a double bass or a drum. I did not want to retreat because it was the time when instrumental ensembles were popular all over the world. I wanted to show the instrumental bands on our Tatar stage as well. I had some doubts if it was possible to preserve the folk traditions singing to the pop-instrumental accompaniment. Would I be able to combine these two features and keep my folk-singer image?

Maybe the elders in the villages would leave my concerts and will not accept the combination of the folk tunes and instrumental music. Fortunately, I worried about nothing because the audience accepted the instrumental ensemble from the first concerts, which surprised me. It was a small ensemble, a kind of a small orchestra, and a novelty at the time. I gradually began to achieve what I dreamed of.

I remember some funny stories related to those instruments, especially to the double bass. Once, we came to a village in Muslyumovskiy district of Tatarstan. While we were unpacking the musical instruments, a woman who was fetching water stopped near us. She was surprised to see the double bass for the first time. «What is that big violin which is taller than a man?» she asked.

«It is called a double bass!» answered our contrabass player and touched the thickest tune string. The woman startled, leaned to the side, and spilled water from her buckets.

«Oh, my goodness! Its voice is worse than the tractor's voice! What a scary thing you have!..» she said.

Our club manager a young girl had a good sense of humor. «Apa, I am to accommodate all of the players. A young man with the big violin, a drummer, a trumpet player,

will be housed at your place. You wanted me to arrange singers at your house before. Thus, now you will have a chance to listen to the personal concert at home,» she said.

«Oh, no, daughter. Please, take them with yourself. Alfiya or the bayanist might come to my place,» she replied.

She took the bayanist Zinnur Gibadullin to her place. He was happy to be invited, of course. After all ladies love bayanists. Zinnur ate a lot of kатыk and sour cream at her house but played the accordion very little. He had such habits.

As for kатыk, when boys of the ensemble came to villages, they used to start taking care of kатыk first of all, because they loved it very much. If the Russian guys saw kатыk, they might eat up every bit in a minute. «Apa, do you have some kатыk?» they used to ask at the gates. As for Zinnur, kатыk was not enough. He usually asked for sour cream as well.

It started burning in my heart when contrabass player Yusuf joined our instrumental ensemble... I fell in love not only with him but also with his big double bass. This love did not fade as quickly as before. On the contrary, it became not only a flame but also a volcano that burned more and more every day. Yusuf also was taken with me. If I looked at him and our eyes met on stage, we both felt embarrassed. His blue eyes were mysterious, like a bottomless sea. He was a white-skinned, intelligent, educated young man, graduated from the Conservatory and as slender as his contrabass. He was younger than me, of course. I did not want to think about the age gap because I was possessed by love. He also seemed to be in love with me. There were invisible threads among us on which a particular magic wave moved.

I did not know what a double bass looked like because I had not seen it before. Where could I, a girl from a village, see the double bass and other instruments from Europe, and how could I love its sound? I listened to the double bass in surprise. It turned out to be a soulful big violin, which reminded of gloomy forest noises, the sea bubbles, violent and gusty wind sounds. It also could evoke sweet thoughts and take you into a dream-world. It had its groove, a mysterious harmony.

These double bass sounds joined the magic wave that passed between us. We had lived on that magical wave a good while, falling in love with each other, looking into each other's eyes without ever mentioning our love. We did not use too many words, either. We spoke with the eyes. I realized that it was true love. It turned out that Yusuf was a man whom I have been looking for years... At the end of the summer, in August, we took a vacation and went to the Crimea. The artists in the team did not know anything. We did not even tell anything to our closest friends Gulshat and Zinnur either. We had a great time in Crimea, and we were satisfied and sunburnt. When we returned to Kazan, everybody was amazed. We were so happy. The fire of hot love united our souls and our bodies together. After we got off the train, we went to our friends' small apartment near the station. They made a great welcome party for us. The table was beautifully set.

«Are you going to get married? We will be glad. Let's arrange a wedding!..»



Alfiya Avzalova and Yusuf Valitov, March, 1970

Gulshat said while we were sitting at the table.

We did not get married, of course. How could I marry Yusuf with my two children? He was eight years younger than me. His mother and grandmother also seemed to be against it. We were close friends and loved each other for many years, even though we did not get married. Yusuf played a significant role in my life and my career. He was a skillful, responsive, diligent man and a very talented musician who helped me a lot. He also helped me to raise my daughters. They loved him very much. Jyrakay also respected him. He seemed to be our relative when he used to come to our house. I also used to visit his family, but I felt uncomfortable with his mother and grandmother, although they both greeted me well. Nevertheless, some invisible obstacles seemed to be opposing me in their house. I felt that Yusuf and I could never be together. We knew that and did not make trouble out of it. It was a temporary happiness for us. Yusuf was always nearby.

I learned a lot of new songs at that time. The song in my repertoire «Kul buena kilsan ide» (*«I wish you came to the lake-side»*) seemed to tell about love in my soul:

There is a water-lily
Swinging in the water.
It is lonely for you,
Misses you.
I wish you came to the lakeside,
And knew that I am thinking about you
And miss you too
Looking at the slender reeds.

If I did not see Yusuf for an hour, I started to miss him like it is sung in the song. This love grew my wings to work in the art sphere.

An article by the famous writer Labiba Ikhsanova that approved my first concerts to the accompaniment of an instrumental ensemble was published in the newspaper «Socialistic Tatarstan» in 1964. She wrote that not only songs composed by modern composers sounded wonderfully to the instrumental band but folk music too. Reading such articles raised my confidence. The instrumental ensemble members were also glad to read such articles, and we agreed to work even harder.

Once I had an idea to sing foreign songs in Tatar language, which I have learned with Irma Yaunzem in Moscow. I would sing a couple of verses in a foreign language and then continue in Tatar so that the listeners understood what I was singing about. The audience liked the changes. My friend and a poet Gulshat Zaynasheva helped me to translate them into Tatar. Such beautiful songs as the Indian song «Ayly ton» (*«Moonlight night»*), the Arabic folk song «Matur kiz» (*«Beautiful girl»*), the Uzbek folk songs «Gulnara», «Yar-Yar», «Kem uze» sounded even better when I sang them in two languages. I enjoyed singing the «Moonlight night».

I still remember how I came to Gulshat with a request to translate that song. It was a cold winter evening. My cheeks were burning in the frosty air when I came to Gulshat.

«What happened? You caught your fortune in a snowstorm, didn't you?» Gulshat asked, smiling.

«I caught a song,» I replied and told her the idea about translating some songs into Tatar. I had lyrics of an Indian song in my hands. «Please, translate it into Tatar quickly,» I said and started to sing the song «Moonlight night» in Indian.

«This song does not need to be translated. It is such a beautiful, elegant song about love, and it is clear to me even when you sing it in Indian. You sing it very softly like Indian girls,» Gulshat said.

«No, couple verses should be in Tatar,» I insisted.

Gulshat dropped everything she was doing, took a piece of paper and a pen, and sat down to translate. We worked hard, and after four or five hours, the first verse seemed to be born:

Summer night, moonlight night,
Flowers sleep tight,
And bird sounds died.
But I don't go to bed,
Waiting for you tonight...

We worked all night long, translated, and tried to sing together again and again. I could not go home that night and stayed at Gulshat's house. We woke Zinnur up at midnight and sang to him the translated version of the song. He liked the way it sounded in Tatar. We were so impressed with such a melodious song we could not sleep that night.

The next day I went on tour and began to sing two verses of «Moonlight night» in Tatar. Thus, Gulshat translated other foreign songs into Tatar. It was pleasurable and fun to sing in two languages. In 1965, The Peace Committee of our Republic awarded me an honorary diploma.

In the 60s I sang with pleasure such beautiful folk songs as «Bolyn» («*Valley*»), «Umyrzaya» («*Snowdrop*»), «Bagrem, diyarmen» («*I would call you my sweetheart*»), «Koyme gena kila gena» («*Only the boat is here*»), «Garmunchigiz oydam» («*Is accordion player at home?*») «Kubalagem» («*My butterfly*»), «Shal bayladem» («*I knitted the shawl*») and «Wagda» («*Promise*») (*I figured out only recently that the music of this beautiful song, which we used to sing as a folk tune, was written by Zinnur Mukhametdinov. He was in exile for many years after getting into post-war repression, and his name was forbidden to be mentioned as the author of such a beautiful melody*). I also enriched my repertoire and sang many songs by Tatar and Bashkir composers: «Mahabbatem» («*My love*») (music by F. Latypov, lyrics by A. Erikay), «Tugan awylym» («*My home village*») (music and lyrics by Kh. Akhmetov), «Yorak sere» («*The secret of the heart*»), (music by S. Sadykova, lyrics by I. Ganieva), «Yaratam, disen sin» («*You say, I love you*») (music by A. Munasipov, lyrics by A. Davydov), «Kil, irkam, kil inde» («*Come to me my sweetie*») (music by B. Gaysin, lyrics by R. Yanbulatova), «Tamchylar» («*Drops*») (music by A. Munasipov, lyrics by G. Zaynasheva). I also added to my repertoire many songs by amateur composers and loved to perform them. I was the first who sang beautiful songs of the composers F. Akhmadiev, L. Aytuganov, S. Khabibullin, V. Akhmetshin, Z. Gibadullin, M. Imashev, and popularized them. As a matter of fact, so called the elite singers did not like amateur composers such as Sayar Habibullin, who composed wonderful songs as «Soyasenme dip, nik soriyson?» («*Why do you ask if I love you?*»), «Ezladem, bagrem, sine» («*I was looking for you, my sweetheart*») or Fatkherakhman Akhmadiev, who was the author of beautiful songs «Mange yashise kila» («*I want to live forever*»), «Jeynen matur ayaz tannary» («*In the beautiful summer sunrises*»), «Soldatlar» («*Soldiers*») and Zinnur Gibadullin with his songs «Kul buyena kilsan ide» («*I*

wish you came to the lakeside»), «Yash gomer» (*«Young life»*), «Sayahatche jyry» (*«Traveler's song»*) were loved by the listeners. Those singers would always pick on me at the Art Council meetings because I had songs composed by amateur composers in my repertoire.

«You should not overfill your repertoire with love songs by amateur composers. Why do not you sing about Lenin, about the Communist party? You should sing the songs of professional composers!» they used to admonish me.

Nevertheless, I did not only sing those beautiful songs onstage but also recorded

Them. So they are still broadcasted on the radio. All those composers, who were called amateurs, were musicians, played various instruments, studied at music schools, and some of them graduated from the Conservatory. However, some of them did not major in composing and the others grew up during the war and did not get musical education. They composed their songs because of their talent. I respect them, and I still enjoy singing their beautiful songs.

I did not know by what law these composers, who were called amateurs were not paid for their songs. I argued with the leaders of the Philharmonic Hall and the editors of the Radio committee defending them. As for me, they should also have been paid for their songs. Some composers who were called professional composers (although those songs were not popular with the audience) were paid a considerable amount of money for their songs. Such songs were forcibly added to the repertoire of singers.

The songs of Zinnur Gibadullin one of an amateur composers deserve my special mention. I first sang his beautiful songs such as «Kul buyina kilsan ide» (*«/ wish you came to the lakeside»*), «Sayahatche jyry» (*«The traveler's song»*), «Yaz jyry» (*«Spring song»*), «Kunelle yal itegez» (*«Have a great time»*), «Yash gomer» (*«Young life»*), «Garmunchiga» (*«To the accordion player»*) composed in collaboration with Gulshat Zaynasheva in the 1960s and 1970s. They became very popular with the public in a short period of time, and they were sung everywhere with great pleasure. Those songs helped me grow professionally as a singer. Zinnur and Gulshat composed these songs especially for me. They also became famous with the audience due to those songs. Zinnur, Gulshat, and I created together and grew professionally together. I am very grateful to them! They were my real stage friends, and this friendship is still continuing.

If you ask me why their songs became so popular with the public, I would say the melodies and the lyrics of those songs were written in the folk style with the enthusiasm of the young. Their songs are about true love and friendship with a sense of devotion to the motherland. Let's remember the «Sayahatche jyry» (*«Traveler's song»*):



Alfiya Avzalova and «Kazan Utlary» Vocal and Instrumental Ensemble:
 Drummer-Vitaly Samoilov, bass-guitarist-Nikolay Velejinsky, Solo-guitarist Karim
 Gabidullin, June, 1975





October, 1970



July, 1973



«Kazan Utlary» Vocal and Instrumental Ensemble, May, 1970



Alfiya Avzalova and
«Kazan Utlary» Vocal
and Instrumental
Ensemble,
August, 1970



Alfiya Avzalova and Rif Gataullin, Madaris Agliamov, Gelzada Safiullina,
October, 1980



Alfiya Avzalova and Solo-gitarist Karim Gabidullin, April, 1975



Alfiya Avzalova, Gennady Kiauzov Director of «Kazan Utlary» Vocal and Instrumental Ensemble, September, 1972



Alfiya Avzalova and Igor Ivanov, musician, September, 1972

I walked for a long time
Along unfamiliar roads,
I went up the hills
If I could see my native land.
Oh, my beautiful native land,
Oh, wonderful homeland,
I saw you in a dream, as a garden
On top of the mountain.

It is said so simply and beautifully about love to a native land! I was a witness to how these songs were composed. I remember those days when the «Traveler's song» was composed. As you know, the actor's life is spent on wheels. We travel all around the country and abroad. The singers know the sense of joy and happiness of returning home, seeing that the children and family are alive and well. Then you might forget about all the difficulties that were seen on the roads.

Once Zinnur and I toured in the countries of Central Asia for a long time. We returned to Kazan with a great feeling of homesickness. As usual, I went to Gulshat the next day. «I wish you could write a beautiful song about travelers like us,» I said to her and Zinnur while we were talking and having tea.

Zinnur hit on the idea and started to tell about his nostalgia for Kazan during our tours. «I went up the hill hoping to see Kazan from the top of it,» he said. Then he took his bayan and started to play a wonderful melody. We liked that melody very much.

«This is the traveler's song!» Gulshat said. «It has its drive and rhythm. That's it, a road song!» she added.

That melody, which was played under the impression of returning from the trip, got the start to «Traveler's song».

Gulshat wrote the first verse with opening lines «On unfamiliar roads...» very quickly on the same day. I tried to sing the first verse. It sounded lovely and harmoniously. But it was not easy and took a long time for Gulshat to write the remaining verses. She wrote several versions. Some versions did not go with the melody, and others were difficult to sing. I liked some of them, but Zinnur did not or vice versa. Gulshat became exhausted, but she did not get angry with us, did not take offense. She continued to write other versions, and eventually, she «found» and wrote the last version:

I went far from native land,
I crossed the seas.
And drank water from
The lake called yearning...

Such poetic lines spoke about homesickness of the singers, travelling abroad. I loved that song very much. It was in my repertoire for many years. And nowadays I

often sing it at the request of the audience. Thus, songs are not composed so quickly. The composer and the poet write a new song after long reflection and soul searching. The singer who sings it first makes the song recognizable. When the song is on the sheet music, it looks like a lifeless skeleton. It is like a feather without the fluff. The singer adds some fluff to a song, sweetens it. Therefore, some songs do not find their real singer. I do not know what other singers do, but when I choose a song for singing, I read the lyrics first. If the words are beautiful, heartfelt, the content is deep, meaning full, I listen to the melody. If I like the tune, I start to learn it. A beautiful melody sinks into the heart at the first try. It is effortless to learn and to sing such songs. I do not like the songs with the lyric which I read over and over, but they do not affect me. For me, the lyrics and the melody of a song should be in harmony with each other. In short, I pay great attention to the meaning of the words of a song. For instance,

You promised me,
«I will love you forever,
I will give a rest to your heart,
When you get tired so hard».

I sang this song «Mahabbatem» («My love») not only with all my heart but with excitement and trepidation. I sang that song on stage for a long time, then recorded it on tape on the radio. The recording was approved by the radio Arts Council and was added to the archive. After the meeting of the Council, one of the members of the Art Council told me: «Alfiya, it was unanimously accepted that the song «Mahabbatem» would be included in the archive. How wonderfully you sang! We listened with delight. People's Artist of the USSR, famous soloist of the Opera theater Azat Abbasov appreciated your performance highly. «This song by Alfiya is the highlight of her singing career. She performs the song with all her heart adding some new features to it. There are melodies inherent in Gypsy folk songs, I can hear some beautiful melismas in this lyrical song in her performance,» he said.

Of course, I did not expect such praise. I am very grateful for it. I wrote about it because I wanted to leave here the evaluation given by such a great singer as Abbasov. Please do not think Alfiya is boasting.

This song, written by Fattah Latypov and Akhmet Erikay, became my companion of my life journey:

My dear, why did your promise
Fly away as the wind?..
Only I was left alone,
As a flower stripped of its leaves...

As in this song, I was left alone... I will write about it further.

On The Unfamiliar Roads...

Tours, tours...

I feel the happiness of living
And traveling as well.
Roads, roads, for how many years
I can't be apart of you all...

The elderly in villages gradually became accustomed to the sounds of our band, even though the instrumental ensemble was called «drumming.» Younger people readily accepted the novelty, of course. I think we brought something new onto stage. To be honest, it was not easy to sing with an instrumental ensemble at the beginning. The singer had to convey the meaning of a song and make it artistically beautiful singing to the accompaniment of the instrumental ensemble. The singer had to sing in harmony with the band so that the audience enjoyed the experience. I made every effort to sing that way. I had to rehearse numerous times. Also, the members of the band had to have a kind of connection with me. Polyphonic music was born as a result. Songs would get a special flow that way. For instance, the famous song «Kakkuk» («Cuckoo»), accompanied by an instrumental band, was enriched with entirely new tunes. Not only the singer but also the clarinet, as well as other instruments sounded like a cuckoo. Thus, I began to sing Gulsum apa's song in a new way, accompanied by various beautiful instruments. In general, in 1920-30s it was common to sing standing in one spot and making limited hand movements. This had to change as new trends required a different approach.

I adopted a different style on stage, singing, and moving around freely when I thought appropriate. I had to perform and, metaphorically speaking, to live on stage, to experience authentic emotions. I believe I managed to do it just right. Over time other young singers adopted similar practices. Our Tatar pop scene, keeping abreast with modern trends, took a new turn. In 1967 N. Smirnova's article in the 8th issue of «Soviet variety art and circus» says the following about me, «She is unique in her performance. Her tasteful, elegant and natural manners are not only reflected in her singing but also in all her graceful movements...»

Did I expect to receive such an evaluation? My movements on stage were born naturally out of the context of the songs.

Talented musicians Yusuf Valitov, Leonid Cherkasov, Gennady Evstegneev, and those who joined us later Rim Kalimullin, Igor Ivanov, Gennady Klyauzov, Rafik Aganov and the head of the ensemble, consummate musician Vadim

Venediktov, who beautifully arranged my songs for the band were the members of the instrumental ensemble. They were my friends and colleagues who sincerely helped me to work on stage in a new way. We performed with them on rural platforms. We were pioneers in singing, accompanied by the instrumental ensemble. A bayanist, now a famous composer Zinnur Gibadullin, worked in our band for many years from the very beginning.

Zinnur was a very hard worker. He was an excellent bayan player, soulfully devoted to music and songs. He knew Tatar music very well, especially folk melodies. He had played the bayan and accordion since childhood and built a family ensemble under the guidance of his father. He had a large family of six children and all of them played some musical instrument such as an accordion, a bayan, a violin, or a mandolin. Thus, they had their own family orchestra. Their family music band used to give concerts in the villages of Bugulminsky and Muslyumovskiy districts. Zinnur, who had a musical background, a national talent, took a special place in our team. He used to give advice to Russian musicians who did not know Tatar music. He taught them to play Tatar music harmoniously. He held himself freely, naturally on stage, and played bayan beautifully. Our team worked well together. Together we went through many difficulties while touring.

There were days when we shared a piece of bread among all of us while we stayed in hotels and apartments. All our musicians, Russians, Tatars and Jews toured together in a very friendly manner and at the same time loved to joke and have fun. Perhaps, Zinnur Gibadullin was the funniest man. He made up all sorts of things! He liked to joke about Russian guys, G. Klyauzov or G. Evsteg-neev's. Usually he «arranged» dates for Klyauzov and Evstegneev unbeknownst to them. «A beautiful girl is waiting for you in that village. She asked me to tell you because she doesn't know Russian. It is a national Tatar tradition to send a match maker,» he used to tell them. Klyauzov and Evstegneev trusted him sincerely and went to the dates. «How skillfully I pranked them», Zinnur often laughed. Klyauzov and Yevstigneev planned something in revenge. Fayzi Yusupov, my concert host at the time, also came up with practical jokes like that. Zinnur himself was often caught off guard by them. He was always in a hurry to return to Kazan as soon as our concerts were over. He somehow managed to buy return tickets for himself, even when it was seemingly impossible to do.

Of course, we got annoyed with his selfish behavior. Some band members took revenge on him by putting one or two bricks into his suitcase. He would sling his bayan over his shoulder, take a bag filled with suits and bricks, and went to Kazan, poor guy! We would laugh and wave our fists at him, seeing him off. I still do not understand how he failed to notice that his suitcase became heavier. Perhaps, he was too happy to go home to think about anything else. Sometimes guys carefully folded a dead crow into paper and put it into his travel bag with a note saying, «Here is a fat chicken for you. Cook it with your wife on your return to Kazan!» They would also

nicely wrap an old fashioned hat with a note saying, «it's a present for your wife». Thus, several times Zinnur brought home old plush hats with feathers on them.

Probably, Zinnur was very angry to find bricks, crows, or hats on his return home, but he was never angry with the guys. I think he just laughed at it.

I was a frequent guest at their house after long tours. Gulshat liked to cook, so we ate and talked at the table. Gulshat was also fine with the «surprises» that guys used to send with Zinnur. She only laughed at them. She danced wearing those plush hats and made us laugh. They lived happily and had fun, but unfortunately, they also got divorced... I guess that's the mystery of love. Was it an evil eye? It was their fate, I suppose. The following lyrics fit the occasion.

No, youth won't return,
It remained in the past,
As grief behind the blue fog.
And my beloved in youth
Also was left there,
Was it either fate or fault...

I loved this song very much and sang it on stage for a long time. I also sing it a lot on request. It reminds me of my youth, beautiful and, at the same time, heart-breaking memories.

Zinnur often came up with funny stories because he always changed his strange habits. Not only our team members but also all the villagers witnessed his funny behavior. He used to run early in the morning shirtless, wearing his blue sports shorts. The villagers who saw him were scared. Zinnur also liked to swim wherever he came across a river or a lake. After swimming, he used to take his so called «ant hill baths», whereby he rested his legs on an ant hill.

Guys liked to fish, but it was not easy. Zinnur cooked fish soup if he was lucky to catch some fish the size of his finger. Once, he cooked fish soup on his small electric stove in a small saucepan and sat down to eat. At that very moment our dancer came into the room. Zinnur quickly put his soup under the table. A cat ate the soup while he was talking to the dancer...

Some kolkhoz managers took care of us well. Villagers prepared meals if there was no dining houses in the village. (These days, of course, such things happen rarely.) Kolkhoz managers used to give us meat, chicken, or honey as a present. Zinnur was the first person to go straight to the farm and bring a hen. Once, he picked the fattest hen on a farm and put it under a bucket and went looking for a man to slaughter it, since he could not do it himself. By the time he came back the hen died. Thus, he ended up with no chicken that day.

Many chicken related stories happened those years. Most kolkhozes had chicken farms. Nowadays such farms are not profitable, and most of them are closed. One

summer we toured the countryside. My friend Gulshat was working in a publishing house. I persuaded her to go on tour with us during her vacation time. «Let's go, you will have a rest, participate in our concerts, read some poems on stage. We will sunbathe and have fun together. We will also get some hens from the farms. I will send several chickens to Kazan. I will send 3 chickens for my family, 1 for my neighbors, 1 for my mother-in-law, and 1 for my sister, 6 chickens in total. If you want, you will take 6 chickens for yourself,» I said. Gulshat agreed to join us.

We went to the villages in Sarmanovsky, Muslyumovsky, Zainsky districts. We were unlucky with the weather. The summer was rainy and cold. We put on wool socks and raincoats, shawls, and rubber galoshes. It rained all month long. It was so cloudy and rainy that we did not see the sun at all. We also did not get any chicken. Gulshat did not complain about anything. «The sun will shine the day I leave you. You are suffering without the sun because of me,» she said and started to think about returning to Kazan. The sun came out the very moment she got on a truck. We all laughed.

«Alfiya, where are the six chickens you promised? You wanted to send them to Kazan. 3 chickens for your family, 1 for neighbors, 1 for mother-in-law, and 1 for Flyura,» Gulshat calculated. «You also promised six of them to me. There is neither six nor half a chicken,» she laughed. «You said it! There is not even half a chicken!» I agreed. «We worry about the rains, not about six chickens,» the actors laughed at us. After such a failure, the phrase «six chickens» became common among us. «Six chickens» meant getting ahead of yourself. If I planned in advance, band members would just remind me of «six chickens!». Even children would laugh if we tried to plan something, «Oh, six chickens!...»

Tours would be boring without any adventures. They helped us to overcome difficulties.

Honored Actor of Tatarstan Fayzi Yusupov was the host of my concerts for many years. He was very popular with the public. The audience was happy to find his name on the posters because he hosted the performances in his own manner. He told his own stories about his namesakes, famous Fayzis, in Tatar art scene. The musician Fayzulla Tuishev, Fayzi Bikkinin, composer Jaudat Fayzi, writer Akhmet Fayzi, playwright Mirkhaydar Fayzi, ballet master Fayzi Gaskarov and Fayzi Yusupov himself, they were all well-known persons in Tatar world.

His repertoire was various. He read such serious poems as «Eleven boys grew up in a village» by Angam Atnabayev, «I sweep the roads» by Ziya Mansur and made the audience think. At the same time, he made them laugh telling funny poems afterward. Not only did he tell them but also enacted them in a funny way. I listened attentively to his satirical fables. His voice was soft and musical. Fayzi abiy was like a flame on stage. Once during a show in Ufa, he got a note from the hall, «Fayzi abiy, you are so smart, you make us laugh. Did the devil spit on your tongue?!»

Fayzi abiy was delighted like a child with this piece of paper. «This is an evaluation of my work!» he repeated again and again.

He did not leave the stage until old age. «Guys, I am not in a good mood today, my heart hurts,» he used to complain behind the stage sometimes. But when it was time to start the concert he danced like a young man. He was so talented and worked soulfully, and forgot about his age. Various situations happened during concerts. The audience would ask questions testing us. Fayzi abiy always did his best. One year we gave a performance in Samarkand. «Fayzi abiy, please tell us, if Samarkand is bigger or Kazan?» someone shouted in the hall. «Kazan and Samarkand are like an elephant and a cockroach!» Fayzi abiy answered. The audience laughed.

Fayzi abiy was much older than we. We respected him as our father. He felt young deep in our heart though, so we treated him as our contemporary. Once Fayzi abiy suggested changing our guitarist Gennady Klyauzov's name to Farit Fakhrutdinov. «Klyauzov is not a suitable surname for the Tatar audience», he explained. Klyauzov did not get upset with him; on the contrary, he was happy. Tatar audience accepted him as Farit and loved him as a good musician. Gennady died at a very young age, we were very sorry. He was a very talented and charming artist.

Fayzi Yusupov also made us laugh very often. Once, before the concert started, he asked, «Do you know whose gang we're in? We are the members of Alfiya Avzalova's gang!» We laughed a lot. «Where did this come from?» we asked him. Fayzi abiy smiled and told us a funny story. Once, we were on a tour to the villages where Mishar Tatars lived. «Gani Valiev gave a concert with his gang recently. Whose gang are you from?» the landlady asked him. «We are in Alfiya Avzalova's gang,» Fayzi abiy answered.



Alfiya Avzalova and Faizi Usupov, Alexey Cherkasov, March, 1963



Alfiya Avzalova and Faizi Usupov, Bashkortostan, June, 1966

We did not have an administrator on one of our tours. We did all the administrative work ourselves: arranged transfers and sold tickets. Before the concert started, we used to stand at the door and check the tickets. We called it «standing at the door». The artist who would appear on the stage later, according to the program, stood at the door. It was my turn then. The concert was about to start. The audience began to enter the hall. A group of men gathered at the door. They did not want to buy tickets. It was typical for the younger generation. The crowd at the entrance pushed me away and rushed into the hall as soon as Fayzi abiy appeared on stage and started the concert. «Help! They are killing me!» I cried out. Fayzi abiy jumped off the stage and ran across the hall, picked me up from the floor. «What are you doing, guys? This is our Alfiya!» he cried out. As the saying goes, smile or weep. The tours were full of such incidents.

Once, Ilyas Yakupov, our dancer, was performing administrative duties. Concerts were going well. «All the villagers loved your concert, but the children were left out. Please, could you give an extra concert for our school children in the morning before you leave our village? We will sell tickets for 30 kopecks and collect money for you,» the school principal said to us the next day after a wonderful concert was given.

We agreed and performed at school. Both the children and the teachers were very happy. After selling the tickets for 30 kopecks, they collected and gave us 160

rubles. We thought and decided not to give that money to the cash office of our Philharmonic Hall. As Fayzi abiy suggested, we decided to buy various gifts and distribute them to the elders of the village. We went to the store and bought beautiful floral textiles, shawls for women and shirts for men. We received lists of old people at the rural council and distributed our presents. They were very thankful to us. We were also pleased. A few days later, when we returned to Kazan, we were invited to the Ministry of Finance. If I am not mistaken, the Minister of Finance was Mr. Ayupov then. We were being accused of using public funds...

As it turned out, our administrator Yakupov added those 160 rubles to the books and reported it to the accounting department. Thus, the document was registered in the report, but the money was never received. They concluded that we had pocketed the money. They wanted to deduct 35 rubles each from our salary. «Yakupov should never be the administrator again,» I said. We did not know what to do. «Come on, guys, let's give those 160 rubles and let the Minister of Finance buy something for his wife!» Fayzi abiy said. He was so funny and lived such a long life.

I would like to write a few words about Fayzi Bikkinin from Fayzi abiy's ditties. Once I invited him to go on a tour with me. He was seventy years old then. «Fayzi abiy, let's go with us. We will walk around the villages, it will be enjoyable. You will play your own accordion. Villagers love to listen to the accordion,» I said. «Ah, Alfiya, I would like to, but I do not have teeth to chew food. My stomach hurts if I take solid food», he replied. «Don't worry, Fayzi abiy. I will sit in your lap and chew it for you!» I answered. He laughed a lot. «Let's go then,» he agreed. I remember him being happy on tour. He forgot about his teeth and ate chicken with great pleasure. In general, he was an amusing and interesting man.

There is another story related to Fayzi abiy. One day we gave a concert at the G. Tukay club of the Tatar writers union. We arrived at the Publishing house on Bauman Street. The club was located on the fifth floor. Fayzi abiy stopped at the door.

«I cannot go up to the fifth floor! It is too hard for me!» he said.

«Come, Fayzi abiy, I will carry your accordion. I will walk upstairs slowly and you will follow my steps. You will not notice the steps at all,» I said smiling.

«After such a smile, I can follow you and walk upstairs not only to the fifth but also to the fifteenth floor!» he said. Fayzi abiy Bikkinin was a man of sweet words. «You are the fruit for pilaf!» he used to say to young women. «You are my prune for pilaf,» he used to tell me.

Another well-known host, Honored Artist of Tatarstan Azal Yagudin moderated our concerts for several years. «You should be a famous singer,» Azal abiy had said to me in Aktanysh when I was a child. Now he was the host of my concerts. Azal abiy hosted the concerts as cheerfully as Fayzi abiy did. We worked well with him. Also, the members of the band made fun of him, of course.

Azal abiy was very health conscious. He did not like it when people smoked

or drank beer. He was always on time and did not like when others were late. Certainly we all used to get tired during long tours of course. Especially the musicians needed breaks. They played cards or told jokes behind the stage. «Please, do not make a noise while I am on stage. It is hard to perform,» Azal abiy used to say. Therefore the musicians took to going outside to get some fresh air or smoke. But Azal abiy did not like it either. He wanted everybody to be on the stage as soon as he had announced them. «Why aren't you ready? Do you want me to go looking for you?» he would ask. «What do you want us to do? There is no bathroom in the backstage» guys would answer back. «What bathroom break during a concert are you talking about!» he would get angry. The guys were always confused because Azal abiy never had any bathroom breaks, no matter how many hours the concert lasted. Eventually, they played a practical joke on him adding laxative to his soup. It did not affect Azal abiy's performance in any way. The guys tried again for several times increasing the dosage, but it was useful. Azal abiy was not going to be embarrassed. Finally, the guys stopped messing with him. He was as healthy as a bull, and he is still in good shape, participating in concerts.

...The 1960s and 1970s were probably the most tumultuous years. Love blossomed in my heart. The warmest memories of happy times we spent with Yusuf break my heart. We used to go to Aktanysh, swim in the Belaya River, sunbathe, and relax outdoors. It was like a dream. Friends from Aktanysh and everyone who knew and saw us together thought that we would get married.

Saniya apa, who lived in Aktanysh, could predict fortune or find a misplaced item by cards. Many people were thankful to her. There was a story about lost geese. One family lost their geese and searched for them a week but could not find them. Finally, they came to Saniya apa. She looked at the cards and showed the directions. The family followed the directions and there the geese were. Did God help Saniya apa or was there anything else? No one could tell. Her life was miserable. She looked poor. Many years she wore the same clothes for years. Each time when I came to Aktanysh, I bought her a present, a headscarf or a housecoat. She was always pleased. Yusuf and I used to visit her. She also told our fortunes by asking cards. Once she said smiling that I would give birth to a lovely, blue-eyed boy. What else could she say when a handsome blue-eyed man stood next to me? She had such a kind heart and beautiful wishes. The blue-eyed boy was not born into this world. It was not destined to happen in my life...

The love songs were the brightest, freshest and most sincere things in my repertoire. I think love songs also match the purest feelings of the listeners. How many love songs I have sung in my life! Love songs were echoes of my true love to Yusuf, the most beautiful, most charming, most skilled person in the world! That love for Yusuf was fire that fueled my career. That fire warmed and illuminated my soul for many years.

I will tell you another sad story. When I realized that we had no future with



May, 1970

Yusuf, I attempted to forget him, get rid of loneliness, and start a family. I tried to fall in love with another man. Perhaps this was a well-considered step forward.

Once a man (I would not write his full name, let him be G.) who did military service in Mongolia wrote me a letter. G. had seen me at the concerts. One day I got a telegram from him. «Meet me, I am coming to Kazan!» he wrote. I still loved Yusuf, thought only about him, but at the same time, I wanted to get rid of him.

My friend Gulsina and I went to the airport. I was afraid, but I also wanted to meet that man. I hoped I might fall in love with him. Oh, what a thing is human's soul! What is it going through? Human's destiny does not follow a straight path.

A tall man with a large suitcase in a military uniform got off the plane. He was a very handsome, charming major. His black curly hair was seen under the military



April, 1966

cap. He came right up to us and smiled. We met and talked a bit. I liked him. I felt I could love him. We came to our house. I decided to break up with Yusuf and told G. everything. He understood me correctly, and we decided to date. G. was also divorced. I should mention that Yusuf was rude to me lately. I also found out that he had been dating another woman. We used to celebrate the holidays together, but several times we did it separately. He was not fond of drinking and did not let me drink either. Rarely did I see him drunk.

Jirakay was in Aktanysh with children. They loved to spend summers in Aktanysh. It was uncomfortable for me to stay at home with G. on my own, so I asked Gulsina to stay with us. We talked and ate sweets that G. had brought. It was fun, but I felt uneasy. I thought Yusuf would come soon. G. did not know about it and behaved freely. I was afraid. We decided to go to Gulsina because it was impossible to stay with G. alone in a large three-room apartment. Gulsina lived in a separate room in the dorm. All the way to Gulsina's place, I thought about letting Yusuf get married, raise children, and live his life. My heart did not want to understand it. When we returned home, there was a note from Yusuf on the door, in which he was writing «Where are you, and why did not you answer my phone? I waited for you for a long time. Tomorrow I will take you to our dacha. Stay home. My mother is waiting for us...».

G. looked at me with surprise. He tried persuading me to visit his native village Salagush in Agryzskiy district. I did not know what to do. Finally, I decided to go with him. The next day we went to the river port to buy the tickets. We came across Yusuf when G. and I were taking a taxi. His car stopped in front of us. He pulled

his head out of the car window and looked at me with surprise. I gave him a sign to be quiet.

Thus, Yusuf left us alone. We bought the tickets and came back home to pack and leave home as soon as possible. Yusuf left me another note on the door, «Alfiya, who was with you? What are you doing?»

We went to Agryz to have some good time. It was so joyful to go by boat. We went out on the deck of the vessel, talked, and laughed. We enjoyed watching the waves. G. spoke seriously and significantly. At the same time, he also told funny stories.

My mind was utterly mixed up... I worried about how I agreed to this trip in the first place. Also, I thought about where I was going, who would meet me there. Besides, what was Yusuf doing? Was he looking for me again? Many thoughts came to my mind.

G.'s relatives and friends came to meet us at the pier in two cars. «Alfiya is just my guest,» G. told the meeters and greeters. His relatives were very cheerful. «Today she is a guest, tomorrow – our daughter-in-law, God willing! You look like you are dating», one of them said. Salagush might be the most beautiful village in the world. I had been there before and gave concerts, but now it looked especially attractive to me. G.'s parents lived in a large, beautiful house. They were a well-to-do family. The strength and cleanliness of their house indicated that his father and mother were very hardworking. They were also very friendly and hospitable. «Be our daughter-in-law, Alfiya!» they said half in earnest, half in jest. I felt they did not mind me being a singer. We stayed there for fifteen days. It seemed we liked each other. I felt that G. fell in love with me. As for me, I still thought about Yusuf... It was time to leave. G. had to go to the far East. We returned to Kazan. My aunt also returned to Kazan with children. They wondered who G. was.

My aunt called me to the next room and began giving me a good talking to.

«Who is this person? Why did you leave Yusuf? He was in tears and got wasted. He searched for you with his friends. He left no stone unturned. He went to the station several times. Eventually he realized you had left him.»

Yusuf came to my house that day and asked my four year-old daughter Zulfiya to call me outside. My daughter came to me and whispered. The little girl seemed to understand such words should not be spoken aloud. I was so afraid to go out to Yusuf. I opened the corridor window and saw him sitting in his car. I was so sorry for him. My heart ached. I was half dead. I went out to the street, and we talked a little.

«What did you do? Did you marry that man?» he asked his questions through tears.

«No, no. He will leave in two days, and then we'll talk about everything,» I said.

Those two days were like two years. Yusuf was on the phone regularly. He

and his friend spent the nights in the car which was parked under my window... G. felt everything but did not say a word. He also seemed to be surprised. «Alfiya, I will wait for you in any case... Don't marry anyone... Wait for me... We will be together...» he said when he left.

I promised him, but it was impossible to keep my word. After his departure, Yusuf came to us with his family. I went out and got in the car.

«What are you doing, Alfiya? What does your behavior mean? Our son might die!» they growled. Yusuf cried, lying on the rudder of the car and kept saying that he was in love with me.

I pulled myself together and told them I felt he had been rude to me lately. I began to think he did not love me anymore. I wanted him to marry and start a new family.

I found out later that the day when G. and I went to Salagush, Yusuf was completely at a loss and came to Gulshat. «Did Alfiya leave me and will marry that man? Doesn't she love me anymore? Why did not you tell her not to laugh at me in such a way?» he complained to Gulshat for an hour.

Gulshat tried to explain to him that she did not know anything, and we could not be together anyway. Yusuf was angry at these words. «No, she can not be happy with someone else!...» he replied.

Yes, Yusuf was right, of course. I could not be happy without him. I broke up with G. and stopped to write him letters. I did not consider it a sin to break a promise in this case. I understood you can not force yourself to love anyone. It was a lesson for me.

We continued to date with Yusuf again. Our love did not fade. On the contrary, it intensified and went through a great test. I understood it was impossible to give up that love.

...A lot of men were singers in my band. I have worked with such famous singers as Khanavi Shaydullin, Gabdulkhak Shagiev, Ilgiz Mazitov, Bulat Baltanov, Minkhamat Gilyazov, and others for many years. We were friends and worked in unison, helped each other during the tours. Khanavi, with his beautiful songs, became a favorite singer of the audience and received the title of Honored Actor of Tatarstan.

Ilgiz Mazitov was also a well-known person of Tatar art. He became a composer, wrote such popular songs as «Ak kaennar shaully bolinda» (*«White birches rustle in the valley»*), «Urman yulinda» (*«On the forest road»*). After graduating from GITIS (The Russian Institute of Theatre Arts) in Moscow, he became a stage director. He directed many operas and musical comedies at the Opera and ballet theatre. For many years he was the Artistic Director of our Philharmonic Hall.

Minkhamat also found his way on stage. He graduated from the Conservatory and became a singer. He often helped me to sing vocal warm-ups before the concerts.



Alfiya Avzalova, Hanavi Shaidullin,
«Kazan Utlary» Vocal and Instrumental Ensemble, March, 1970



Alfiya Avzalova, Minhamat Giliazov, «Kazan Utlary» Vocal and
Instrumental Ensemble, October, 1984

Now we began to work with the singer Rustem Malikov. He has a good voice and people like his singing. He graduated from the Kazan Conservatory, worked for several years in Ufa, got the title of Honorary Actor of Bashkortostan, and returned to Tatarstan. He worked hard in Bashkortostan and developed his skills. His voice was trained well. He always enriched his repertoire. The audience listened with admiration to his performance of Salavat's Aria from the Opera «Salavat». He masterfully performed Tatar folk tunes as well.

Many dancers were also members of my team, and most of them retired on a pension. A beautiful dancer Faytuna Abdullina, a lovely woman Rosa Smirnova who had changed her ballet dancer career and joined my team and earned a high salary. Guzel Vafina (Gayazova) also danced in our band for several years. Today she is a famous dancer, the Honored Actress of Tatarstan.

It's nice to see those who have been working with us for many years and found their way in art. They grew professionally and were recognized by audience. I am happy about the achievements of fellow countrymen.

I want to underline that singers should not be jealous. If you are a team leader, you need to be kind, responsive to your co-workers in particular. I tried to provide all possible assistance to the artists I had worked with. I gave some pieces of advice to young singers how to behave on stage and to sing correctly with good diction. I



Alfiya Avzalova, Sania and Karim Gabidullin, November, 2010



Alfiya Avzalova and
Zulfiya daughter,
«Kazan Utlary»
Vocal and
Instrumental
Ensemble in
Baskortostan,
Days of Culture in
Beloretsk
City, May, 1988



Alfiya Avzalova and Zulfiya Avzalova entertainer, her daughter Leisan,
Guzel Vafina, dancer, May, 1988

think none of those who worked in my team would say I was not helpful to them. Many people are thankful to me.

I want to write about a host Rashit Sabirov, who was grateful to me. He was born and raised in Zelenodolskiy district. A young man who had just graduated from theater school joined our team as an entertainer in 1976. He was a lanky, bony figure and did not dress very well. Apparently, his university years were not very easy. His parents were elderly people who could not help him a lot. I liked him at a glance and had high hopes for him. Rashit had a very thin voice, unfortunately. First of all, we agreed on changing his tenor voice into a baritone as Fayzi abiy had. We trained a lot, and soon he began to perform in a good baritone voice.

Then I took care of his stage costumes and shoes. Together we bought a good suit, shoes and a white sheepskin coat which was made for the policemen. Rashit wore it for many years with pleasure. He was very thankful to me. Within a few years, he became a famous master of entertaining and a favorite actor for among the public. He also got the titles of Honorary and People's Actor of Tatarstan. He worked hard with any team, updated the repertoire continuously, and led the concerts cheerfully. He participated in my concert and thanked me, telling the audience



Alfiya Avzalova and Rashit Sabirov, October, 1980



Alfiya Avzalova and Gulzada Safiullina, June, 1986

about his first steps on stage. He remembered what I had done for him. Rashit was the first person who proposed my to be a candidate for the State Prize named after G. Tukay at the session of the Philharmonic Society.

Many people worked as entertainers in our team. We worked with Dilyare Ilyasova, Alifa Valieva and Zaytuna Yarullina. The famous singer Gulzada Safiullina also worked as a host in our group. She led the concerts very cheerfully. She worked as a singer in the Ulyanovsk regional Philharmonic Hall. Gulzada had a beautiful voice, and she sang beautifully. She had a desire to sing at our concerts, but I did not permit her. «Dear, you are good, I don't mind if you become a singer, but I do not want a female singer to sing at my concert. Usually, only men sing with me. You might sing in a team which is led by a man. We need an entertainer,» I was totally honest with her. After that, she joined Ilham's team, where she sang and was an entertainer. Then she founded her own team and became a singer. Now she is an Honored Actress of Tatarstan and the winner of the National prize named after M. Jalil.

Unlike nowadays, It was not usual those years for two female or two male singers to work in one team. I was wrong not to let Gulzada sing in my group then. Now I regret my decision.

I want to mention another talented fellow Damir Nabiullin, who worked as an entertainer with us. He made the audience laugh, telling satirical, humorous stories during the concerts. Unfortunately, he died accidentally and tragically at a very young age. He died as an officer of Tatar art like a soldier who saves the country, standing at his post until his last breath. Actors suffer different accidents on the roads during the tours. I will write about them later. Now I want to tell you about how Damir died. He would never have thought that he would die during that tour, of course.

He was a very humorous man and used to tell us various jokes during the tours. It was winter, and we were going from Tomsk to Kuzbass. It was 43 degrees Celsius below zero, frosty and windy evening. We were waiting for our train on the platform. I saw Damir hurrying from the platform to meet the train. I thought he wanted to meet with the Tomsk audience. They told they would prepare takeout snacks for us. The train stopped, and we took our seats.

Suddenly it went back and forth. Soon the train departed, but Damir did not come. We found out later that such movements were necessary so that Damir's dead body could be removed from under the train... It turned out that Damir accidentally fell under the train when he was going to meet with the audience. A woman who came to see Damir off saw his dead body on the platform and recognized him. We did not know about that accident. We worried about Damir because he was always was on time. We reached Kuzbass and checked in a hotel. We recalled that Damir organized the whole check-in process joyfully. Soon we received a telegram from the Tomsk Philharmonic Hall about Damir. His body was in the Tomsk morgue. We sent a telegram to Kazan. We sent our manager to Tomsk to bring Damir's body to



July, 1983

Kazan. It was hard to believe what had happened. We missed Damir very much. Unfortunately, we could not attend his funeral. The director of the Philharmonic Hall, Mr. Tazutdinov told us to continue our tour performances and did not let us come back to Kazan.

Damir was a very talented man and sang beautifully. I remember him singing all day long that day. He sang merrily and told jokes when we visited Tomsk Tatars. He used to describe a hilarious monologue during the concerts on stage, «I did not introduce the host of our concert. Today it was Damir-r-r Nabiullin, Damir- r-r Nabiullin!» He made the audience laugh, repeating his name, again and again, emphasizing the letter «r». It was a pity he had a very short life. He was an honest person.

Most people who joined our team worked with us for many years. Bandsmen in other groups used to change their teams after returning from tours. Our musicians did not like to move from team to team.

Naziya Minkina, a host, was a well-known actress when she joined our team. She was a beautiful woman and quickly became familiar with the team. The audience also knew her well. Naziya led the concerts beautifully from the very first days. Her repertoire was rich, and she told the stories with pathos or warm lyrics where it was suitable, performed satirical and humorous works masterfully. We became close friends with Naziya. We lived together in hotels and shared our food with each other during our tours. She was a well-mannered woman and became a



November, 1984

role model for me on how to behave in different situations. It was characterized by her cleanliness, accuracy, intelligence, calmness, and respectful behavior towards her husband and people. I liked Naziya very much. Now she is retired, but we often meet with her and like to talk a lot.

Karim Gabidullin joined our team in 1969. He was a college-educated engineer. He could earn a lot of money as an engineer, but his soul, which was full of love for music, led him to the stage. He played the bass guitar and quickly became friends with our musicians. All musicians used to smile as soon as a young guy with long curly hair smiled on stage. I thought the engineer would not work as a musician for a long time. I was wrong. Karim dipped his toe into the music and chose the stage as a platform to develop his creativity. He helped me to enrich my repertoire and, especially for me, brought foreign songs from vacations abroad. He recorded a beautiful Czech song in Czechoslovakia. We named the song «Beautiful woman» in Tatar. Gulshat translated it into Tatar. I loved this song very much and sang it for many years. Karim became a close friend of mine during the years we worked together. Karim helped me a lot, not only on stage career but also in regular life situations.

Karim grew as a musician and became the head of an instrumental ensemble. He was awarded the title of Honorary Actor of Tatarstan. We worked together for more than twenty years. Karim was also a decent family man. They lived with his wife Saniya very well and raised a smart daughter. Saniya began to help in managing our concerts in recent years.

Thus, completing this chapter on unfamiliar roads, I want to write about roads and roads again... Finally, after my traveling a lot on unfamiliar roads, I think our vast country, which was called USSR back then became familiar to me. Now I can show the drivers the right direction when they lose their way or take a wrong turn.

There are a lot of articles about actors different incidents on the roads in mass media I can count a few thousand of such incidents I lived through during the tours. I remember how we travelled through a blizzard on horses or on tractor-sled. It was hard then, but now all the difficulties are forgotten. I remember only a beautiful romance as a dream-world. For instance, the roads might be muddy after rain in the countryside. We would just laugh it off and walk barefoot the distance between the villages. It was fun because we were young that time. We used to perform at all types of concert halls then and did not get to choose if the club was large or not. The distance between the villages was also close. Nowadays it has become fashionable to give concerts only in the villages where income is high and clubs are large. I should emphasize that some teams «walk-around» several villages in one or two days in the last few years. Many communities in the districts do not have an opportunity to watch any concert.

It is complicated to travel now because there are a lot of cars and many car accidents happen on the roads. I have toured many faraway regions in recent years. I



Alfiya Avzalova
and Haidar Safin,
February 1983

went to Siberia, to the far East. I went to Kamchatka, to Kiev in 1993. It is also very dangerous to travel by plane. We often read reports in newspapers about airplane crashes, or about derailed trains here and there. The most dangerous is to tour by bus and by car because traffic has become too intensive now.

Many roads and bridges were repaired in Tatarstan in the past. Today, the officials focus on the conditions of the road surface. Still, we cannot confirm that all high roads were mended. The rural roads are still muddy.

I want to mention that the nightmares related to roads tortured me my whole life. I have never had a sweet dream in my life. In my nightmares sometimes I saw that I could not cross an old, destroyed bridge or sometimes I fell off that bridge just before I managed to cross over; or our car got stuck in mud, or it crashed in the

accident; I fell into a ditch and can not get out of it... This was the content of my dreams.

We toured a lot all over the country, and we also got into car accidents. I would like to tell you about one of them. It was in 1982, we were touring the Republic of Mari El. It was winter, and the road was icy. We were on our way home after the performance on the Yoshkar-Ola road. It was 1 a.m. I usually sat in the front seats of the bus and looked at the road. I could not relax and be careless during the drive. I did not have a habit of looking around and admiring nature. I did not have a moment of peace. I always felt responsible for the artists. I was not vb– calm that night either. It was very windy and cold outside. The bus was skidding on the icy road. The headlights of the oncoming cars blinded the eyes. I always held onto the handrails so tight that my hands would hurt. I had a bad feeling that something might happen that night, and unfortunately, I was right. A large truck suddenly appeared in front of us and was skidding towards us. It was hard to drive on that icy road.

It seemed that our driver did not know what to do. I think it was impossible to stop the bus on such an icy road. The actors were tired after the concert. They rested, some of them were asleep. The members of the instrumental ensemble were young and did not care about the situation. Some of them chatted and laughed. I just opened my mouth to wake everyone up and get them ready, but I had no time to say a word. KAMAZ was getting closer to our bus, its headlights were like a dragon. Our driver was shocked and confused. He did not know what to do and turned the bus across the road. The driver of KAMAZ seemed to have noticed the passengers inside of the bus and tried to avoid the collision, turning the truck to the side. Anyway, its trailer hit the bus. My eyes dimmed. It seemed as if something had exploded, it thundered, and the world went upside down in a second... Bus windows shattered, someone flew through the broken window out onto the road side. Someone screamed and cried. Thank God, I was ok and managed to stay in my seat, holding handrails. I was afraid to open my eyes. My chest hit the front bar, and it hurt. Fortunately, it was not the heart side.

The car drivers passing by must have reported the accident. The police arrived quickly. Our actors were taken to the hospital to the nearest township of Sovetsky. Most passengers were hurt, unfortunately. I was ok because I held the handrails. Karim fractured six of his rib bones. Naziya fell by the side of the road and fractured her clavicle. Minkhamat split his lips. The driver broke his leg. Oddly enough, the ensemble guys who were sitting at the back of the bus were unhurt. Several of them fell out of the window onto the snow. It turned out that some of them were drinking, the bottles and the glasses of vodka were not even broken.

We stayed in the hospital. Thank God, nobody died. We tried to comfort each other that fractures and wounds would get better soon. Naziya stayed at the hospital for about two months. Karim and Minkhamat were there for several weeks. I returned to Kazan after four or five days. My colleagues from other teams buzzed

with rumors in the Philharmonic Hall. «Alfiya hit her chest really hard, now she might not be able to breathe and sing properly...» they gossiped. Our accident scared them a lot. They were afraid to go on tours.

Some of them supported me, whereas the other were happy. Our team did not tour for a long time. I joined other teams. Thank God, I did not have any problem with my breath or voice, I kept singing. Karim, Naziya, Minkhamat stayed in the hospital for a long time and could not participate in our concerts. Finally, all of them cured and the team was full again. We started touring again. We went to Moscow and Leningrad and gave several concerts there, as it is said in the lyrics of beautiful song «Yullar, yullar» («The roads») go:

Let the traveling be uneasy, oh, roads,
But do not let them be the last!..
Yes, do not let the roads be the last!..

We are still on the road! A new song «Yulda» («On the road»), was composed. We asked Gulshat to write the lyrics for it,

We pass the roads, discover the world,
Where haven't we gone?
We sing and travel Cause we are not tireless!..

Thus, we continue our roads tirelessly! Let us continue!

My Family And My Friends

The forest of our village Is small and shrubby.
Don't say a word to a girl, She is a guest only...

(Folk song)

In 1960 Hayat Akhmadishevna Kalinina was appointed to the position of Director of the Philharmonic Hall. Many years she was a Communist party member an activist and a manager. H. Kalinina liked me, and I also respected her very much. She knew the world of art well, understood Tatar songs, and respected singers, although her previous job was not connected with singing. H. Kalinina arranged for me a two-room apartment with all the amenities. The housing was a very complicated issue that time. I want to write about how I got that apartment. I had still been living in a «sypuska,» which had the size of a small bath-house. It was in such a bad state that the walls were wet and it lacked basic facilities. One day Gulshat came to visit. My children and I had fallen ill with a common cold.

«It can't continue like this. I hear your new director Kalinina is a very kind lady. You should explain to her the living conditions you are in and apply for new housing. She will understand you,» Gulshat said.

«I do not know how to apply. Could you do it for me,» I replied.

Gulshat filled in the application form, and I signed it. She went to the Philharmonic Hall and gave the application to Kalinina the next day. Thus, our Director met with the Chairman of the Kazan Executive Committee, Mr. Tunakov, and they decided to give me a two-room apartment at Kosmonavtov street. The administrator of our Philharmonic Hall Taskira Akchurina prepared all required documents and visited different organizations to receive a certificate for my apartment. She also helped us to move to the new apartment. Taskira was very helpful and did her best to improve the living conditions of many actors.

We were very happy to move to a new apartment. I could hardly believe it. I hugged my daughters and said to them, «My children, I hope you grow up in better conditions without the hardship I had to endure».

My aunt looked after my children well, but eventually she aged. They loved her very much. I brought Vagiz abiy's daughter Nazifa from Aktanysh to Kazan to help my aunt to take care of kids. She helped my daughters to do their homework. Thus, life was getting better. My daughters learned to speak Tatar well with their grandmother. I did not worry about my family during the tours. I knew that my kids were fed and taken care of. It was hard to leave my family for a long time, as we missed each other very much. My daughters were very happy when I came back from tours.



September, 1975



Zakira Kamasheva (Jurakay),
January 1971



Zakira Kamasheva, Svetlana, Guzel, Zulfiya, Tatiana, June, 1966



Zulfiya, Yakub Bilalov, Eliza Usmanova, February, 1968

I began to earn more money. For me, it was very important. During the tours, actors used to go to the restaurants while I tried to save and cook for myself. I tried to give Jyrakay enough money for food and other stuff while I was away. She spent money smartly as well. She would not give any money to the girls even if they asked for an ice cream or chocolate. Once, when I was on tour, she took my 3 or 4 years old daughter Zulfiya to the grocery store. They filled their bag with groceries. Zulfiya began to ask her to buy an ice cream as they were leaving the store. «I do not have money,» Jyrakay said. «I know you have some money in the pocket of your pants!» Zulfiya began to cry. People in the store began to laugh at them. But Zulfiya did not stop and kept saying, «Your money is in your panty pocket and I saw it bulging». «Oh you liar, you are embarrassing me in front of people I do not have any panty pockets!» she replied and took Zulfiya from the store.

Zulfiya was a child of a strong character. She found a way to buy ice cream anyway. We lived next door to a famous singer Suleyman Yusupov for many years. After returning from the store, Zulfiya went to Suleyman and said, «Suleyman abiy, will you please give me 20 kopecks. I will return them when my mom comes back from the tour. Jyrakay did not give me money for ice cream, although her pockets were full of money». Thus, Zulfiya spent 19 kopecks that Suleyman gave her for ice cream. She wanted to return him the remaining 1 kopeck. She stood at the door until passers-by helped her to press the bell-button because she was too small to reach it.

My aunt, who was a rural woman and lived in poverty knew the value of money and could not waste it. Once I played a trick on her. That days toured for a long



Alfiya Avzalova and Zulfiya, Munavara, Zulfiya, July, 1970



Zulfiya Avzalova, November, 1975 and May, 1987





Alfiya Avzalova with
her daughter Zulfiya,
April, 1981

time and brought home all my several-month salary all at once. When I came in, I pretended to fall down and dropped all my money on the floor. The floor was covered with fifty, twenty-five, and ten-ruble banknotes. «Jyrakay, all the money is for you!» I said. My poor aunt laid down on the floor and began to collect them... I started laughing It pleased! It was so fun!

We raised children together and had a lot of fun. My youngest daughter was not breastfed long enough because I was often away. Maybe because of this she was such a crybaby. She could start crying for no reason, and it was impossible to stop her. Jyrakay used to feed her through «hand-made nipple» while I was away. She chewed bread and sugar, put the mixture into that nipple, and gave it to Zulfiya. Thus, she raised my daughters in her own way, according to the traditions of the previous generations. Zulfiya was a lively and cheerful girl when she was not crying.

In summer, I used to take her on tours with myself. She never cried there and did not act up but played in the backstage during the performances. She liked to travel and put up with any discomfort. Our team members also loved her very much. Especially Yusuf loved her as his own daughter. Everyone who was free took care of her and played with her while I was on stage. Sometimes when concerts lasted longer than usual, she would fall asleep behind the scenes. Usually, someone would put her to bed made of pieces of clothes. She often put her head on an accordion case and fell asleep there. She ate the same food as we. When I could not take her



Alfiya Avzalova with her daughter Zulfiya, April, 1987



Zulfiya Avzalova, May, 1988

on tours, especially in winter, she stayed at home with her grandmother. And if grandmother got angry with her a little bit, she used to sing our most popular song «Yullar, yullar» in her own way and cry, «I want to go on a tour!».

Sometimes she would go on stage and dance while I was singing. I would notice her only when the audience began to laugh and applause. I also could not stop laughing. Thus, she grew up singing and dancing at the back stage.

One summer, my aunt went to Aktanysh to sell her house. I left both my daughters with Gulshat and went on a week. They played with Gulshat's daughter Asiya and had fun. Gulshat sewed them tunics and cooked delicious dishes. She made dough adding sour cream and cooked doughnuts with berries or jam. Zulfiya liked her ring doughnuts very much and asked how they were called. «It is «pon– chik», jam doughnut,» she answered.

Zulfiya could not pronounce the word so she would call it «putik» instead of «ponchik». When Jyrakay came back, she took girls home, but Zulfiya cried, «Putik! Putik! I want to go to putik!». My aunt could not understand what she was saying, and my eldest daughter explained to her what the word «putik» meant. Since then Zulfiya started to call Gulshat «Putik». That nickname «Putik» was taken hold for Gulshat, and now her grandchildren also gently call her «Putik».

My daughter Guzel grew up calm and patient, but Zulfiya was hyper active. Their characters were different. My daughters frequently got sick when they were



Guzel Avzalova with her daughter Idelia, May 1976

small. Jyrakay used to take them to the doctors or treated them with herbs herself. One winter, I was on a tour for more than three months. I traveled all over Central Asia, Kazakhstan. It was a very cold year, and my daughters fell ill. I could not get a letter from them and I worried a lot. I wished I could fly to visit them just for one day.

My eldest daughter Guzel was sick for about a month. My aunt was an illiterate woman and did not know how to send a telegram therefore I did not know about her illness. My friend Gulshat often visited my family and was going to find me through the State Philharmonia and send a telegram. Fortunately, Guzel got better. Gulshat treated her well and took her to doctors. Guzel had a serious case of pustular tonsillitis. The doctors cured her sore throat and sucked out a lot of pus. She got injections for about a week and recovered. I found that out when I came back from my tour.

In spite of Jyrakay was uneducated, she was very attentive to my daughters' education. She fed them on time and saw them off to school and met them preparing a hot meal. My daughters learned well. Guzel graduated to the Elabuga Pedagogical Institute, Library studies. Zulfiya graduated from the Kazan theater school and became a pop artist. Zulfiya seemed to be born to become a performer. Please, do not think that I am boasting, but she sings and dances well, and she is a good entertainer at the same time. Now she often hosts my concerts. When she lives in Moscow, she participates in shows as part of pop bands. Nowadays, my daughters live well and raise their children.

Let me write about my sister Flyura. As I mentioned before, Flyura was raised in orphanages. Unfortunately, she could not get any education or master any profession. She worked as a housecleaner or yard keeper. My poor sister, that was her destiny. Unfortunately, she was married several times, and each time her new husband was an unemployed or alcoholic. Some of them died, others disappeared. Even though she was not happy with her men, she gave birth to six children one after another. Her salary was not enough to take care of all six children. I helped her, of course. I took care of all of them as much as I could. Of course, it was not easy for me. My income was not very high, because I never got high wages at work. I did have higher musical education and did not graduate from the Conservatory. My payment rate was always lower than Ilham Shakirov's or Vafira Gizzatullina's. Nevertheless, thank God, I always had enough money to live. Half of Flyura's expenses were also on me.

It was difficult for her to raise children alone in the village so I brought her to Kazan, bought her an apartment, and got her a job. Flyura's fate was so sad from the day of her birth until the last day of her life. Her life was short, unfortunately. She suddenly died at the age of 38 and left six children orphaned. Although they did not have a father, they lived all together as a family until their mother died.

I was so upset and desperate when Flyura died that I could not even do anything to arrange Flyura's funeral. I was thankful to my friends, who helped me a lot. Yusuf

took care of everything and I was very grateful to him. He was my real friend during the most challenging days.

My sister's children, six poor souls, were left orphans in these unbearable living conditions. It was tough for me to bury my only sister. I thought I had not been a proper sibling to her as a sister. I brought her five children to my home (one boy was brought up in Bashkortostan, in the village with his grandmother). Five children were crying from five sides. I did not know what to do with them. The oldest was eleven or twelve years old, and the youngest was just a baby. They were strong enough, although they had lived in bad conditions. I thought a lot and decided to place the children in boarding schools and orphanages. The oldest Svetlana stayed with me.

It was such a pity to place small kids in the orphanages. The youngest, lovely boy Ruslan with snow-white skin cried on the floor and searched for his mother to be breastfed. I was in tears, looking at him. I could not stay home and take care of them. I had to work and earn my living. I could not ask my aunt to take care of all the children either. I was thankful to her for raising my daughters.

Thanks to our government that it did not leave the children on the street. Of course, it was not so easy and quick to place them in the orphanages. I had to prepare a lot of required documents and certificates. Thanks to my friends, to Yusuf and Gulshat! We visited different institutions together. Due to age differences, it was impossible to place all of them in one orphanage. Though the children were settled separately, they did not lose each other. I did everything I could make sure they did not forget each other.

I used to bring gifts to all of them and tried to visit them after my tours. I often imagined that dozens of children were waiting for me in Kazan like little birds waiting for their mother to be fed. Now all those orphans have grown up and started their families. The girls Svetlana, Tanzilya, Ramilya, and Rosa – everyone got married and live well. When they got married, I gave them wedding gifts, clothes and bedclothes. I wanted to make some contribution for their living. I helped three of them to get apartments. In our country we have the law that children who were raised in the orphanages must be provided with an apartment when they reach a certain age.

It was a hard period of my life. I was about to lose my voice. My vocal cords began to ache because of stress. I tried to sing, but I did not have a voice. The doctors said I had vocal fold paresis. It was very dangerous for a singer. The doctors told me not to sing. Thus, I had to stop singing for several months. Well, thank God, I was cured and began to work again.

Though my vocal cords were healthy. It was very hard to sing. When I entered the stage, the image of Flyura wrapped in a white winding-sheet appeared in front of my eyes, forming a lump in my throat. It was hard to hold back my tears when I sang lyrical songs, I could hardly finish my singing.

It is say that one death might draw another. A year later, in 1976, another disaster came into my life. My aunt was taking care of my children and lived well, but suddenly she got sick and died. I was informed in a telegram about her illness when I was on a tour. I stopped touring and returned to Kazan immediately. Gulshat stayed in my apartment and took care of Jyrakay, called the doctor, gave her medicine, and took care of the children. When I arrived, aunty was conscious but could not speak but she recognized me. She looked at me and wanted to say something, but she could not speak. My darling died in my arms. Her sweet face reminded me of my mother's features.

I cried for a long time thinking that I would never see those features again. We buried her according to all established traditions next to Flyura's grave. My aunt did not think she would ever die. She did not talk about death at all. Once, six months after Flyura's funeral, we somehow began to talk about death. I told her that I had left a place in the cemetery near Flyura's grave. Jyrakay did not like that. «After I die, don not bury me there. I do not want to lay near Flyura,» she said. I turned it into a joke and said: «Why? She is not a man!» «No, no, I do not want it anyway,» she replied. To tell the truth, she did not like my sister's lifestyle. «She had children but was not married, she is a sinner,» aunt used to say about Flyura.

Nevertheless, we buried her close to my sister's grave. Where else could I bury her? Every year I go to the cemetery, make donations for charity, and pray for both of them at the same time. Proper gravestones were made for both of them. Flyura's children also visit their mothers' grave.

My aunt's death depressed me even more. I began to get sick very often. I would get a cold or a sore throat in autumn. Once I got ill with tonsillitis and had a fever. I could neither eat nor swallow anything. It was hard to open my mouth. I did not call the doctor, because I was afraid the doctor might give me sick leave and I would need to cancel my concert tours. I had never taken sick leave before. There were times when I went on tour with a sore throat. Usually I would recover somehow while I was working. This time it was a more severe illness. I did not know what to do. One day Gulshat came. She took a teaspoon and tried to open my mouth. I could hardly open it.

«You are a person who opens a mouth wide when you sing, but now I cannot open it with a teaspoon! You might die. Why do not you call the doctor?» she got angry with me. I could not answer because it was hard to open my mouth. I did not have a phone at my house then. Gulshat went outside to call the doctor. She came back very quickly and gave me warm water with baking soda to gargle while we waited for the doctor to arrive. She opened my mouth almost forcibly and began to gargle my throat. Something burst in my throat when Gulshat opened my mouth, and pus came out of the wound. When the doctor came, he was surprised to see that pus. He said that it was good and prescribed some medicine not to get an infection. I felt better and did not drink any drugs. My throat recovered on its own accord.

The thoughts about love disappeared somewhere. Maybe two deaths which came one after another or serious illnesses had its effect. I could not think about anyone. My soul was empty. Yusuf still used to come and see me, but there was no flame between us. Her mother and family persuaded him to work in Naberezhnye Chelny. He worked as an administrator of the Philharmonic Hall there for several years. Of course, it was done to separate us. Indeed, we missed each other very much and several times we met in Naberezhnye Chelny. Soon Yusuf married a Russian woman who had a child. The news struck me a serious blow. I was shocked. I lost my voice. When I heard about his marriage, my withered soul flamed again. My friends and even my daughters advised me to forget him.

There was a lovely song (lyrics by A. Erikey):
Everyone say, «Forget, love another one,
Our youth wouldn't come again.»
The heart responds: «It's impossible
To forget him anytime with any gain!» –

As it says, «it was impossible to forget!...». I have not forgotten him. I pulled myself together and decided not to think about Yusuf. We lived with the same thought, with the same wish, with the same breath for more than twenty years. I do not regret it, I loved him, and I knew that he loved me too. We spent many happy minutes and hours together. Now we were friends only. When we met, we usually spoke about life, work, and creativity issues, but not about love. He has his own family, a child, and I wish him happiness. I cannot love anyone the way I loved Yusuf anymore. I am not able to love at all now.

My grandchildren have already grown up. I have two granddaughters – Idelia, Leysan, and a grandson – Askar. I want my grandchildren to continue my family line. I love my grandchildren. All my savings are for children and grandchildren. I would like to write that they also love and look up to me calling me «grandma» but I asked them not to call me «grandma». Earlier when they called me «grandma», I used to say, «Your grandma is in Bavly!» (*I meant their another grandmother – mother of the son-in-law from Bavly, the district in Tatarstan*). My grandchildren call me «Enne, enneke» (*«Mummy» in the Tatar language*). I am already a grandmother, although I do not want to be called «grandmother». The singers also become grandmothers when the time comes. Such is life...

I also want to write a few words about my friends who were like relatives to me. I have many close friends except Gulshat, Karim and Naziya. They helped me to look after my children in the most challenging times. After my aunt's death, I used to take my daughters on tours during the summer holidays, but in winter, I had to leave them at home. Even though they could look after themselves, they needed to have an adult person around. Rimma, a doctor by profession, helped a lot in such



Alfiya Avzalova with her daughter Guzel Avzalova granddaughter
Idelia and grandson Oskar, October 1993

cases. My other friend Gulsina was always like my relative. I had known her since I came to Kazan and started to work in the ensemble. She helped me to find an apartment to rent. We have become close friends ever since.

Gulsina Salakhova was born and raised in Aksu village, Buinskiy district in an ordinary family of a collective farmer. She graduated from the university and got her PhD in biology science. She was a senior researcher scientist, the head of the laboratory. Gulsina was a surprisingly diligent, self-improving, demanding person. She helped me a lot, always gave me wise pieces advices. Gulsina, with her

Alfiya Avzalova with her
grandson Oskar,
September, 1993



demanding character, would disapprove when I performed poorly on stage or sang a meaningless song. She also used to scold me for wearing low-necked dresses on stage. «Don't perform in such an obscene dress!» she used to say strictly.

«Why do you pick on my low-necked dress? You know some go on stage without a dress these days,» I tried to respond to her.

«Don't follow the example of such bad behaviour!» Gulsina would persist. I wish I had followed her recommendations...

Gulshat, Gulsina, and I are all good friends. Sometimes we might criticize each other directly for certain shortcomings or failures. Still, we do not offend and resent each other. I learned to take life seriously from them. They were a positive role model for me. I am satisfied with my fate that brought me together with my friends!

Oh, my dear friends,
Fellows, my close friends...
What would I do alone,
If I fell out with you?!

I think the song was dedicated to my closest friends – Gulshat and Gulsine.

I had another friend who has already passed away. It was quite a funny friendship. Maybe it was not friendship at all. She tried to be friends with me, liked to come to visit me. She was one of those flatterers who talked behind someone's back. She was a great talker and liked to laugh at someone's failures or shortcomings, making fun of people. She liked to go to parties, and would tell her «funny stories» about others. She was a secretary in a book publishing house. The writers, poets, and composers used to make different requests with her. Therefore, she was very close to the people of arts and often visited them. Each time she was a guest at somebody's house, she would gossip about the others. Her stories passed from mouth to mouth. Some people still tell her stories as jokes. I guess my colleagues have already understood that I am writing about Salima. She was a beautiful, unmarried, and young looking lady who died at an advanced age. She also made fun of me. May she rest in peace! I hope she told anecdotes about me affectionately. I did not get upset with her. But sometimes I used to get upset when I heard about myself «Salima told that...» about myself.

I want to mention another beautiful friendship with Zuleykha, which comforts my heart. She never paid attention to my deficiencies. I could talk to her openly. Zuleykha was not one of those flatterers who talked behind your back. Sometimes, returning from concerts late at night, I stayed at her apartment in the city center. She always kindly welcomed me as if I was her sister. Zuleykha worked as a sound engineer in the Academic theater for many years. Thus, many people of arts and actors were her frequent visitors. She used to welcome everyone very warmly.

In this chapter, which is devoted to my friends, I want to write about very good people of our nation, thousands of those who hosted me warmly during the tours. Is there anyone who deeply understands the meaning of the words «Tatar people are hospitable»? During the tours, mostly in villages, we stayed at people's houses. Thousands of friends hosted me. I am grateful to all those friends who treated me like a family member and prepared a bath-house.

I have such close friends in many places where I have been to. They meet me and invite me to their home without any hesitation whatsoever as soon as they hear about my arrival. If I go to Moscow it is Valida, in Ufa it is a singer Flyura Nugmanova, in Tashkent it is Munavara, in Gulistan it is a singer Raziya Gaynullina, in Izhevsk it is Shamil and his beloved wife Razilya, in Kukmor they are Gulsira and Nasima, in Menzelinsk it is an artist Venera, a librarian Gulshat, in Agryz they are Zakirov brothers, in Isenbaevo it is Baniya, in Rybnaya Sloboda they are Saniya, Gulshat... The images of hundreds, thousands of women who prepared delicious dishes, and hosted me warmly come into my mind. I would like to ask the others not to get offended if they read this book and can not find their names. Unfortunately, it is impossible to list everyone but I do remember all of you!

They made me feel like a family member. I ate delicious food and slept in a



Alfiya Avzalova
and Munavara from
Uzbekistan, August, 1972



Alfiya Azalova and Fiora Nogmanova popular singer from
Bashkortostan, Ufa City, November, 1975



Alfiya Avzalova and Zulfiya, 'Kazan Utlary» Vocal and Instrumental Ensemble,
Ufa City, May 1988

clean bed after my long trips and concerts. Sometimes after the concerts, we would talk or sing at the table until dawn. It is wonderful that our nation is so hospitable.

However some such landladies would not care about the actors at all. Even though they were well-off, the food on the table was very poor.

Once in one village, I was hosted by a single woman. She worked as a farm manager and was retired. She lived a perfect life, the furniture in the house was imported from abroad. She had a new refrigerator. We did not open it, but we had noticed the fridge was filled with food when she opened it herself. She seemed to live a rich life but was greedy. She boiled water in samovar, made us tea, but did not put any bread on the table, not even mentioning sugar and butter. This was in the 1970s. I put sugar that I took with myself and made a cup of tea when I felt that we would not be fed well. But I had no other food with myself.

«Don't you take bread with yourself?» she asked surprisingly. I did not return to her house after the concert, of course. A very generous, very nice woman invited me to her home.

I remember a lot of funny stories related to landlords. One summer, we went on tour to the Agryzskiy district. I took my daughters and daughter of my sister, Svetlana, with me. I wanted Jyrakay to have a little rest and though children could get some fresh air during those beautiful summer days. We mostly traveled on trucks in those years. Thus, we drove into a village sitting at the back of that car.

I jumped out of the car and began to pick up girls as soon as we stopped in front of the house, where we are supposed to stay for a night. My daughters and I were sunburned.

At that very moment, a woman looked out of the window.

«The gypsies came, quickly bring the laundry home!» she yelled at her daughter who was playing in the street.

«Apa, we are not Gypsies, we are singers!» I laughed.

«All the more reason in that case. Not only the laundry but also the clothesline should be taken away!» the woman said. I did not understand either she said that in earnest or in jest.

I think she joked because invited us to her house after the concert. She treated us well, and made us a clean bed. Our daughters slept on the floor. My colleagues laughed at this story and tell it as a funny joke.

Once, we toured the Alekseevskiy district. We arrived in Kryashen village. I was hosted by a single Krashen¹ [kryajn] woman. (By the way, I wanted to note that the Kryashens are our best audience. They love concerts very much and they are attentive and disciplined during the whole performance. That Kryashen woman's cleanliness was impeccable. Her house glistened, the bed clothing was snow-white. She did not know how to please and surprise me. She spun around and around.

She boiled samovar very quickly and set the table. She oiled the pan with pig snout, put a spoon of dough, and fried pancakes. Oh, I looked at the pan and thought I would have eaten the pancakes with pleasure if had she not used the snout. I wish I had not seen it... I was so hungry and could not help myself and ate a couple of hot pancakes that hostess put on the table. I thought I had sinned. I could not eat anymore. The vision of snout flashed in front of my eyes... I said I was very thirsty and just drank a lot of tea. The pancakes were very tasty. Though I was hungry, I said that I did not want to eat. I thanked her and left the table. I saw our bayanist Zinnur Gibadullin in my dream that night. He had the snout of a pig in one hand and pancakes in the other and ate them with great pleasure...

The next day we went to another village. If I am not mistaken, it was called Tigana. It was a muslim village. I was also hosted by a lovely woman. Her house was also immaculate. Her husband was a tractor driver. The whole day long he worked in the field. They had two very pretty and quiet girls. Their house was clean, elegant and furnished with modern furniture. They lived very well. The landlady set the table very quickly. She knew in advance that we would come and baked ochpohc-maks [ejppochmci:k]. The table was full of ochpohcmaks² [ejppochmci:k], honey, butter, and sour cream... As I ate only one or two pancakes the day before I

¹ Krashen [kryajn] – Baptised Tatars. A sub-group of the Volga Tatars, frequently referred to as one of the minority ethnic groups in Russia.

² ochpohcmak [t'jpmj' ma:k] - a triangular pastry, filled with minced beef, onion and potatoes (from Tatar), Tatar national and Bashkirs dish.

was very hungry. The ochpochmaks were very tasty and crisp... I told my hostess that I was famished.

«Neither last night nor this morning did I eat because yesterday the Kryashen landlady cooked pancakes using pig spout. I saw the process, and I could not eat those pancakes. Kryashen is Kryashen,» I said and continued to eat ochpochmaks.

The landlady nearly stumbled and said, «Oh, Alfiya, but I'm also Kryashen. We moved to this village only last year...»

I nearly fell over out of embarrassment.

«Please, don't doubt the ochpochmaks. I cooked it out of lamb, I swear by the bread. We slaughtered a sheep just yesterday. If you don't believe it, its hide is hanging in the garden. You may have a look,» she laughed.

The ochpochmaks were really made lamb, I could tell. My belly was full. We sat for a long time at the table with my new Kryashen friend. We sang songs, and I told jokes to please her.

Here is one more story about how we went to a bath-house. It happened quite recently – in 1989 in Salagush village, Agryz district. My friend Gulshat and a dancer Guzel Vafina were also touring with us. We were hosted by an elderly woman. It was a hot summer day. I saw a bath-house in the yard and wanted to take a bath. «Let's heat up the bathhouse!» I suggested. «We went to the bath-house only the day before yesterday!» Gulshat replied resolutely.

«The bath-house has not been used for a long time, sheep stayed there all winter. It needs cleaning. Usually, my neighbors invite me to their bath-house. You could go too but they are at work now,» the landlady said.

«No, no, we won't go to your neighbors, we will clean up your bath-house,» I said.

«Alright then,» the landlady agreed. Guzel and I spent half a day cleaning the bath-house. Guzel fetched water from a stream. Gulshat was reading a newspaper at home. She neither wanted to help cleaning nor go to the bath-house.

The bath-house was eventually ready and as it should be, it was very hot inside. We soaked a bunch of green birch twigs in a basin of hot water and placed it on a bench in a steam room. Gulshat refused to join saying that she did not feel like it, but somehow, we managed to persuade her. It was really hot inside. Gulshat opened the door to let some cool air in but I insisted on closing it. I sat on a bench in a steam room ready to take a steam bath but suddenly the bench snapped under me and I fell down. I screamed in pain. My neck and chest were scalded by the water we had placed on the bench. Gulshat got angry. «I said I was not feeling like going but you insisted as if you have never gone to a bath-house before,» she said. «The concert might be canceled today,» she added.

«No, it's not gonna happen!» I said.

We looked at the broken bench and were terrified. Twenty-centimeter-long nails were sticking out of the wooden boards. We were shocked by how my body was not injured by those nails in any way.

«That bench was made by my husband when he returned from the war about 40 years ago. He wanted to renew it, but he never did because he passed away,» the landlady explained later.

We smeared goose oil on my scalded skin. That way it hurt less and we did not cancel the concert, of course.

«Alfiya, I would like to ask you for a favor, please, do not tell today's story at the concert. The villagers would laugh at my old bath-house,» the landlady said jokingly.

«No, I won't,» I said.

I wanted to tell that funny story to the audience during the concert, but I did not. Gulshat also kept me under tight control. I tried not to talk a lot if she participated in my concerts. Since it had happened a long time ago, I just wanted to write about it so that you would laugh a little, my dear reader.

During the tours, I also met some very cheerful landlords. Once in one of the villages I was hosted by an old man and a woman. After the concert we had tea and the landlady made me a clean bed in the main room of the house. Mattresses were put on top of one another like a mountain. I felt like a queen and was going to fall asleep drowning in a fluffy bed. The house was warm, but I went under the blanket.

«Alfiya, have a rest. You are alone here, nobody will bother you,» the woman said.

«And where will you sleep? Where is your husband?» I wondered.

«I will go to bed in the kitchen. My husband is a security guard at the farm, he will stay there tonight,» she said, switching off the light, closing the thick door behind her.

I was very tired. I lay down, and fell asleep immediately. I was almost asleep, but suddenly someone began to pull on my blanket! I got frightened and jumped out of the bed. I ran through the door into a small room.

«Grandma, there is someone in the room. Someone pulls on my blanket! Maybe your husband returned and is playing a practical joke on me?» I asked.

«No, no, he is not at the age of fooling around anymore...» grandma said.

«What is it then?» I asked.

The landlady turned on the lights. The room was empty.

«Ooh,» grandma said laughing, «it is just a goose under your bed... It's laying eggs. Don't be afraid it's a mommy goose, it won't hurt you!».

People like to have fun in some villages. Once, we came to a village. The concert hall was full of people. There was a half-wit man amongst the audience. He was wearing a hat with earflaps and a greatcoat in the summer. His chest was covered with different kinds of medals: some war medals, labor veterans medals, even dog medals, etc. One smart woman started talking to him, «You know, very pretty singers came over today. You'd better marry someone... You are already forty but still a bachelor».

«Whom should I marry?» the poor fellow asked.

«You may pick anyone you want. If your wife is a singer you can go to Kazan and ride trams there,» that woman replied.

We could not hear the end of the conversation. We picked up our things and came into the club. Then we went to the guest house. I was hosted by a woman named Kamer, who lived alone. She prepared a bath-house for me. I went to the bath-house, and as I was undressing I heard someone coming. The door was not locked. Nobody locks the doors in a bath-house in a village. I looked and that poor fellow from the concert was standing at the door clanking his medals.

«Um, what are you doing here?» I asked surprisingly.

«I'm here to marry you! Kamer apa sent me to marry you,» he answered.

«I am not Alfiya Avzalova, I am a demon of the bath-house,» I exclaimed.

He got scared and ran away.

«You have really scared the poor «groom»! He ran away stumbling,» said the landlady laughing as I came from the bath-house.

Summing up I would like to underline that I do not betray friends. Once we become friends, I try to maintain friendship all my life. Amongst all of them, my friendship with Gulshat is the strongest one, of course. I do not remember when, where, or how I had met and became friends with Gulshat. We became friends when we came to Kazan much time ago. Gulshat was born in the Sarmanovskiy district and grew up in Menzelinskiy district. Our fates are similar. In childhood both of us went through orphanhood and suffered a lot. We overcame various obstacles in our career of creativity with patience and achieved success. Thus, due to these similarities we always find common grounds.

Gulshat is a person who can always put herself in someone's shoes. I always turn to her for support in any situation and she always helps me with her wise advice. She is my best helper and adviser at my onstage work as well as in my everyday life situations. She showed me the right path in my life. Gulshat had a great impact on me. Our children and grandchildren are also friends. Gulshat and I swore to each other that if one of us dies, the other would not leave our children, and would give them advice and help them.

As a singer I have met and worked with different government officials and I have no grudge against them. Eventually I was given an apartment and honorary titles. We could not go on tours abroad like Russian singers Lyudmila Zykina, Valentina Tolkunova and Sofia Rotaru but I think it was not entirely up to Tatarstan officials. I only went abroad as part of a touristic group. However, there were times when some decisions were solely up to our managers. In the late 1960s, a group of actors from Tatarstan were invited by Finnish Tatars. They wanted to see Ilham and me and sent an invitation letter. The Minister of Culture Bulat Minullovich Gizzatullin led the group. Bulat Minullovich brought the Opera singer R. with him. I

was left out. Perhaps I was not good enough, besides he probably enjoyed traveling with R

khanum (hanum) more. Upon return, the actors told me he had a good time...

I was welcomed wherever I went and I was happy about that fact. I enjoyed working in a real creative atmosphere. Head of our Republic Mr. Tabeyev and Mr. Usmanov were kind to me. As years passed their contributions were evaluated differently. Some artists criticized them for «being unfriendly to the people of arts». It is a typical situation when someone has power, people of arts flock to them and seek friendship. As soon as they leave their positions, so-called friends start criticizing them. As for me, I was treated well by the heads of the government in those years. I have much respect for Fikret Tabeyev and Gumer Usmanov as well as Mansur Khasanov and Rais Belyaev, who led the ideological campaign for many years. However, they had their assistants and deputies, who would pick on us for trifling matters and summon us to their offices every now and then.

Nowadays government officials are completely different kind of people. They will not waste time mingling with young singers or dealing with minor pop stage issues. They do care about the welfare of the people. Notably our President, Mintimer Shaimiev is truly a great leader. He is fighting for the Republic's independence. He cares about people and works hard for the wellbeing of the people. I am pleased with the current leaders of our government. All leaders including M. Shaimiev and R. Minnikhanov treat me well.

Mr. Shaimiev always helps me, no matter what kind of request I have. I must confess that he looks favorably not only on me but also on other music-hall artists in general. M. Shaimiev does a lot for the people, though the times are complicated. Many new mosques were built, and those that had been destroyed during the Soviet period were restored. The capital of Tatarstan, Kazan has changed a lot. Its streets have been renovated and look even more beautiful. Actually it is not my duty to list all good things Shaimiev has done, I am just mentioning it as a footnote.

Current leaders are men of action, which does not allow for intrigues amongst the people of arts, especially among singers. Sometimes I think that my career would have turned out even better had we had such great leaders ten years ago. Back then executives delegated a lot to their assistants, who would deal with our issues.

A very unpleasant incident happened to me about ten years ago. Many actors and singers from Tatarstan attended the celebration of 'The Decade of Literature and Art' in the Autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan. Some singers were awarded the title of «Honorary Actor of Karakalpakstan». I had just come back from a long tour which lasted for about a hundred days and made a lot of money for the Philharmonic Hall. My host Naziya Minkina and I were very excited about the prospect of participating in the upcoming celebration after a long and successful tour. But unfortunately, we had not been invited which made us very upset. I would

never forget the sense of unfairness. And it was arranged not by the first Secretary of the Regional Committee, of course, but by his assistants.

Five or six directors of the Tatar State Philharmonic Hall changed during my long stage life. Among them there were such directors, artistic directors, who used to pick on me about my singing without any reason. Some heads were entrepreneurial as well as humane leaders. I was happy to work when our directors were the following persons: Mikhail Bogolyubov, who was Russian by nationality but loved Tatar art; Hayat Kalinina, who loved art and tried to treat all singers equally; Marat Tazetdinov, who also wrote poems and songs and understood art well. They arranged all the necessary conditions for me and helped me in my creative work. Asgat Safin, who is leading the Philharmonic Hall today, also treats me well. Being an artist who has danced on stage for many years, he understands our way of life and personally helps me in every case. He worked in my team in the last years of his dancing career. He was a good dancer and a skilled manager.

Unfortunately, there were directors who did not know, understand or love Tatar art. After all, the Regional Committee could appoint anyone they wished. It was hard to work with such directors. They preferred to criticize us then support us in our work.

In the 1960s, some singers who sang mostly folk songs, were treated differently. Many music experts (especially Zaynab Khayrullina) used to criticize and belittle them. Such experts tried to fire such well-known artists as Fayzi Bikkinin, Zifa Basyrova and Gabdulla Rakhimkulov on the grounds of their qualification. They were also criticized shamelessly at the Art Council meetings. They would mostly find fault with actors who were not party members. That trend affected me too. They tried to humiliate me and fire me on the same grounds. But I did not give in. I worked hard, learned new songs, enriched my repertoire and did not allow for their unfair appraisal.

It was very hard for the actors to endure. The audience had no idea about such inner workings. Zifa apa won the great love of the people. She passed away with the title of «Honored Actress of Tatarstan», although she deserved the title of «People's Artist».

I would not even recall the events of the past. I just wanted to emphasize the fact that our line of work is very hard. Singers do not only walk along red carpets and achieve success. Through hard work they have to overcome many difficulties and navigate inner workings of the industry. I do not want you to think that my success came easy.

In the 1960s and 1970s anonymous complaint letters were widespread. Many life changing decisions were made based on such letters. Some people would also write anonymous complaint letters to our Philharmonic Hall. As for me, those who write such letters are envious people. They can be found among singers too. If one singer becomes popular, the other becomes jealous and starts writing anonymous

letters to damage his or her career. I was accused of every possible transgression. Anonymous letters against me were written to the Philharmonic Hall, the Ministry of culture, and the Regional Committee of the Party. Based on the content and style of writing I tried to guess who it might be. We discussed it with Ilham Shakirov and he said, «They write such letters because you are popular now. Look, this one such and that one ended the career and no one bothers to talk about them. Let them talk. It is bad if they do not...».

I also got anonymous phone calls. Sometimes in the middle of the night someone might call and start cursing, «Let your throat get sick!», etc.. Sometimes, they called and said, «Chimpanzee, how are you?». «I am well, and what about you, orangutan?» I might answer. I never have to search for words, you know. I knew who called me. Now she has become a poet. If she reads this book, she will understand everything. I can recognize voices as I am an expert with «absolute ear».

I do not want to get angry when I am told that I look like a monkey. I do know if I do but if that's the case I definitely look like a pretty monkey. Nevertheless, some fell in love with me. I have written about my love affairs in the previous chapters. I do not care much about it. Alexander Klyucharev used to call his favorite women «maymulka», which means my little cute monkey.

Once I went to Kislovodsk sanatorium. A resort is a resort. You are supposed to have fun and relax. In the evenings I went dancing, although I do not like it very much. I usually went there to spend free time. So one day I went dancing. The room was full of women and only several old men. I sat down and nobody invited me to a dance. Then one huge man with a belly as big as «KAMAZ» truck wheel invited me for a dance.

He came to me and said, «What a nice little monkey! Let's go and dance».

«Let's go, good bear!» I said. He laughed at it. We started to dance.

«Are you Chukchi?» he wondered.

«No!» I answered.

«Then you are Yakut!» he said.

«No!» I answered.

«Who are you then? Maybe a Cossack?» he continued.

«No!» I answered.

«Kalmyk?» he asked.

«No!» I answered.

«Who are you by nationality, tell me, please!» he asked.

«I am Japanese!» I replied.

«Oh, Japanese! What a beautiful Japanese woman!» he said, pressing his big belly to my body. Tell me something in Japanese».

«Oh, kart alasha (an old horse in Tatar),» I said to him.

«What beautiful Japanese words!» he replied with joy.

Thus, I became a «Japanese monkey»!

In the 1970s, a lot of anonymous letters were written to the highest authorities of the Republic complaining about me. Once, a letter was sent to Mr. Batyev saying that I was drunk and disrupted the performance. I was summoned to Mr. Batyev's office in the Kremlin. When I arrived, there was a long queue in his waiting room. I did not have to wait for my turn. I was afraid. It was scary because Mr. Batyev was sitting like a king in his office. He really looked like a king, not only The Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Tatar ASSR. He was furious and did not smile at all.

«Why do you disrupt the concerts during the tours?» he asked. «We have got a lot of complaints about you,» he continued.

«I've never disrupted a concert in my life, even when I was sick or had a fever. Someone wanted to take me off the stage and had fabricated the news that I was drunk. You have not got complaints but anonymous letters,» I said. «And you trust them not looking into the situation. I will bring you the members of my team tomorrow. You should talk to them and ask when I was drunk and disrupted a concert».

The next day I booked the Philharmonic bus and took all my team members to Mr. Batyev. The musicians told him that I had never been drunk. «Alfiya doesn't drink vodka at all, and before the concert starts, she always checks our breath for alcohol. I had a drinking problem but I gave up. When Karim Gabidullin joined our team, Alfiya and Karim made a rule that drunk artists do not participate in concerts. If someone was drunk, they deduct some payment from the weekly salary and share it among the actors,» Gennadiy Klyauzov said.

As I said, many life changing decisions were made based on those anonymous letters and it continued for a long time. Unfortunately, even today there are some poisonous pens out there.

In 1980 I was invited to the Ministry of culture to meet with the deputy minister Renat Kharis. I was afraid to go alone and asked Gulshat to join me. We were welcomed well by Renat, a famous Tatar poet, very cultured, smart, and a patient person.

«Alfiya khanum¹ [hʌnum], what should we do with these anonymous letters which are written to damage your reputation,» he said.

«Do they write that I was drunk?» I asked.

«Yes, they do,» Renat said, embarrassingly.

«Do you believe that?» I asked.

«And do they also write about the incidents of disrupted concerts due to her drinking problems?» Gulshat joined the conversation.

«No, such facts are not written. I don't believe in such letters myself. And yet I want to know who writes them and why? These letters don't write the authors themselves, of course. It is difficult to find the authors of these letters. And yet you

¹ khanum [hʌnum] – madame, (used in postposition); form of polite address for a married woman (from Tatar)

probably know who writes them. Whom do you suspect?» Renat asked, looking at us.

I told him why and whom I suspected. Renat listened very attentively and said, «Real talented people always have enemies. They try to smear the talented person's name in such a way. Let's do the following, you continue your work and don't worry about the letters. We will tear up these letters and throw them in the trash». And so he did.

As the saying goes, dogs bark, but the caravan moves on. The anonymous letters still continued, but I continued to sing. A year or two later, our government passed a very humane law, according to which anonymous could not be the basis for any decision regarding any person. However, poisonous pens still continue their nasty business. They use the names and surnames of other people and pay them for a job. As the saying goes, only the grave can straighten the hunchback.

It is easy to spread gossip in our country. You target someone you cannot stand and start telling that he/she is a heavy drinker. Since the drinking problem is widely spread in our country, people readily believe it. In the 1980s, someone also tried to gossip about me and wrote many letters to higher authorities with the context that «Alfiya was drunk on stage.» If I was drinking on the stage back in the 1970s, I would no longer be singing today. I would be an old woman leaning on a stick or would have died. Alcoholics leave the stage quickly. Many great actors have left the stage today because of that fact. A woman is mainly under the risk of giving in to such a pernicious habit and she quickly loses her humanity.

Thank God, I reached this age and still give concerts with great pleasure. The audience desires my shows. Time puts everything in its place. I have proven that I am not a drinker, that I am above all the gossip. As I mentioned above, the audience likes my performances, if they did not, no one would come, even if the concerts were free of charge. You could even go outside and cry, but they would not come anyway. Surprisingly, the audience might not attend the concerts of famous, honored singers as well. Nowadays, concert tickets are expensive enough, but life is not so easy. Thus, people only attend concerts of their favourite singers. We cannot blame them for it.

They do not have a problem with how to spend their evening. They can stay at home and watch TV. I am often asked if I am tired of singing for more than 40 years. I am not tired. When I think that it is time to finish my career, I imagine concert halls full of applauding people. Why should I get tired? The stage is my life, and how can you get tired of living?

Besides, I have loyal audience who wants to see me and come to my concerts. They still want to see me on stage. I will stop when they do not come. Answering the question of when I will finish my career, my answer is, «When the audience doesn't need me.»

There is an interesting fact that people like to talk about celebrities. They may

tell both the truth and gossip. Telling stories about celebrities during dinner parties has already become a tradition. It looks like the food on the table seems more delicious if you talk about celebrities. I know that people talk about me a lot. I am happy about it. When I was younger, people gossiped that I dated men. Who does not do it? It is actors' fate tour for long periods of time. The singer does not stay at home for the most part of his/her life. A female singer's family life might survive only if her husband is a patient man. What kind of man would commit himself to a family and would be loyal to a wife, who is away from home for months? I also tried to start a family, but I failed. Once when I was on a long tour, Zulfija's father got married. I almost fell over at the train station when my friends told me the news. It's not surprising that people talked. You would not believe it if I said I had not dated. I did, but I had never broken up a family. Some people continued to write many anonymous letters about my dating to the highest authorities of our Republic.

Once, in the 1970s, when Bulat Minnullovich Gizzatullin was a Minister, I was invited to the Ministry of culture. I was told that it was an important matter. I dressed beautifully, of course. I liked to dress after the latest fashion. You knew that well. And why should I dress poorly being an artist? I was young and attractive.

Bulat abi was older than me. I wanted to look beautiful and make a good impression on the Minister. (I promise I just wanted to be liked as a sister. I thought if he likes me as a singers, I might have a chance to join the group of actors going abroad. In those years, several groups of artists went to Finland. I also wanted to join but they did not send me). When I came to the Minister's office, his face was so grim that I felt like not a beautifully dressed singer but just a random passer-by. I thought I had not been invited for good news at all.

He did not even offer me to take a seat and started his speech with a question, «I was told you are dating a lot. Don't you have a husband?»

I was at a loss, and I do not remember how I responded.

Actors who liked to talk and gossip about me reconstructed their version of what was said in that meeting. According to their version, my answer to Bulat Minnullovich was as follows «And what do you suggest I do? You can't feed it hay...»

Surely I did not say that. How could I dare to talk to the Minister like that? Besides, he was not a person who understood jokes. I bet he had never smiled in his life, let him rest in peace. I don't know whether he smiled or not but what I heard is that people gossiped that he liked to date beautiful artists.

I had high hopes about that meeting thinking I was called to him to be sent to Finland, but unfortunately, my wings were cut off. It turned out that Mr. Gizzatullin summoned me only to talk about my so-called faults.

I did date men, but I never dated government officials. Therefore nobody can say that I got my honorary titles unfairly. Thank God, I earned my titles by working hard so there were no talks about it. As the saying goes, there is no smoke without a fire. As a matter of fact, there was not any fire at all. But it is no secret that such

cases happen in the world of art. Some female singers get honorary titles very easily. We cannot blame them. Many win competitions get such valuable gifts as a car, a mink coat or a Japanese tape recorder. In our time everything was different. As I noted above, if someone wins a contest, the winner gets a certificate and that is all. I have a considerable number of such certificates. What do you do with a sheet of paper with Lenin's head on it? Is that a present? I have never received a single gift on stage from any government official in my life. Not even a mink hat, let alone a mink coat.

I bought everything myself. But many people helped me to get things which were not available for sale. The district and kolkhoz managers never decline my requests. I am very grateful to all of them.

Many young leaders hold positions of authority these years. I must confess, most of them respect the singers. I would like to thank some of the managers. Head of the Menzelinskiy district Rashit Khamadeev was like a brother to me. He used to meet me as his own sister whenever I came, checked me into the best hotel rooms, and treated me with respect. He would find whatever I asked of him.

Once I stopped over in Menzelinsk on my way back to Aktanysh. He did not let me go, and I stayed there for a week. He took me to the best shops in Menzelinsk. It was hard to buy things back then even if you had the money. I managed to completely upgrade my wardrobe. I also bought a lot of household items. He arranged a car for me to take the purchased items to Kazan. Not every sibling could do that. I have been grateful to him my entire life. Now he is head of the Zainskiy district. Rashit Khamadeev is a man in love with art, particularly songs.

Once he asked me, «Alfiya apa, you sang a lovely song when you were young. There are recordings on the radio, but for some reason, that song is broadcasted rarely. Do you mind singing that song now?».

«What song are you talking about? Do you remember the name» I asked.

«I don't remember its name, but it goes like this» he said and began singing.

«Come to me, my dear, come to me, my bird of happiness...».

«Ah, it is called «My bird of happiness» I remembered. «Music by Zinnur Gibadullin, lyrics by Gulshat Zaynasheva. Yes, I enjoyed singing it. Now its lyrics are forgotten, I can't sing it,» I replied.

Rashid has straightened his body like a hero of a fairy tale and began to sing the song himself,

«Like a cornfield waiting for rain,

I am waiting for you, I've missed you.

Come to me, my dear, come, my bird of happiness,

Be my beloved forever in my life.».

He sang with such a beautiful melodic voice that my eyes teared up.

Nurulla Bagramov, Head of Agryzskiy district, also did a lot of good for me and helped me buy a lot of necessary items. The brothers Renat, Rasim, and Rustem

Zakirovs from Agryz are also my friends. They also helped me a lot in purchasing basic necessities. When I go to Naberezhnye Chelny, the KAMAZ plant manager treats me with respect. Azat Zyabbarov, «Biryuli» farm manager, Rais Minnikhanov, the director of the Sabinsky forestry enterprise, and the chief engineer Vasil also helped me a lot in my everyday life matters. I consider all of them to be my good friends.

There are a lot of friends, and, unfortunately, it is impossible to list all of them. My onstage life lasted for more than forty years thanks to my friends, I think. It is difficult to perform in unfamiliar places without any friends' support. It is possible to sing with pleasure only when the singer feels the warm attitude of friends. As for me, I always felt that friendly attitude towards myself. Audiences became my friends. A festive atmosphere reigns on the stage when a singer becomes friends with the audience. There are songs, music, harmony, and some beauty that hangs in the air and can not be explained in words. Those are the happiest moments for a singer! Those are magic moments that raise the souls of thousands of people sitting in the hall to the beauty of song and harmony. Thus, a singer is ready to sell his or her soul for the connection with the audience to feel that happiness.

How Songs Are Composed

Someone sings by the river, it pulls at my heartstrings,
Lyrical songs are like miracle, just a miracle!

Lyrical songs are really a miracle! Emotional and touching songs are rarely composed. It is often said that there are three authors of a song: the composer, the poet and the singer. In my opinion the singer's role is overrated. The singer could not pass for the author, but a person who performs the song for the first time plays a crucial role in the song's future. A song composed by a composer on the sheet music is like a newborn baby. The singer breathes a soul into it. If the singer finds its most precious features and sings it with the right emotion, the song might reach the listeners' hearts and become a long-lived song. Please, do not think that I brag when I say that I sang a lot of songs for the first time and breathed souls into them. Most singers do it.



Alfiya Avzalova and Rif Gataullin, Golzada Safullina
Top row left to right: Ahmet Gadel, Fannur Safin, Modaris Aglamov,
Ilgizar Fazlullin, Kiram and Gulshat Sateev



Alfiya Avzalova and Rafael Iliasov, May, 1970



May, 1975

There are dozens of such songs in my repertoire: «Yash naratlar» (*«The young pines»*), «Watanymnin gadi ber kizi min» (*«I'm an ordinary daughter of my homeland»*), «Aktanysh tannary» (*«Aktanysh dawns»*), «Kaytam inde» (*«I am coming back»*), «Yorak sere» (*«The secret of the heart»*), «Nik sonladin?» (*«Why were you late?»*) «Tugaylarym» (*«My valleys»*), «Kul buyina kilsen ide» (*«If you came to the lake side»*), «Yash gomer» (*«Theyouth»*), «Sayahatche jyry» (*«The traveler's song»*), «Kunelle yal itegez» (*«Let you have fun»*), «Kukmara» (*«Kukmor district»*), «Tuy kulmege» (*«The wedding dress»*), «Bik sagyndym awylym» (*«I missed my village»*), «Haman da kotasen» (*«You are still waiting»*), «Ezladem, bagrem, sine» (*«I was looking for you my sweetheart»*), «Beznen kunellar» (*«Our souls»*), «Tamchylar» (*«The drops»*), «Yalgyz jilkan» (*«Lonely sail»*), «Kil, irkam, kil inde» (*«Come to me, my beauty»*), «Gollar ile» (*«Land of flowers»*), «Uramnarda yorim de min» (*«I walk in the streets»*) and etc. I witnessed these songs' creation. The authors of the music and lyrics would show me their drafts and consult with me. Then we would work



Alfiya Avzalova and Gans Safiullin, Haidar Safin, «Kazan Utlary» Vocal and Instrumental Ensemble, August, 1976

together on a song for a week or a month. We would try singing different versions of a song and rewrite it several times. The songs by Z. Gibadullin and G. Zaynasheva were composed in that exact way.

I would sometimes add some changes to the songs myself, and only after the author's consent would sing them in front of the audience. The serious song «Haman da kotasen» («*Still waiting*»), the warm, gentle, lyrical song «Gollar ile» («*Land of the flowers*»), a beautiful, rhythmically structured, joyful song «Tamchylar» («*The drops*») and others are among such songs in my repertoire.

I remember the days when I rewrote the song «The land of flowers». The author Salima Shamsieva was an amateur composer. She gave me the sheet music of that song and sang it playing the piano. Her voice was not very good. Although I liked the lyrics, the music was not very good.

«I will sing the song, but I will change it as I see it,» I said to Salima apa.

I took the song and went to Gulshat's dacha (*summer house*). I added changes to the song and sang it for hours for the whole week in the kitchen, which was the size of a phone box. Gulshat was busy in the garden. Sometimes I invited Gulshat and made her listen to the song. She suggested adding more crossfades after listening to it. «No, the melody is simple, and if I add more changes, it will be lost,» I said. I can not explain it explicitly (let the theorists explain it), I did it following to my gut feeling. Thus, «The land of flowers» was rewritten. I think it was a simple



Seventieth, January, 2003





January, 1983

but beautiful folk song at the same time. I sang it with great pleasure. As for folk melodies, I also sang them a lot.

For instance, «Saginam, duskay, ilkeyne» («*I miss my homeland*»), «Oh, janyem, sularda» («*Oh, my darling, on the waters*»), «Aktanysh basmalary» («*The bridges of Aktanysh*»), «Kubalegem» («*My butterfly*»), «Sarman» («*Sarmanovskiy district*»), the old folk songs «Gulzhamal», «Segat chilbyry» («*The clock string*»), «Salkyn chishma» («*The cold spring*»), the songs on the lyrics by G. Tukay «Ellyuki», «Zileylyuk», «Taftileu», Bashkir folk tunes «Elmalek», «Gulnazira». Although these songs were performed by many singers, I tried to sing them in my own way. I think the listeners appreciated my work. In my opinion, every singer should have his own voice, which could not be mixed up with others. I love singers who sing with their natural voices.

We have two singers with beautiful voices who are very much loved by music fans. They are Zukhra Sakhabieva and Zukhra Sharifullina. They both sing melodiously, but their voices differ. Each of them has an original background. I love both of them. The singers can find the right color or melodic pattern where it is necessary. They do not copy me or any other singer.

I want to say a few words about Khamduna Timergalieva, who sang her own melodies and earned great love of the people without copying anyone. She sings so naturally in her own way.

The «Bayram» («*Holiday*») ensemble was created in Moscow recently and became quickly popular. A singer Khaniya Farkhi was leading the band. As a dramatic artist (Khaniya is a director), she directs and produces her concerts herself, and also

composes the songs. The audience quickly fell in love with the songs that are sung with a soft, folk voice by this talented artist. Her songs have their own face.

I am glad that these artists won recognition from the public. Our Tatar stage is not empty, talented singers who will continue our work came to the stage. They do not copy me. They maintain the folk singing traditions. Zaynab Farkhutdinova, for instance, differs among others with her beautiful voice. I focused only on folk singers and female performers. There are also excellent singers among our opera singers. They play a special role in our music art.

These singers made a significant contribution to the creation of many new songs in the Tatar world. For instance, Z. Sahabieva's song «Jidegan chishme» (*«Seven-pointed spring»*), Z. Sharifullina's song «Su buyenda uchak yana» (*«The campfire is near the water»*), H. Timergalieva's folk song «Jomga» (*«Friday»*), which was forgotten but returned to the Tatar stage enriched with beautiful harmony. All these songs are beautiful examples that were performed with utmost sincerity.

A lot was written about the role of a singer in song creation. It is typical not only for Tatar culture but also for other nations as well. The virtuoso of Russian folk songs, Lyudmila Zykina wrote the following in her book, «Rarely do you get a well-prepared song...». Some beautiful Russian songs associated with her name were composed with her full involvement.

Sometimes I want to sing a song which is not written yet. I cautiously begin to sing a song which does not exist yet... Please, do not think that this is nonsense! No, I am not crazy. It is a desire to sing a beautiful new song. That means to be thirsty for it. Sometimes people would look at me in disbelief... Once I sang a song that had not existed to the Artistic Director of the Philharmonic Hall, a composer Ilgiz Mazitov. I described to him what I would feel if I sang it on stage. Ilgiz looked puzzled and laughed with pleasure. «I heard that song, and I imagined you performing on stage. You gave me a lovely idea to write a new song,» he said.

I felt such joy when I found new beautiful songs. The feeling to be involved in the process of song creation is even more joyful. The singer might be the main hero or a direct participant of the process. The song «Kukmara» (The district in Tatarstan) was composed thanks to me. I would often tour to Kukmorskiy district with concerts. Every time I went there, I saw that the audience liked my songs very much. My concerts were always sold out there. I also felt the respect of the district leaders and the kolkhoz managers. My close friends from Aktanysh Nasima, Gul-sira also lived in Kukmor. In short, I loved Kukmor as much as I loved Aktanysh. Its nature and the population were very close to my soul. So I had a beautiful song about Aktanysh, and I wanted to pay tribute and sing a beautiful song about Kuk-mor as well.

«Please, write the lyrics for the new song about Kukmor. I will find the composer myself», I told Gulshat. «Someone wrote a song about Kukmor, take and sing it,» she replied. «No, I don't want to sing someone else's song, I want to have my

own song, which is written only for me,» I said. Soon Gulshat wrote the lyrics. I read the lyrics and was so happy. It was exactly what I wanted

Kukmara meets and
Sees the trains off.
Although they go far,
Don't let them put us apart.
Oh, Kukmara, Kukmara,
Don't let them put us apart.
You will miss so much Just try to go so far!..

Although I promised to find the composer for the song, Gulshat agreed to collaborate on it. We decided to talk to Masgut Imashev. Masgut was the Director of the Kazan theater school back then. We called him immediately. «I wish you composed the song «Kukmara». I would like to sing about it,» I said, holding the phone tightly. I was nervous but Masgut agreed quickly. We ran to the theater school to meet him. Masgut read the lyrics and smiled. His face was shining and he seemed to get younger!

I began to hum a tune to Masgut slowly as I had imagined it. «Please stop, let me do it myself...» he said. Gulshat and I left him. «Let's see how it goes,» Masgut said modestly. When we met again at school, Masgut played the piano, and I tried to sing to it immediately. The melody was so good entwining some folk tunes. It penetrated my soul. It was exactly what I wanted it to be, neither too complex, nor too simple. As G. Tukay said, «it is exactly like our national beautiful melody...». Gulshat and I liked the music very much. We sang it for a long time. I already knew the song by heart. The next day, I sang it at my concert. Thus, I was directly involved in the creation process of the song «Kukmara». That song is close to me as my own child. I get upset if it is sung incorrectly. I do not want anybody to change a single word in it. I think the singer, who sings a song first, has the right to claim the song his own. But at the same time as soon as you sing the song and share it with the public, it is open to everyone. Just like a fledgeling leaves the nest. Therefore I do not like when some singers argue about the ownership rights to the songs. Let them sing! Maybe they would sing it better than you. If not, they will take the blame. I have never said, «This is my song, do not let others sing it!». Many singers sing the songs that I had sung first. Whether they sing it better or worse is not my concern. In my career I also did not sing exclusively «my own songs». Sometimes the audience requests a particular song. Sometimes they want me to sing the most popular song of the year. For instance, I often sing «Jidegan chishme» of Zukhra Sakhabieva at the request of the audience. The audiences abroad come to concerts to listen to their favorite songs after all.

As the saying goes, a song can either elevate a singer to the highest podiums

or bring down to the deepest of pits. You can not get far singing primitive melodies of two or three notes and simplistic lyrics. The repertoire should be good enough. It is the singer's biggest headache. A good repertoire is half of the success. I often add Rustam Yakhin songs to my repertoire, «Kuzlarem tik sine ezlilar» («*My eyes are looking only for you*») (lyrics by M. Nugman), «Kil, chibarem» («*Come, my beauty*») (lyrics by A. Erikay), «Tugan yagym» («*My native land*») (lyrics by R. Baytimerov) because I have a desire to develop my professional skills continuously. Such songs enrich the voice, expand the range. The ditty songs make the singer cheap and small.

Last year, I listened to a program devoted to the famous French singer Edith Piaf on the radio. Oh, what they told about Piaf!.. Announcers told about her mezzo-soprano voice, which was thick and rich for colorful hues that came out from the bottom of her chest. Her slim figure and beautiful waist-hugging expensive velvet dresses, beautifully built cottages with luxurious furniture in several cities and her personal cars, chauffeurs were also mentioned... I listened to it in amazement and got lost in thought.

Her life was so much unlike ours... She was talented, well-tempered, and rich. She said the following about the song, the repertoire, «The song makes a personality out of a singer...». Unfortunately, such songs are composed rarely. Composers were mainly passive in the past. Because of this sometimes I had to sing songs from my previous repertoire. For instance, such memorable songs by M. Muzaffarov «Sin kaytmadin» («*You didn't come back*»), «Kayda da yorekte» («*Somewhere in the heart*»), etc.

I must admit that the songs by Bashkir composers and Bashkir folk music always took a significant part in my repertoire. Their melody is similar to our Tatar national songs. That's why I sang Bashkir songs all my life with great love. When I went I toured Bashkortostan, I always learned new songs there. I have close friends and composers such as Rim Khasanov and Talgat Sharipov there.

I remember a story how Talgat Sharipov's song «Komeshe baldak» («*The silver ring*») was composed. We were giving concerts in Ufa then. Gulshat Zaynasheva was also with us. Talgat Sharipov invited both of us home after the show. We ate delicious dishes, and Talgat «treated» us with enjoyable music playing his accordion. We listened to Talgat's new songs and tunes, which he had just started to compose. Some of them had no lyrics yet. I liked one of the tunes very much. It was a tune similar to the old melodies, wide-band, beautifully structured, and melodic. I asked him to play that tune over and over again. Talgat showed that music to several poets. They promised to write the lyrics, but they had not done it. It is not easy to write lyrics to a ready-made and formed melody. Not any poet can do that. I was also in such a situation when I came across beautiful melodies but could not find the lyrics to them. I used to ask many poets to write the lyrics, but they declined.

Gulshat always helps me in such situations. I asked her to write lyrics to Talgat's music. She also loved the melody and promised to do it. We were in that frenzied atmosphere till sunrise. In order not to bother the neighbors, Talgat played

the accordion quietly, and I sang in a soft voice... We returned to the hotel only after sunrise. Gulshat did not sleep even for a minute and wrote the poem for «The silver ring». Thus, just overnight the nameless and wordless music turned into a song called «Silver ring». I loved to sing it very much. It seemed the song was dedicated to my youth, my life. Unfortunately, I could not record that song somehow. Therefore, this song is probably not very familiar to many listeners. Here is its first verse,

I ringed not gold, but a silver one,
It was an ancient silver ring.
The beautiful youth, like fine silver, has passed,
It's passed without you, what a pity!..

International songs always had a large role in my repertoire. They are like a beautiful page of my repertoire. I loved them very much. I think the audience also liked them. Therefore I sing some of them regularly.

If we talk about the repertoire, you might ask me, «How many songs are in your repertoire?». Who ever counted them? I regularly updated it. I do not know what number we will get if you add up hundreds of songs, I have sung on stage for more than forty years... There might be a thousand! I have sung such a great variety of songs in my life. Still, it seems that the most beautiful song have not been sung yet. As I mentioned above I imagine that more beautiful songs would be composed, and I will sing them in the future. I know that the sun of my stage life is setting, and I will not be able to surprise the audience if I sing some new beautiful songs, of course. As the saying goes, only the devil is hopeless. Still, the day when I sing my most beautiful song seems to be waiting for me in the future...

Now when I listen to my songs I feel overwhelming emotions. It hurts when I recall my youth, my favorite, dear people, or my stage friends. My favorite song «Mahabbatem» («*My love*») was broadcasted on the radio recently. I listened to it half breathing, and my eyes filled with tears. I felt like an uprooted tree.

I experienced mixed feelings as if something was torn out of my heart. The song seemed to have described my entire life, my youth, love, sadness, and joy... I felt as if I dissolved in that song. I became a song... I was happy and sad at the same time. That strange feeling accompanied me all day long. I would like the new generation of singers, who came on stage after me, to sing such songs as «Mahabbatem». I would like these songs to stay alive forever in the hearts of the people. I would like to teach young singers to discover the secrets of singing and keep the harmony, the timbre of these songs. For instance, if Khamduna Timergalieva sings that song, she will convey its beauty. Maybe Khamduna discovers features and beauty that I had not found yet.

Songs, songs. They are all different and complicated in their own way, just like human destinies. My songs are my destiny.



December, 1980



October, 1987

I Was Never Blinded by Fame

Thank God, I have achieved great success in my career. In 1970 I was awarded the honorary title of People's Artist of Tatarstan in addition to my previous title of Honored Artist of Tatarstan. In 1983 I was also awarded the title of Honorary Artist of Russia. I was awarded the Order of the Red Banner of Labour twice. It was enough for me, and I did not expect any more titles. I was grateful for what I had. In 1992 I received another prestigious title. I became the winner of the State Prize of the Republic of Tatarstan named after G. Tukay. Both the public and the government have held me in high esteem. I am not going to boast about my success. I was not overwhelmed by my success and fame, I always stayed grounded. But sometimes it affects you in a negative way. You need to be able to handle fame. If you can not handle it, it handles you and pulls you in different directions. Some singers put on airs as soon as they see some newspaper article speaking highly of them. I never did that as I have not changed much and stayed the same Alfiya.

A lot of articles were published about my long-term onstage work in our national, republican as well as regional press all over our country. If I had collected all the articles that had been written for more than forty years, it would have been a mountain of paper. I couldn't possibly collect them all but I do have some of them. When I was nominated for the State Prize named after G. Tukay, I gathered some of the articles in one folder, and sent them to the jury committee of the award. Those articles were published in many languages: Tatar, Russian, Bashkir, Kazakh, Uzbek etc. They were written by different people, music and art critics, experts, journalists, writers, poets, composers, artists, workers, members of kolkhozes, students...

Here is a yellowish piece of historic paper. Bashkir writer Sagit Agishev in his article in «Kyzyl tan», December 24, 1961 wrote about Ilham Shakirov and me wrote the following, «One is better than the other. Both these singers have common qualities, and they are different at the same time. The common thing is that both of them perform folk songs in perfect form.» Many similar articles were published about our collaborative concerts.

Here is an excerpt from an article published in Bashkortostan by G. Ramazanov in «Kyzyl tan», August 31, 1965, «...Everyone was happy that Alfiya Avzalova was also part of the team. The tickets were selling like hot cakes. It shows that the audience is very excited about the show. Alfiya Avzalova's voice is often heard by the audience. Her songs are played on the radio or TV, and we know most of the songs by heart. It would not be the same if the following songs were performed by someone else: «Kak-kuk» («Cuckoo»), «Nafisa» («Tatar female name»), «Salkyn chishme» («Coldspring»),

«Kaytam inde» (*I'm coming back*). She performs them in her unique style... At the concert she performed about thirty songs, most of which we had not heard before. Many Bashkir folk songs sounded in a new beautiful way.

One could write as much about just one of her many songs. But this is not necessary as her performing skills do not need high praise.»

There are a lot of such articles about my onstage career. Here is another fragment from an article published in «Leninskiy put'» («Lenin's way»), April 17, 1973, Osh, Kyrgyzstan. The authors V. Kamalova and A. Volchin wrote the following, «...The audience is familiar with the old repertoire of the soloist. Today she is performing a new song. For instance, the song «Maki» (*Poppies*) was performed for the first time. The young composer and the author Mars Makarov is at the instrument. When you listen to it, pictures of scarlet valleys flash in front of your eyes... The grateful audience presents flaming flowers to the wonderful singer – a gift from the Kyrgyz mountains.»

I was given flowers by the armful my whole life. Once the Tashkent audience filled the stage with gladioli as tall as me. I did not know where to put the flowers. Singer Minkhamet Gilazov suggested jokingly, «What should we do with so many flowers. Alfiya apa, maybe we should sell them on the street. It is a pity they will wither in the hotel.»

The articles were published each time after my performances in the Tatarstan press. Nail Khasanov, the director of brickworks, published his article in «Socialistic Tatarstan», August 18, 1981.

«I have watched the concerts by Alfiya Avzalova twice, one after another. It has been an experience of happiness that left deep impressions in my soul. I was so glad for our star Alfiya Avzalova's success and I'm proud of our Tatar variety art development.

It was especially noticeable to see the multinational audience during the concert. That meant the singer could reach the hearts of other nationalities. They were also looking forward to the concert. Listening to various folk songs was very memorable. The concert program was upgraded entirely. The concerts ended with the song «Saubullashu» («Farewell»). It includes the following lines «...we will meet through songs». We will meet again, surely. We will be happy for Alfiya's success. Can anyone be bored with it?..»

There are some who get bored I guess. You will get bored if you eat porridge every day. Therefore everything comes to an end. It was also time to finish my onstage career. I did not get tired, of course. I finished it because it was time.

Let's read some more articles just for fun. The following extract is from an article published in Uzbekistan by K. Gaydinov in «Selskaya pravda», March 19, 1983, «...Alfiya Avzalova won the audience's recognition for her masterful performing of the old and modern songs, folk melodies, ditties, Tatar lyrical songs, and songs of peoples of other nationalities. The modern Tatar song comes from folk art. Performing them Alfiya Avzalova emphasizes deeply national and folk intonations...».

A lot of articles about me were published in Bashkortostan and Uzbekistan newspapers. I toured these republics many times, of course. And more articles were published in our republican press. Aktanyshsky district newspaper, where I was born and grew up, was especially close to me. They constantly wrote about my concerts. Here is the issue of «Igenche dany» («The glory of grain grower»), June 30, 1984. The article, written by Akhtyam Satiev has the following lines, «...The imagery, facial expressions, and high acting qualities, movements inherent in each song are the bridge of communication with the audience. There is no place for uniformity at the concert, the audience and the performer act as a unit. Especially the song «Fate», written by Sibgat Hakim together with the composer Sara Sadykova is heard as a motto. Alfiya Avzalova comprehends the meaning of the song even deeper having travelled abroad. Therefore while she sings, the listener might forget that the lyrics of the song were written by a poet:

Do not leave me without
My black bread and milk tea.

Alfiya Avzalova says the following about our countryman, the bayan player Kiram Satiev, «We have been working with him for 5 years together. He graduated from the Conservatory, and he is a proficient bayanist. Kiram played an important role in the management of our team. If the tune needs to be changed or there are some unexpected changes, we understand what needs to be done by just a quick glance at each other. For instance, if we have an electricity cut, the work of the whole ensemble falls on the bayanist's shoulders. Kiram sweats profusely as a result of one-and-a-half-hour performance...»

I have always respected my bayanists. I do not think that any bayanist would say, «it's hard to work with Alfiya apa. She picks on everyone for nothing.» I always praised my bayanists and stood up for them. I have not worked with any bayanists I could speak ill of. Luckily, only talented and competent bayanists joined me. Herein I want to remember with gratitude those bayanists whom I worked with. In the first years, I worked with such older generations of bayanists as Rokiya Ibragimova, Mukhtar Akhmadiev, Gali Zemlikhanov, Gani Valiev, Mustafa Salakhutdinov. They were the favorite bayanists of our nation, the first professional bayanists on stage. They played bayans in a surprisingly folk manner. Then the younger generation came on stage: Rifkat Gumerov, Rifkat Lotfullin, Zinnur Gibadullin, Fanis Gilmutdinov, Khaydar Safin, Rinat Sibgatullin, Mars Makarov, Kiram Satiev. Many of these musicians have been recognized in public and have received honorary titles. Now a young musician Ravil Zakirov is a bayan player in my team. He plays bayan well and sings beautifully. A talented accordion player should always grow. I tried to support my bayanists in every possible way. I let Ravil sing. The performers should sing, dance, and show all their talents on stage. Long story short, I was friends with my bayanists.

In 1992 I was nominated for the State Prize named after G. Tukay, and it generated a lot of press. Let's have a look at two of them. My countryman, journalist Mirkhat Khusnimardanov exalted me in his article in «Vatanym Tatarstan», April 10, 1992. The article begins with these lines:

I am like a nightingale,
But only do not sing...

Sometimes if a baby cries, people would say, «Let the baby cry, maybe he/she becomes a singer». It seems that there is a deep unambiguous connection between these two expressions. Initially, the word «crying» is foremost. As a child grows the word «song» becomes a dominant element. It must make humans either cry or smile. Otherwise, singing doesn't make sense. Maybe our Alfiya also cried a lot as a child... Maybe a girl from Aktanysh hummed to herself throughout her life while suffering hardships and experiencing compassion. She began to sing at an early age... It is difficult to narrate her creative biography and talent to perform songs. You must be either a senior musicologist or a good singer to understand her talent. I have my own attitude toward Alfiya, and taking this opportunity, I want to tell my story again. I think I have the right to do so. I emphasised «again» on purpose.

We are contemporaries and countrymen. Both are orphans. Good people from Aktanysh helped us to step on a great creative path. I just remembered it by the way. At the beginning of my career, I wrote an essay about Alfiya in the «Republican Youth Newspaper» called «Yana yazмыш» («*New destiny*»). I submitted it to a competition for young talents and won a prize.

I had the opportunity to write a radio essay about Alfiya while working for the radio committee. The interview and songs were combined in the essay. I have chosen songs sung by Alfiya, and which people liked very much. I received a lot of letters for that concert-essay. It filled an entire folder. I reread the letters that were written 30 years ago. There are many words of gratitude and praise written on paper. «She's a singing bird of our nation. Let her live a long life and keep her voice...», some of the people wrote. Yes, they are right. When I was preparing to write these lines, she called me, saying, «Tomorrow, we will go on tour again.» She is always on the go. She continues G. Suleymanova's and Z. Basyrova's heritage, enriching it with special touches and creates her own style. She is a singer who tries to pass it on to the younger generation of singers.

I remember another encounter in her apartment. Gulshat Zaynasheva was also there. We talked through the entire evening. When we began to talk about the singing skills, Alfiya quickly sat down at the piano and began to sing in Russian: «I love my land.» I have heard this song performed by Russian singers, but Alfiya performed it in her own way, in Tatar. The melody was not wrong, but it sounded different. The lyrical notes of Tatar singers dominated. Perhaps it could only be

done by Alfiya. «Every nation has its lyricism and harmony, and the performer must feel it deep in his/her soul,» Alfiya explained. But the most amazing thing for me was her playing the piano. It was news for me. During our last meeting, she said, smiling, «My dear, I can also play khromka¹ [hromka] well and sing and dance on stage as younger generation do. If you want to stay on stage, you will learn.» Still, it is not enough only to have a desire, you must also be talented. Some people in the arts domain lose their talent after some years, but she has not. She has the energy to keep up with the times. I was interested in garmon players, dancers, and singers my whole life. I looked at them with admiring envy. I loved Alfiya most of all. I am not the only one who fell in love with her... She continued singing for many years. She might like to finish her career, but people write a lot of letters asking her to continue. The audience feels good singers deep in their souls.»

My countryman Mirkhat Khusnimardanov praised me a lot. Many articles were published about my career, when I was nominated for the State Prize named after G.Tukay. I am embarrassed to give some extracts from them. Ilham Shakirov surpassed all of them. His article is interesting due to the fact that he is a famous singer writing favorably about another singer. He would not praise for nothing. That is Ilham, after all! Let's read about some of his thoughts, «...We have a pop singer Alfiya Avzalova on stage. Alfiya bound her talent with the destiny of our nation. Now it is hard to imagine Tatar history without Alfiya Avzalova.

We came on stage in the same period and we worked together. She found the songs herself and performed in her own style. Her songs reached the souls of the people. Alfiya loved her nation, and that attraction was mutual. Alfiya never performed meaningless songs only to make the audience applaud. You can check her entire 40-year creative work and I bet you could not find any meaningless, trivial songs.

It will be a mistake if we say that her creative work was not appropriately appreciated during her career. She has got many honored titles, which means she was not an unnoticed singer. Besides, she has a lot of diplomas and certificates in red folders. Alfiya Avzalova is open to the Tatar nation. Alfiya has been full of harmonic melody from her very birth! She is the daughter of the nation. She is the «daughter» of Tukay. People like Alfiya are born very rarely. Let's appreciate such people, and make haste in paying high tribute to their services. «Alfiya» in Arabic means «long-standing». Let's also wish long-standing life to her. Let's fairly appreciate the creative work of Alfiya Avzalova, who is one of the founders of Tatar variety art».

Oh, Goodness! Ilham praised my work as high as the sky. I am copying these lines into this book not to boast, but as a matter of fact only. It is Ilham's friendly evaluation of my creative work. I am so happy to hear such words from Ilham. By the way, talking about happiness, I am often asked: «Are you happy?». How can I be unhappy? Does not singing on stage for such a long time count as happiness?! I

¹ khromka [hromka] – a type of Russian garmon (from Russian)

got accustomed to deriving happiness from the smallest of things. Now I am very happy. I am on the top of that feeling. I am grateful to my nation! I am thankful to the leaders of our Republic. My thanks goes out to all my onstage friends, artists, composers, poets! Eventually, in 1992 I was awarded the highest award of our Republic – the State Prize named after G. Tukay.

I also received a lot of letters from people during many years of my onstage life. Unfortunately, I have not collected them. I could not do it because I was busy touring all around the country. I am so sorry I did not reply to most of my beloved listeners. Still, I have several letters, which were saved somehow. These letters are written with great love and respect. Let's read some lines from them:

«Alfiya apa is the same age as my mother. Their lives are similar. My mother was also raised an orphan, and her life was hard. She also likes to sing. I grew up listening to the songs of famous singers on the radio or my mom's performance. All my family like her songs very much. We used to learn her songs broadcasted on the radio and sang them. When I was a schoolgirl, I had a dream to go to Kazan, to enter the university and go to Alfiya Avzalova's concert. I wanted to listen to her live. An interesting story happened to me when I was a student. It was in the 1970s. We were going home by tram. On the «Leninskiy sadik» tram stop, a lovely, slim woman looking like Tatar or Bashkir got on the tram. The tram was full, there was no vacant seat. I offered my place to her. «Thank you, my darling. I am so tired,» she said to me. I was astonished by her voice. It seemed to be very familiar to me. After about ten days I went to the concert and realized that woman was Alfiya apa. Now I am a mother of two children. I listen to different kinds of music but keep the harmony of the Tatar songs deeply in my soul. Alfiya Avzalova and Ilham Shakirov remind me of the spring of my village. Life is going on, everything is changing, but their purity will exist forever. It is durable like life itself.

Best regards, Garipova-Akramova Khamida Lotfullovna, School principle of Mamatkhudzha, Verhne-Uslonskiy district.»

After watching my concert on TV, retired man Sadykov Salih, an electrical engineer by profession from Kazan wrote the following letter,

«...When I watched Alfiya Avzalova's concert, her work made a strong impression on me and made me proud of our nation. We have a real national singer, talented performer Alfiya Avzalova! I really like her singing and the sound of the ensemble. She has once again masterfully demonstrated her knowledge of subtleties of our national melodies. Our Alfiya is not getting old at all!...»

People's Artist of Bashkortostan Flyura Nogmanova wrote a long article about me in «Soviet Bashkortostan», December 13, 1985. There were the following lines in it, «People's Artist of Tatarstan, Honored artist of RSFSR, Alfiya Avzalova was raised not far from Bashkortostan. Maybe because of this fact there is loud applause when she comes onto the stage. She is met by the audience as the dearest guest. The applause reflects their love for her songs and respect for Avzalova's work.

Alfiya Avzalova has been keeping her title as a variety singers nightingale for more than 30 years. As years pass, her performing style is only improving and enriching with her emotional, harmonious features that flatter our souls. She learned how to reach her listener's hearts. She also reproduces musical features be it folk tunes or songs by composers. The audience gets a totally complete image for each of her songs. They receive great inspiration and an aesthetic pleasure from her music. She has a huge number of songs in her repertoire. A lot of people love her unique, tender, nightingale-like voice. This time Alfiya Avzalova gladdens Ufa citizens with a melancholic rich concert program as well. If the song «Tugan yagym» («*My native land*», lyrics by R. Baytimerov) by R.Yakhin is has been made a love anthem for one's country, another song «Sagyndym awylym» («*I missed my village*», lyrics by M.Latifullin) by R. Safiullin strengthens that sense even more. Most of her songs are wrapped up with youth ardor and lambent humor. Arabic folk song «We've got greetings», Bulgarian song «Charming woman» is performed in Arabic, Bulgarian, and Tatar languages. All of them are long-expected and desired by the audience. Elderly people ask for folk tunes «Shakhta» («*Mine*») or «Jomga» («*Friday*»). Indeed, a performer does not include any song in her repertoire accidentally...»

Flyura Nogmanova is also a famous singer of Bashkortostan. She is a musician and has taught vocals for many years to the younger generation of singers. I was impressed by the article of my friend, a cultural worker Flyura. Rarely do female singers write about the other woman in such a warm and highly praised manner. Most singers envy each other, but Flyura does not.

I would like to quote excerpts from another article published in «Shakhri Kazan», September 18, 1993. The article entitled «I would like to go back to my youth» was written by the journalist Raisa Yakhina.

«There are personalities among Tatar people whose names have gone down in history forever. When they are alive, we do not appreciate many of them. We may spread various rumors about them or not show proper respect to them. Everything becomes evident later on, unfortunately.

The other day I came to the same conclusion, talking with the famous singer Alfiya Avzalova. Everyone will understand it in their own way. I would like to share some of her responses to my questions here.

– Alfiya apa, there is a lot of information about your childhood and youth. Still, let's talk a little about your childhood. How did you become a singer?»

– Yes, my dear, as they say, an orphan is usually a melodious person. I became an orphan at the age of five and life wasn't too easy. I started singing in the first grade.

The swallows are flying in the sky,
Disappear into the clouds.
I'd better be a bird with wings but not a girl –
I would not be a prisoner in this world!

I used to make the audience cry singing this song. I have been on stage for 41 years already.

– 41 years is a lifetime. Did not you get tired?

– No, I am not tired. Even though I'm old now I still have a voice. Wherever I go, I receive great ovation, and I am always on stage. My life is my work. We just returned from Kamchatka in April. Tatars and Bashkirs who live there sent us personal invitations. We went there with a team and stayed with fishermen for ten days. The compatriots came to meet us at the airport in Volga cars. Even though it was too cold outside, they gave us bouquets of flowers. We were welcomed and treated very warmly. They paid for the round trip tickets themselves. I also like to go to Tashkent every year. I am always a long-awaited visitor there. Thus, I consider myself useful to people. I'm not going to stay at home.

– What new songs do you have in your repertoire?

– I plan to perform a song «Late love» composed by Anvar Zakirov to the lyrics by Gulshat Zaynasheva. My favorite artist with a beautiful voice Khaniya Farkhi sings this song. Our voices are similar and deep. I love the song «Don't take offense» from her repertoire. I got permission from her to sing the song and I have learned it. As for my previous songs...

Alfiya began to sing with her magic voice:

«You swore, you promised...»

Her singing was interrupted. Alfiya got the phone.

«Karimulla, how are you doing, dear? Are you getting ready? Please, dress warmly, the days has become colder. Wear your wool socks. Don't sweat it, I have five needles. we will knit them anew. We need to take sugar, tea, butter, jam. We will definitely be housed. Now it is the season to dig up potatoes. They do not have time to take care of you. It is not the Agryz district!...»

That was her conversation with Karim Gabidullin.

«Tomorrow I'll give an interview on TV in the forest. I hope I won't get cold. It is freezing in the house too.

As a person who used to go on business trips all over the Republic, I remember the times when I also had to pack bags. Alfiya had been driven along these roads all her life. She is not only an outstanding singer, she is an eternal star of the Tatar stage but also a mother who cares about her children, the kindest aunt for orphans, and a smart adviser for colleagues. God grant her patience, inspiration, and health!...».



1960 ел



1968 ел



1970 ел

1971



1974

1980





My Benefit Performance

Women are usually evasive about their age. Most female artists lessen their real age. I was forty for several years. I did not want to get old at all! Nevertheless, I eventually turned 60 and reached retirement. The leaders of the Philharmonic Hall, my friends, suggested celebrating my anniversary. To tell the truth, I do not like the anniversaries. Those celebrations usually last very long and are very dull for me. The hero of the day is given folders in a red cover, and the speakers often give long speeches in such performances. The audience usually gets tired and begins to leave the hall. About ten years ago it was fashionable to celebrate anniversaries. It has changed in recent years.

Singers and people of arts began to celebrate anniversaries in the form of a benefit performance. During the pre-revolutionary period, benefit concerts were popular. The famous Tatar actress Fatima Ilskaya celebrated her benefit performance in the 1920s. The renowned actor, director Gabdulla Kariev presented her with his gold diamond ring. The benefit performance is a celebration and honoring of a creative person. The hero of an anniversary is also given gifts, of course. The managers, friends, and colleagues suggested holding a benefit concert. I thought for a while and agreed.

It is not easy to organize the performance. Director of a Philharmonic Hall Asgat Safin was not afraid of all organizational issues. He led all the preparations, and everything was coordinated very well. My other colleagues under the leadership of the Philharmonic Society, Ayrat Arslanov, Ilham Shakirov, and others also helped to organize the event. On January 24, 1994, my benefit performance was celebrated of creative work. This was not only my personal celebration of creativity but also a celebration for all art lovers, pop fans, and our nation. The hall of the Tatar state academic theater named after G.Kamal was crowded. Many friends, artists, writers, composers, and others attended the event to congratulate me and be part of the jubilee.

I also got telegrams from Turkey, Moscow, and Saint Petersburg. More than a hundred people came onto the stage to congratulate me. As I mentioned above, I stayed grounded, but the excitement made me dizzy. I had not got such recognition, such respect for more than 40-year onstage life. I was awarded and given a lot of presents. Director of the Philharmonic Hall in front of the audience announced that he would give me all the money I had earned from the benefit concert. The most significant gifts were government awards, of course. Then-President of the Republic of Tatarstan Mintimer Shaimiev presented me with a monetary award of 1 million rubles from the Presidential fund.

I would like to express my gratitude to the leaders of our government, to all district managers, to the managers of enterprises for their respect for me. Not only did they give me lovely presents on behalf of the whole staff but also provided financial assistance and sponsored my benefit concert.

Herein I want to underline that almost all the district leaders, the heads of the rural settlements, and factory directors were young people. They were smart, educated and cultured men, who understood and loved art. They respected people of arts and culture. Formerly, it was impossible to schedule a meeting with the heads at their workplace. Now the times have changed, and the leaders have changed too.

I was also honored with valuable gifts from the art lovers, Rafis and Nafis Kashapov brothers, singer and composer Firzar Murtazin, singers Hamduna Timergalieva, Zuhra Sharifullina, young singers Salavat Fathutdinov, Aidar Galimov during the event. I thank all my friends and colleagues who came to congratulate me, who highly appreciated me, and took part in my benefit concert. I am also thankful to all the composers, writers, poets who sang and danced at my benefit concert. It is impossible to list all the names here. The list would be very long.

I must admit my benefit performance was grand and beautiful. It seemed like a sizable close family of audience and artists gathered for a big family celebration in a theater building. Although the ceremony was joyful, there were moments when the audience plunged into deep thoughts. They even cried when Almaz Khamzin, the host of the event, told the story about the sufferings I went through in my childhood. Tears also welled in my eyes. We rejoiced, cried, and laughed during the performance. There were also some funny moments during the performance. For instance, some of those who went on stage to congratulate me I had seen for the first time in my life.

Thus, my benefit concert was a great success. It was the biggest, the most wonderful event in my life! I thought that getting the State prize named after Gabdulla Tukay had been the achievement of the highest point of the mountain of happiness. I reached it once again on my benefit evening.

I gave concerts throughout the year of 1994. These concerts were called benefit concerts, and everywhere the audience welcomed us warmly. Concerts dedicated to my anniversary were held in the city of Naberezhnye Chelny, Kukmorskiy, Pestrechinsky, Aktanyshsky, Nizhnekamskiy, Tyulyachinsky, Zainsky, and other districts. The concert halls were full of flowers everywhere. Those who could not take part in the benefit performance congratulated me during my tours. I melted into tears out of regard and respect for the leaders and the people of the districts. I said goodbye to the audience because I thought I would not be able to tour like before. Some of the audience went on stage and shook my hands. They thanked me, wished me all the best. They wanted me to continue to sing. I do want to sing, of course. The heart is still young when it feels the love of the audience. Does the heart ever age?

Does The Heart Ever Age?
Does the heart ever age?..
Even if the forehead is wrinkled...

I thought a lot about heart aging, after my huge benefit event. Yes, the heart ages, but the soul remains young. «Why do you sing that your heart is getting old then?» you might ask. It is just a song! As the saying goes, you cannot throw words out of a song. After all, a song is a desire, a dream, an aspiration!

A person tells us about his/her desires and aspirations in a song. Love songs in particular convey those emotions. I do not want to get old, and I sing about my aging! Thus, the songs included in my repertoire of recent years symbolize my state of mind. Anyway, old age sets in. It begins without your permission. Someone says, «No, the heart does not age». Why should the heart remain young when the entire body is aging? The heart also ages, of course. The desire to stay young lets us feel young.

I try not to get old either. I let it happen on its own accord. Old age has its joy though. You have to live with it. I can sense it well. I am happy when I see my children and grandchildren growing up joyful and healthy. I look forward to such a comfortable old age. It is wrong to say I am waiting, old age comes on its own.

The voice also becomes old. Why should it not? Vocal cords are not made of steel after all, are they? Iron also gets rusty as years pass. I can not boast my voice has not aged, either.

When you become old, you start thinking about how you lived your life. When I think about my life, I am grateful that I lived it well. I had a beautiful youth. I loved my work, I sang and have been on stage my whole life.

I have sung many songs about youth and love throughout my onstage life. I realized that love is the companion of youth! Now those feelings are only memory of my youth. You might ask why I sing the following song:

They say that young people have love,
Everyone has it.
You can't live without love
Even becoming old.

I will repeat once again that song is a song, you can not knock words out of a song! I would like to add that it is a desire, an aspiration. I sing about it. I wish love always existed. But no, there is time when love leaves you, and you can only dream about it. Gata Nurullin, the artist and author of the lyrics of the song, may still be in love, I do not know. But passion has left my soul, and I enter the world of love only in songs. My love has transferred to my grandchildren. There is no one in this world I love more than my grandchildren.

Maybe some people fall in love in their old age, or they just say, «I'm in love.»



January, 2008

Probably, they just talk about it. It is only pretending to be loved. I do not like to act like that. My friends, you will probably be surprised to read that an actor who had burned in the fire of love in youth, quietly grows old. As the saying goes, everything is good in its season. These lines apply to artists too, because an artist is also a person!

Please, do not think that Alfiya has faded away. I still have dreams and desires. I climb up the mysterious mountains of love in my dreams. Let the idea live! Sometimes I meet or see a handsome man of my age on TV. I think if such a man said, «Let's spend our chair days together, Alfiya!» I would not mind it. But it is just a dream of a soul. It does not get older..

Life is beautiful! Maybe it is beautiful because songs exist in the world! The songs that I sang seem to be flowers scattered on the roads I passed. Maybe those flowers were grown by my songs and spread out their seeds all over the world. Or perhaps songs came out of flowers...

The song! I would like to quote a line from a song, «Our song had not been sung yet» and state that my song had also not been sung yet. I would say that a singer always lives with the desire to sing a new song. I want to sing! It seems like my life dedicated to singing will never end...

It is said that the happiest artist is the one who die on stage. I do not know how I would die. As for me, I will not die at all... Let's live and sing! Let's never part with a song. Thank you, song! A song is a living force for a human to let him be alive forever. If the Tatar song stays alive, the Tatar nation will not die!

The mufti¹ Talgat Tadzhuiddin once said, «During hard times when our nation could have lost our religion, language and traditions we stuck to songs. The song saved us from extinction.»

When I gave concerts away from our republic, I also noticed that Tatars, who do not know the Tatar language would come to our shows and listen to Tatar songs. Although they did not understand the lyrics, they felt its melody and harmony. That very moment they did understand their ethnic background and returned to their sense of national identity. Some of them used to come backstage and feel shy to tell that he or she had forgotten the language, but after our performance, they began to feel proud to be Tatar. «The Tatar song is beautiful and harmonious. It is not shameful to be a child of the nation which has such songs,» they said.

The singer sings for the people, for the nation. I also hope that my more than forty-year career was not for nothing. When I think about it and it reminds me of the lines from our great poet Tukay as advice to younger singers,

«I do sing, but is there any benefit in my songs for my nation?..»

I hope young people will not sing useless songs. If a singer sings meaningful songs, he or she will remain in the hearts of people forever! The singer will remain in the songs.

Our favorite singers Gulsem Suleymanova, Rashit Vagapov, Zifa Basyrova, Sara Sadykova remained in their songs together with our nation. I also would like to stay alive in my songs, I wish God would grant me such a fate!

¹ mufti [mufti] – senior member of the Muslim clergy



January, 2008

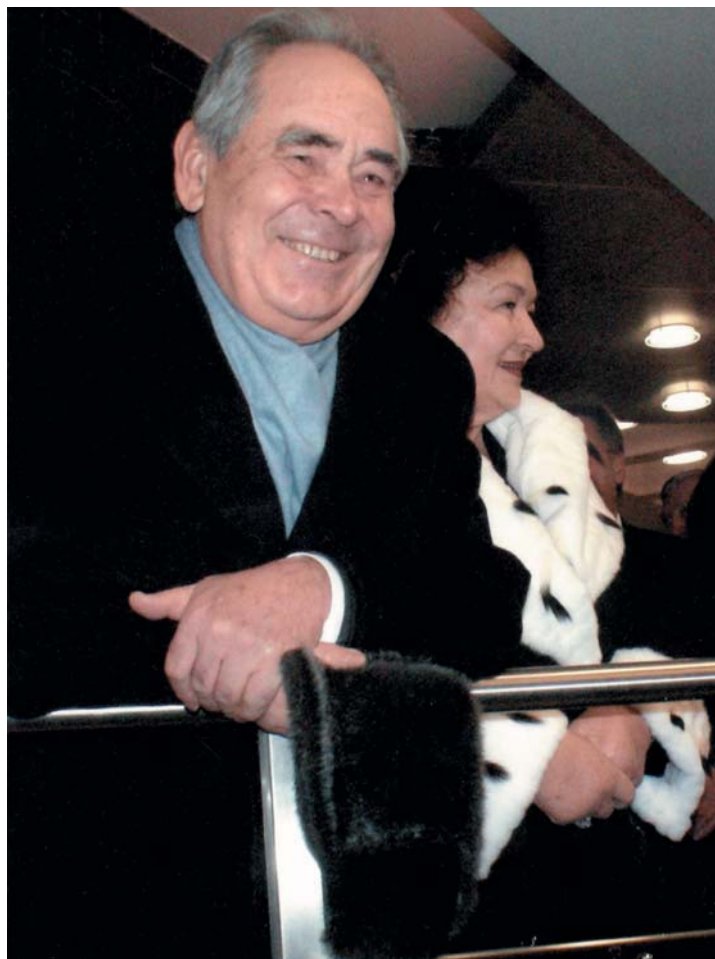


**MEMORIES OF
ALFIYA AVZALOVA**

Mintimer Shaimiev
The First President of the Republic of Tatarstan

The Dearest Child Of Our Nation

Alfiya Avzalova is the dearest singer and a worthy daughter of our nation, with a great plaintive melody in her heart. She had a profound impact on Tatar musical art. Her dedicated service for the public is huge, powerful and remarkable. Each time we listen to her songs, we recall her with admiration. I always addressed her by name Alfiya, because she is the dearest child of our nation. She survived all the life difficulties together with the nation and gathered their grief and joy into her heart in the form of a plaintive melody. Our people held a five-year-old orphan girl in their arms. When we imagine her life course, we involuntarily remember Tukay's poem,





«Did I not put up with enough beating as an orphan?!
Only my nation raised me, stroking my forehead».

Generous people of our good-natured nation helped her to get an education and develop her skills. Thanks to them a lot. But most importantly it was Alfiya's talent, diligence, courage, and persistence which helped her to prevail. We will not be mistaken if we say that Alfiya traveled around the globe. If she couldn't reach some places herself, her plaintive melody and her songs did it for her. With her lively, interesting and plaintive songs she united our compatriots all over the world and strengthened their spirits. She learned songs in many foreign languages and paved the way to the hearts of different nationalities and advanced Tatar art all over the world.

Alfiya knew how to sing the songs properly. I should confess, it is a rare talent and it is difficult to explain. Her way of performing – passing through the heart very gently, and saving its harmony is probably not given to every singer. Alfiya lived her life singing.

Being her fellow-townsmen, I particularly felt her songs' impact. Her songs, sounding in Aktanysh manner, are very close to my soul. They seem to comfort the heart, when you miss your parents and the village. The beauty of our native land seems to be reflected in Alfiya's songs more charmingly.

The image of native land and sunrises in Aktanysh fields come to memory when I hear her singing,

«Please don't wander the valleys wistfully, don't think that I forget you...

I am coming back to my native land, to my dales, my valleys».

It is only natural that the International Festival-Contest named after Alfiya Avzalova, our unmatched nightingale, is held in Aktanysh under the patronage of local officials. Alfiya's own participation in this event was especially joyful. It is notable that the contest becomes more and more popular and significant. The number of participants is also increasing yearly. It is an important event to commemorate her creative work. This year it was held in Kazan for the first time as an international festival-contest under the patronage of Tatarstan government, Kazan city administration, World Congress of Tatars and other official organizations.

It is a great honour for young singers to get Alfiya Avzalova's personal blessing to start their careers. Alfiya was always friendly toward young talents. Young singers also paid great respect to her throughout her life.

Tatar people will always be thankful to Alfiya. She is the adornment of our time, an invaluable treasure of our national heritage, which will last for centuries. The years, centuries will pass, ages, generations will change but Alfiya Avzalova's songs will always be a creative example of Tatar spirit and will be on sentry duty of our nation. We believe in it.



Ilsur Metshin,
Mayor of Kazan City



The phenomenon Alfiya Avzalova, the people's artist, is a significant miracle for humanity indeed. In the future, a lot of books will be published, and films will be made about the great singer in order to reveal her secret. I think she reached that mountaintop due to her closeness to ordinary people. She understood her dear nation well, and it was mutual. They are a single entity and have always been a single entity. Her character traits, such as frankness, sincerity, humor, knowing her self-worth, being respectful to others and her resilience complement each other. They do create a miracle person, indeed. She was faithful and friendly to her nation and the audience until her last days. Alfiya apa had no insincerity in her nature.

Her songs came out of the depth of her soul. Her concerts did not need any advertisement. Her amazing performances gathered full concert halls sold, and she always received loud and hearty applause from the audience. Nevertheless she was never blinded by fame, she was always an ordinary, down to earth lady – a song lady. Her songs were on people's lips and in their souls.

Her concerts enabled people to feel the beauty of life, cheer up, and get new energy to live. With her inherent harmony she touched every heartstring singing about the feeling of love for the native land and people's destinies. Delicate but powerful

threads connected her to her audience. Alfiya khanum, with her intuition, could understand the nation's soul, she tuned to their wavelength. In return, the beloved audience inspired the tireless artist, who used to give up to five or six concerts per day. She did not differentiate between a thousand-seat concert-hall or a small village club. She always performed her best and never cut her performance short.

Alfiya khanum was always a dedicated and righteous woman. These character traits made her successful and respectable, and formed her unique personality. She was a role model for many people because she was very demanding of herself as well as the others.

I was told an amazing anecdote. Once during a concert, Alfiya khanum became very sick and the curtain was lowered. Her blood pressure was off the chart and went up to 240! They called an ambulance, but she refused to go to the hospital. The doctors, being in a tight situation, asked her to sign a release form. Strong spirited artist does not give in, «Give me an injection to relieve the pressure. I will go on stage.» «If I die, I will die on stage!» she wrote on the release form. The concert went ahead, and the great singer did her duty to the audience.

When I became the Mayor of the capital, I invited Alfiya apa to the greatest, the most prestigious national celebration – Sabantuy. We celebrated Sabantuy in the Kazan hippodrome back then. Later she also participated at the Swan lake Sabantuy celebration and sang her marvelous songs. The audience's warm applause, their huge and intense love for her are still before my eyes.

Alfiya khanum never gave in to difficulties until her last breath. She was always in a good mood and smiling. She used to sincerely greet her audience as if she saw them for the first time and to say goodbye like it was the last time. We attended the 'Alfiya Avzalova Tribute Concert' together with my wife and my youngest son. My son was very impressed and listened to the famous singer's unique singing holding his breath. It is a pity we would never hear Alfiya apa's real voice again, but she left her beautiful and unique songs and plaintive melodies to new generations to come.

**Engel Fattakhov,
*The Head of Aktanyshskiy
District***

It is said that talented people never die. It is true. Alfiya apa still lives in our hearts. Especially in her homeland in Aktanysh, where her heritage became a brand. We love her, and she loves Aktanysh. She was so proud of her homeland. She used to come to Aktanysh several times a year, walk its streets and go across its well-known bridges to see the newly built streets of Aktanysh. Is there anyone who was more familiar with the joys and troubles of the common Tatar people who lived in remote areas.

She toured those places a lot and gave concerts almost in every village. She is a person, who had fun after the concerts making jokes even at times when only jacket potatoes were set on the table. I always smile when I remember her anecdotes and funny stories. Now I know that I relaxed in her company, putting all ranks aside and recharging to take on new challenges, which I was frightened to start. She is as close to me as my parents. Alfiya apa also treated me like her son. When we were boys, we watched her singing on the stage of a club built of wood in my native village, sitting on the floor.

The contest which was started on the district level scaled up and received the status of an interregional event. Now we want it to be well known all over the world. We invited renowned Tatar personalities as jury members. Alfiya apa's simplicity and national spirit permeated the festival.

Alfiya apa is still with us, she lives in our actions, souls and art.



*Guzel Avzalova,
singer's oldest daughter*

Our mother was the most precious, wise and fair person in our eyes. I thank her for her good advice and teaching me how to live and choose friends. I thank my mother for her kind heart, which was always open to another person's needs. I owe my mother for who I have become. My mother never spared herself and was very demanding of herself.



High artistry, brightness, spiritual generosity and memorable stage appearance... The host could not finish announcing my mother's full name and the audience was already bursting with ovations. Her name alone became a landmark of our art. However she was never vain and maintained true modesty. Her performances were multi-faceted, she could sing tender heartfelt songs as well as songs that required special expressiveness.

Going on stage, she skillfully got into a character of the song she was performing. It is not only her performing art that arouses interest, but also the uniqueness of her voice which is inseparable from her work. Her amazing talent, big and kind heart – all these predetermined the love for Alfiya Avzalova across the nation. Those who grew up with her songs are able to distinguish genuine art from cheap pop fakes.

My mother's fame was huge: i.e. endless tours across all the Union republics, frequent performances on television. Her songs records were released in huge numbers. She is still loved and listened to to this day. Her repertoire included more than 600 songs.

She never chased the ever changing fashion, her talent and charm won millions of hearts. The overcrowded halls, the sea of flowers, the legends and gossip – my mother tasted all that in full. At the same time she maintained true modesty, combining internal dignity with sobriety of self-esteem. My mother was proud of her homeland and loved it. Now, after her death, people seem to rediscover Alfiya Avzalova all over again.

**Zulfiya Nigmedzyanova,
*singer's youngest daughter***

I am one of the happiest persons in the world because I was given a birth by a sacred Mother, the idol of the masses, a great and generous person, from whose soul a plaintive melody flowed like a river! My children, my grandchildren and my husband also predestined to share this great happiness.

I want to begin with my early childhood. We always missed our mother very much, because we stayed without her for up to several months.

We used to ask her, «Mom, why do you always leave us? Other mothers stay at home, cook tasty dishes everyday and attend meetings.» I do understand now how her heart was hurt by such words. She always had the same answer, «My darlings, if I stay at home every day who will feed and dress us? We need money to live, to buy tasty food and beautiful clothes.»

When I think about how I remember my mother, it's not a woman at home with an apron and headscarf that comes to my mind. I see my mother in a beautiful dress who is on stage shining, smiling and singing in front of full concert halls in different corners of the country. Growing up we spend our childhood and youth on the road. The lifestyle of show business entertainers back then and nowadays differ very much. The roads were very bad then. Our stomach hurt when we toured sitting on a thin layer of hay on carts or old trucks. In winter it was cold inside of rural clubs but in summertime it was very stuffy in overcrowded small concert halls. Those terrible roads are unforgettable. Once our bus got stuck in mud. It was a very cold day and my mother covered me with her pressed concert dresses in order to keep me warm.

It is good to be a child of a famous person on the one hand but on the other people gossip a lot about them... I still remember a very unpleasant, heartbreaking situation. Once Guzel apa and I were riding on the tram number 5 from Sovetskiy street to the city center. A woman got on the tram on K. Marks street. As soon as she got on, she began to talk loudly to another woman, «Have you heard that yesterday Alfiya Avzalova was taken to the hospital. She was hallucinating and they tied her down, they said». We were very surprised to hear that because our mother was on a 3 month-tour in Central Asia at that time. My sister Guzel has a patient character but I could not stand it. «We are Alfiya Avzalova's daughters. Aren't you ashamed of telling such



things about our mother? We haven't seen our mother for 3 month, she is on a tour far away,» I shouted at her. The woman was startled and lost for words. «I don't know then, I just heard it,» she said. Thus, our mother had to bear such injustice.

I married Ravil. He was a young doctor. Mother had known Ravil before and she liked him very much. She endorsed our marriage. She always called him warmly «Ravil my son-in-law», sometimes «my son». Our children's birth were her happiest moments I suppose. In 1983 my first daughter Leysan was born. After her birth my mother was awarded a big title «Honored Artist of Russia».

As I mentioned above, our mother liked the stage and the audience very much. Nevertheless, she also had enough love left in her soul for us and for her grandchildren. You should have seen her happiness when she became a grandmother! She only became younger with every other grandchild coming to this world. Once she summoned my youngest daughter Renata and gave her a necklace taking it off her neck, «I give this dearest present to you, my daughter. Please, keep it! Keep it as a memory of me!». My eyes filled with tears.

Ravil Nigmedzyanov,
Singer's son-in-law

The family we started with Zulfiya, Alfiya Avzalova's youngest daughter, proved to be robust. We have two daughters: Leysan and Renata, three grandsons and two granddaughters. So we live in a large and friendly international family, as if continuing our great Alfiya's tradition.

She loved her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and was most faithful to family traditions. We are sure that Alfiya Avzalova's bright and original talent will manifest itself in future generations.

Creativity was the infinite space for Alfiya Avzalova, in which she felt free and sincere. The scale and depth of her world perception were reflected in her performances, each of which became an epic depicting events from the song. If she sang about nature, you could imagine the vast expanses of fields and forests, hear the rain and feel the freshness of the wind, bringing the fragrance of flowers. In her repertoire there were songs about family and motherhood along with patriotic songs about soldiers who did not return home from the war and about the Motherland. All songs performed by Alfiya were easy to understand and close to the listeners.

The natural talent that was passed on to her from her parents turned out to be



one of its kind. She generously shared her thoughts on life and people, reproducing those images in songs which listeners committed to their memory forever. It seemed that Alfiya, having achieved fame and veneration, awards and respect, could enjoy her success for many years, but she always remained in motion and in search of something. It was as if someone told her not to stop, hence she laid the foundation for Tatar pop music with elements of rock and jazz.

In the 1960s, Alfiya Avzalova, being an Honored artist of Tatarstan, prepared the program «Songs of the peoples of the world». It was something special at the time. It seemed to be achievable only by our great opera singers, but the success was stunning.

Alfiya could perform folk songs in Tatar with the same persuasiveness and authenticity as international songs. The folk singer Alfiya Avzalova's creativity and her contribution to the Tatar pop art development has proven to be relevant and still in demand nowadays.

Russia has entered the XXI century with a program for the development of the «national idea». It is best reflected in the multi-ethnic people's art of our state, multiplying the age-old folklore traditions. The Tatar people, who have preserved the original features of their art, traditions and rituals are a constituent nation and are united with the Russian culture.

Alfiya Avzalova is the great Tatar singer, who became famous at the national, federal and international levels. Her professional path is a vivid example of how a ordinary rural orphan girl managed to become an esteemed singer and the founder of Tatar folk performed on stage thanks to her innate talent.

**Leysan and Renata Nig-
medzyanova,
granddaughters**

We were lucky to be born in Alfiya Avzalova's family and to be her heirs. She was not just a mother's mother for us, she was more than a grandmother, so from birth we called her «Anneka» (which means «mummy» affectionately).

She became our guiding star, a source of love, kindness and wisdom. All our memories about our Anneka are filled with warmth and light, joy of meetings and sadness of parting. We got a lot out of every minute spent with her. She could unobtrusively convey important things, which are family values in the best Tatar traditions. These are being true to yourself and respecting elders. By her



example she showed what a real woman should be: modest, kind, caring, devoted to her family and children. She is both soft and affectionate, and at the same time she has a strong personality. We knew what made her angry. Anneka did not tolerate insincerity and lies. She taught us how to cook and host guests. Hospitality is the main feature of our family. Holidays of our life are unforgettable! Especially when Anneka was alive! Her humor, her voice, her songs! It was hard to be sad in her company. She stayed positive herself and did not allow us to feel down.

Leysan

I am happy that I could create my own family, where my husband Ruben, an American, fell in love with the multi-ethnic Tatarstan. Thanks to Anneka, he tasted our national cuisine and fully felt the warmth of relations among people living in Kazan. In short, we created a family, which my Anneka would be proud of. My children, Alfiya Avzalova's great-grandchildren, Eva, Tristan, Sebastian and Maximilian strive to learn the Tatar language, thanks to their great grandmother. Our national culture and traditions will certainly be handed down from generation to generation. I am happy and grateful to my parents and my great grandmother Alfiya Avzalova thanks to whom we are building our lives and look to the future with confidence.

Renata

I am the youngest granddaughter of Anneka, so, apparently, she spent a lot of time with me. I remember going on tours with her, where I listened to her performances with admiration and tried to understand why the audience greeted her with such ovations. One day, just a few years before her serious illness Anneka summoned me, silently took off her golden necklace and gave it to me, saying kind words that remained in my memory for the rest of my life. I already know that I will give this gift to my daughter Maya, as well as everything that my beloved Anneka taught me. I started my own family later, but my husband Ayrat and I in a way empathized with the events that took place in recent years. I am sure that our children will be able to contribute to our common cause. This is the true understanding of our Anneka's heritage; her name and creativity remain in the memory of the people, and in our lives.

**Ideliya Iskhakova,
*granddaughter***

Anneka has always been my favorite and important person in our family. I had been going on tours with her since I was 3 years old. Thus, we formed a strong and tender friendship. Anneka is my knowledge source on how to communicate with people from different generations. She was strong on the outside and soft on the inside, as well as talented and cheerful. For me personally, she is associated with something warm and cozy. I spent my entire childhood with her.

Going on tours with her was a real adventure for me. Anneka was gentle and strong. She was also scared and sad sometimes but she never showed it to us. She magically attracted people, sometimes with opposite natures, different life values and interests. Still, there is something that unites them all -a boundless love of life.

She was a wonderful and understanding person. She was ready to cheer us up when it was needed, and to empathize when we were too tired to have fun. She was a very unusual person. She firmly and confidently preserved the happiness of our large family in her strong hands.

As long as her songs are alive, she will never die. Dear, beloved, my one and only, wonderful and the best Anneka in the world!



**Oskar Avzalov,
*grandson***

Memories about my grandmother are the most vivid and brightest memories of my childhood.

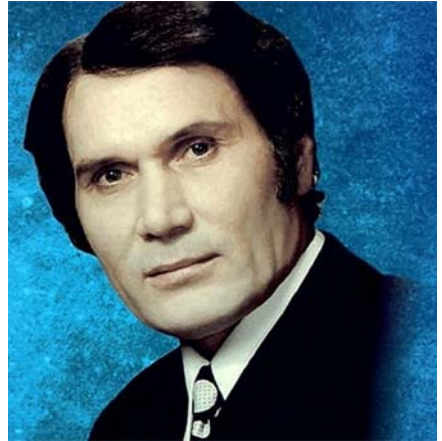
She has always been a role model for me, a person with a kind soul and a strong spirit. Her songs are relevant to this day; they are full of love and heartbreaking lyrics. There are many different stories and events that connect me to her.

I remember some incidents from my life which wouldn't have turned out well if it was not for her help. She could appear so quietly in a difficult moment and help, that it felt only natural. I remember the dark days of her illness, her resilience, the ability to keep everything to herself without disturbing the family. She was still great and popular and could demand special conditions, but she always remained modest and attentive to the concerns of others. I often miss her. I wish I could consult her, listen to her songs.

Alfiya Avzalova's memory will remain with me forever.



**Ilham Shakirov,
*the great Tatar singer***



There are many talented people among Tatars, who you can call the darlings of our nation: Kol Gali, Mukhammadiyar, Gabdulla Tukay, Gayaz Ishaki, Salih Saydashev... I listed only the most significant ones, who turned into burning stars, which could not be extinguished by any adversity. These stars lit new ones and they shone ever more brightly.

We have a pop singer named Alfiya Avzalova.

Alfiya has bound her talent with our nation's destiny. Nowadays it is hard to imagine Tatar history without Alfiya Avzalova.

When I think about her, I remember words by a poet Ravil Fayzullin,

Do we have such a nature,
We cry when it is too late.
But we become so jealous,
If someone living reaches success...

The poet is right. Dear Sara Sadykova was nominated for the G.Tukay Prize after her death only. I wrote then that Tatars are good at thinking post hoc. We did not appreciate her while she was alive. Let's repent and be cleansed. Sara Sadykova is not the only one among those who was not appreciated while alive.

When Alfiya Avzalova was nominated for the G.Tukay Prize at the Tatar State Philharmonic general meeting, everyone gasped. After some awkward silence, the entire hall began to applaud. Why was the announcement like a thunderstorm in broad daylight? The reason is apparent. Everyone thought, «Why didn't we think about it before? It should have been done a long time ago!»

I think about Alfiya's work over and over again. We might say her destiny is similar to Tukay's. She also became an orphan early in her childhood, was taken care of by distant relatives, lived in an orphanage, was left on the street or in a stranger's house. There is nothing worse than staying on the street. She used to beg, knock on doors, or stay in the middle of a field alone at midnight, not knowing what to do and sleeping on a bonfire site. In the morning, she continued her way with the first light.

Even though Alfiya took a twisted route onto the stage, she did not bring any sense of orphanhood at all. On the contrary, after listening to her songs, people feel energized, optimistic and faithful. She reached the audience singing thought-provoking songs.

I have been there too; sometimes you grieve, or have sleepless nights, feel angry and resentful toward not someone particular but toward the whole nation... Still, we can't disclose those feelings to others! We must go on stage with a happy face and pure soul. So we are destined by God. Alfiya also entered the world of arts with such beliefs and stayed loyal to them.

When someone is nominated for a prize, there is an opinion that «it should be given for a particular work». What did Alfiya Avzalova do? What was her contribution? Indeed, she performed thousands of songs, and a billion people learned them by heart and sang them. We should be thankful to her for spreading our plaintive melody, our national art to every region pushing through the snow, breaking through the ice and overcoming challenges. I would also call it heroic to lead the way for the upcoming generation of singers. To overlook that contribution is ignorance, refusing to acknowledge it is a sin.

However, nowadays we are not afraid of being sinners. As soon as a talent appears on the horizon, he/she becomes the subject of gossip. It becomes a kind of tradition to be interested in the private life of famous people. Humans make mistakes, and people of arts are also human beings. It is a great sin to gossip about a person regardless whether what you are gossiping about is true or not. There was a lot of gossip about Alfiya...

She repeatedly complained, «We were like insects trying to climb up the wall. We climb a little and fall back then start all over again...I wish someone appeared to help.» What help are you talking about? You would be thankful if they didn't keep you away from stage...

We came on stage in the same period and we worked together for a while. She found the songs herself and performed in her own style. Her songs reached people's souls. Alfiya loved her nation, and the attraction was mutual. Alfiya never performed meaningless songs only to make the audience applaud. You can check her entire 40– year career and I bet you could not find any meaningless, trivial songs.

Alfiya entered the stage with a song called «Cuckoo» by Sultan Gabashi. She adopted Gabdulla Tukay's poem lines «If you want to touch every heartstrings.» as a prayer and sang «Taftileu», «Elluki» and «Tugan tel» («*Mother tongue*») from the very childhood. She remained faithful to her prayer and still strikes the heartstring.

It would not be truthful if we say that her work was not appropriately appreciated. She has many honorary titles, which means she was not an unnoticed singer. Besides, she has a lot of diplomas and certificates in red folders. Alfiya Avzalova's conscience is clear in front of the Tatar nation. Alfiya has been full of harmonic melody from her very birth! She is the daughter of the nation. She is the «daughter» of Tukay. People like Alfiya are rarely born. Let's appreciate such people, and make haste in paying high tribute to their services. «Alfiya» in Arabic means «long-standing». Let's also wish long-standing life to her. Let's fairly appreciate the creative work of Alfiya Avzalova, who is one of the founders of Tatar variety art».

*Zilya Valieva,
former minister of culture of the
Republic of Tatarstan*

Alfiya apa has a special place among the great personalities who won the love of the people in the Tatar art world.

She will always be a bright star that lights Tatarstan's sky! She awakened our nation and Tatar spirit within us with her songs and plaintive melodies. We might call her a singer– fighter, singer-politician, singer-ambassador, singer-diplomat, singer-agitator and etc. She filled our souls, educated and led us through her songs. Listening to them our national attitudes aligned.

I listened Alfiya Avzalova's song «Yaratam disen sin» (*«You tell me that you love me»*) for the first time when I was a child.

I was studying in Ufa at the time. My father bought two tickets when he saw the posters of A.Avzalova's concerts. He also played the garmun very beautifully. I remember we attended the concert with my father. I was a schoolgirl then. Everybody dreamed to see, to listen to the singer back then. I could not even think about talking to her. I began to attend her concerts regularly when I came to Kazan and began to work in the editorial offices. Later on I became a member of the Parliament. When I started to work in the arts sphere I got acquainted with Alfiya apa closer. «Alfiya apa, I have known you since my childhood. You are as pretty as before,» I complimented her. I saw an ordinary, people-loving, talkative, humorous lady. She knew how to joke at an appropriate moment. Had she chosen humor and satirical art she would have been very successful, I think. Some people are big in their outward appearance but Alfiya apa had a big heart on the inside. When you are in her company you feel protected under her wing. She has great spiritual energy. When you talk to her you unwittingly become a slave of her soul. She is a person who worked hard using her talent, energy and the warmth of her soul. There were no appropriate conditions at the time but they worked with enthusiasm, with all their hearts. They are great people who toured experiencing difficulties and shared the warmth of their souls in the cold rural clubs.

A person who could reach Alfiya apa's heights as a singer is yet to be born. I can't think of any name who left a mark in this century as bright as Alfiya Avzalova.



Azat Khamaev,
former minister of the Republic of Tatarstan



I met Alfiya Avzalova in mid 60s. Their team came to our village with a concert. I saw her on the stage and heard her plaintive voice once again after a while. Once she brought her daughter to the concert.

Alfiya apa was welcomed with open arms anywhere she came, and in her homeland in Aktanysh she was always a dear guest and especially welcome. Our next encounter was in Aktanysh district in the kolkhoz of «Chishme» («Spring»). Alfiya apa was a close friend of the kolkhoz manager. They spent a week each year

at his place. This time she also brought along a famous composer Sara Sadykova. I was a student then and came to work in kolkhoz. There were six of us then. We were invited to a dinner at the kolkhoz farmers' house. We were about to finish our meal, when Alfiya apa and Sara apa entered the house. It turned out the dinner was arranged in their honor. We began to talk and became close.

In 2000 we lived with Alfiya apa in the same apartment block on Yamasheva street for about two years. Alfiya apa was a funny khanum and liked to talk very much. When her daughter Zulfiya went to America with her family, they left their dog to Alfiya apa. She used to carry the dog or run after it. She made me laugh telling me how she should kill that dog. People who have been performing for their entire life tend to have a changing nature. I remember Alfiya apa to be lively, sociable, generous, courageous and self-motivated. She used to tell jokes and once told us that she used to bring 15-20 geese carcasses from each of her concerts.

Alfiya apa remained in my soul as a good-natured, humane and responsive person. She was always kind to me. Though we seldom met, we talked a lot when we did. I felt her respect for me inside of my soul. I am very thankful to God that I have met such a wise, lovable and talented singer with a plaintive voice in my life.

**Alsu Nabieva,
Professor and Rector
of Kazan Institute of Cooperation**

When I think about the great singer I remember her songs. Our generation was raised with Alfiya Avzalova's melodies.

You might find books about Alfiya Avzalova, treasured collections of her songs anywhere you go. The goddess of the plaintive voice was not called the ambassador of Tatar people for nothing. Musicologists are still researching Alfiya Avzalova's plaintive voice. Her songs are

related to the destiny of Tatar people. Famous playwright Tufan Minnullin once said, «The memorialization of the greats' names is important for those who are alive first of all, rather than for those who passed away». Indeed, the events dedicated to Alfiya Avzalova make our language, plaintive melody live on. Our meetings with Alfiya Avzalova are kept as a bright memory in my soul. I first met Alfiya khanum's daughter Zulfiya Nigmatzyanova when the famous singer was alive. Today the daughters of Alfiya Avzalova make many things to pass legendary singer's heritage on to future generations. It is a great happiness for a mother if your children continue your legacy and can pass it on to the new generations. Its beautiful beginning is the Fund named after Alfiya Avzalova which has been launched recently. I am proud to be a member of the Fund's Board of Trustees. We provide solidarity assistance to every Alfiya Avzalova tribute event. This year the teachers, students and volunteers from our institute took active part in the International festival of creativity named after A. Avzalova. We also plan to organize A. Avzalova tribute events at the Kazan Institute of Cooperation. I think her songs will remain in our souls forever. I would like to pay tribute to her children and thank them very much. Their contribution to perpetuating their mother's name is immense. They are the initiators of all the events. They turn various ideas into reality, having created the Fund named after A. Avzalova. They are doing a great job of conveying the legendary singer's heritage to the coming generations. If Alfiya apa's songs are preserved, our language, nation and culture will live. May the activities of the Fund be beneficial in the future. The international contest will soon find its own form, find its performers and the audience. The art of the great singer should be passed on to the youth, it should live forever.



**Albina Nasyrova,
*Executive Principal and
CEO Bala-City Group***

Alfiya Avzalova's songs are associated with my childhood memories. She was my grandfather's favorite singer. When I became a mother myself, I began to understand the importance of her words, «Children should be raised with a sense of love toward Tatar songs and melodies». The songs we listen to in childhood leave their marks in our mind.

Alfiya apa's songs and her voice touch the heart and awaken very delicate sensations.

They make us think, inspire and understand the meaning of life!

As an educator it is my belief that listening and performing proper songs is an important element in the lives of children. I think we should pass on Alfiya Avzalova's creativity through generations and be proud of her!



**Albina Shagimuratova,
*Honored Artist of Tatarstan and Russia***

Alfiya Avzalova was and will be the most famous person of our nation! She is a queen of musical art! She performed each song with her strong timbre, unique, beautiful voice in a professional manner.

Her repertoire is very rich. She is the first singer who sang old Tatar folk songs and modern melodies to the accompaniment of an instrumental ensemble!

The Tatar nation, spread all over the world, listened in awe to the singer, who raised Tatar musical art to tremendous heights. Not only Tatar people but also other nationalities loved the singer, who always stayed loyal to the audience and masterfully sang songs in different languages. She formed the very basis of Tatar pop musical art and made a lot of efforts to make it famous in the wider geography. People will listen to her beautiful, harmonic songs in 20, 50 or even 100 years!

Alfiya Avzalova was a queen on stage, and in real life she was a generous Mother, an authentic human being! Personally, from Alfiya apa I learned to skilfully



perform meaningful Tatar folk songs at the right emotional level. She respected her friends on her creative path very much. We miss our generous, responsive, strong-willed Alfiya apa, who sought to do a good deed to people, every day. She was never blinded by fame. Legendary singer of our times Alfiya Avzalova will remain in our hearts as a benevolent, affable, courageous, fair, mischievous and smart person. She seemed to be sent to the earth for a while in order to shine spreading her melodies and inspire people.

Kadim Nurullin,
director of Tatar State Philharmonic Hall

Alfiya Avzalova... is a devoted, unique singer of our nation with a wonderful plaintive voice.

She is a respectable citizen of our country, who reached immeasurable fame, having tasted enough of bitterness in her life. Her mere name announced without mentioning any of her numerous titles was enough to lit fire under each Tatar person's heart. Why «was»? Even now, through her songs, which will be passed on through centuries, she encourages our nation to be brave, smart and strong.

Alfiya apa worked at the Tatar State Philharmonic for the most part of her life. She began to work as a singer in 1951. The artists who toured with Alfiya apa were very lucky because they always had work. Where there is work there is food. I remember the words by one of her team members (who holds a title of People's Artist) about the difficult period in mid 90s in our country, when every second man became unemployed, «May Alfiya apa live and be healthy. We will not starve with her.»

Alfiya apa worked with many directors at the Philharmonic Hall. Many heads were changed during her career. I think she was careful with the directors although she had a perky character. She respected the hierarchy although she felt as a queen of the song. It is a useful character trait for a singer to hold her stage performance in focus. When we talked to Kadim Nurullin about Alfiya apa, he also mentioned her respectful behaviour toward the directors. Kadim Nurullin is a person, who became a director of the Tatar State Philharmonic Hall named after G. Tukay when he was almost 30 and introduced a unique tradition – to give big concerts on I. Shakirov's and A. Avzalova's birthdays. He continued that tradition for 13 years.

I hope Alfiya apa's fairness and generosity is reflected in films and books about her. Nowadays we live in the times of indifference. We do not care about the problems of the others'. Everyone worries more about themselves. The spirit of Alfiya apa's times should be written and told about to the younger generations as an example to follow.



R. Abdrakhmanov

The works of the great Alfiya Avzalova take me back to my childhood and my dear davanishkas (an endearing Tatar term for grandmothers).

They loved and appreciated this legendary singer a great deal.

«Just listen to that amazing voice of hers, ulym (Tatar for son)», my davanishkas whose names were Gulzigan Abzalovna Abzalova and Marziya Khasanovna Abdrakhmanova always said in admiration.

They were born on May 1 and May 10 so I always went over to spend the May holidays with them and wish them a happy birthday. Once a grown man, I got the chance to make my loved ones happy by buying them the best seats in the front rows each time Alfiya Avzalova gave a concert. And each time my davanishkas were delighted and I couldn't be happier that I could indulge them like that!

Still, my mind was set on developing further beyond that. The Tugan Avylym national entertainment center is widely known for its «Always from the heart!» motto. So it is from the bottom of the heart that, by the will of the Most High, our team is working on a unique project where we seek to set up a creative space as a tribute to Alfiya Avzalova. This should be a unique place intended to preserve her creative legacy and a sign of our gratitude and mine personally for the contribution that she made to the development of the Tatar culture. This place was chosen for a reason as we all know how Alfiya Avzalova loved the countryside. Tugan Avylym which translates as our «native village» would have certainly struck a chord with her!

Beyond that, we have been hosting concerts of Tatar performers featuring both famous singers and beginners, and we will continue to do so with a view to preserve and expand the rich traditions of national culture.



Aygul Nurislamova,
family friend

I was acquainted with the music world thanks to my grandfather, who was a skillful bayanist. Despite this fact he lived poorly during the difficult war period. Somehow he managed to preserve the love toward songs and melodies in his soul. Unfortunately, he was the only person who was keen on music in our family. If it was not for one incident I would have stayed far from music.

Once I met a beautiful and graceful lady just by chance. Usually people ask of each other's interests. She also wanted to know what I thought about Alfiya Avzalova's songs. I answered that I had never listened to her songs. «If you do not listen to Alfiya Avzalova, we have got nothing more to talk about then!» she replied. Affected by such an unpleasant encounter I threw myself into the world of music. Since then I could not live without Alfiya's song any more.

Many years passed after that day. It might be a destiny, but today I am close friends with Alfiya Avzalova's children. I am very happy not only to have met them but also to be able to help when necessary.

I am amazed by the fact that her daughters have created a Fund named after A. Avzalova. They are doing a great job perpetuating their mother's name. For instance, during the festival not only Alfiya Avzalova's name, but also her songs were revived. Young performers breathed life into her songs and took responsibility to pass them to new generations. I believe that our language known through our national melodies and which is spoken and preserved to these days will follow the path laid by Alfiya Avzalova.



**Karim Gabidullin and his wife
Saniya Gabidullina,
*Alfiya Avzalova's creativity
companion, musician, lead guitarist
and backup vocalist***

I chose music instead of my profession by training after graduating from the Kazan National Research Technological University in 1965. I went to the music college to learn to play the bayan. I successfully graduated but chose to play the guitar instead of the bayan. I played old guitars at first because new guitars were expensive and hard to come buy. I met other musicians in Kazan and began to perform with them in the Gorky park. Once we were invited to play at the Muslim Magomaev's concert. Unfortunately, our salary was not fixed and we could not even ask for our money.

It was a pleasure for us to play our favorite music instruments. I got the hang of playing guitar working together with a musician Edik Letvinskiy and a drummer Gena Evstigneev. I began to like my playing. Once we were invited to work with Sofia Rotaru's team when she was on tour in Kazan. They took Edik to Bulgaria to work in their team «Chervona Ruta». One day I met with a musician named Yusuf. He told me that he worked for A.Avzalova, the famous singer, and invited me to join. It turned out that Gena Evstigneev was working there too and he persuaded me to join them. It was 1969. I accepted the job and met with the singer. She seemed to be demanding and strict at first glance. She was quite specific about the people she was looking for for her team. She was not very glad about me joining the team, although it seemed she was not against it either as Yusuf was the leader of the band. It was clear that it was a big challenge for me. We ended up spending our whole life together, and it is impossible to forget our Alfiya apa and those musical years and long roads we drove along together. We attended the «Alfiya Avzalova Tribute Concert» with my wife Saniya. The public respects us thanks to Alfiya apa. They got used to see us together. The Moscow audience welcomed us warmly. It was a very beautiful event, but only Alfiya apa was not present... We miss Alfiya apa very much, indeed.



**Leysan Khametova-Mustafina,
*Dancer, People's Artist of Tatarstan***

My father Rashit and my mother Ruzaliya worked with Alfiya apa for a long time.

My mother was a skilled dancer, and my father was a musician. My mother was not only Alfiya apa's colleague but also her close friend. They shared secrets with each other, and learned new songs together. My mother also had a beautiful voice and plaintive melody in her soul. «You have those dimples and your smile is charming. You are born to be on stage,» Alfiya apa used to compliment my mother. My mother also adored Alfiya apa.

«There's an apple and a tree analogy lurking.

Look, what a good dancer girl with promising prospects for the future,» she used to say, as my stage partners recall. She used to care about me like my mother so that I did not get hurt while performing complex elements. Thus, my mother brought me onto the big stage. I was entrusted with a dual responsibility as I was a dancer's daughter. Alfiya apa's daughter Zulfiya began to host concerts at that time. She also sang and danced when it was necessary. She did not get any slack, being a singer's daughter, on the contrary, she had more responsibility. She taught her daughters how to live by her own example. She taught them not to be afraid of difficulties and never give up. Both my mother and Alfiya apa played a big role in my life of becoming a dancer. I am very thankful to them! When I was a member of the team I learned the most important human qualities such as humanity, mutual support, kindness, politeness. Everyone was kind and friendly to each other in Alfiya apa's team.

I have worked at the State Song and Dance Ensemble of the Republic of Tatarstan for many years. The ensemble celebrated its 80s anniversary this year. Our great Alfiya apa, well-known singers Khamduna Timergalieva and Zuhra Sharifullina also began their careers in that honorary creative team. It is a big challenge and the best life training for every creative person. I am infinitely glad to have had a chance to work with such a big hearted and great person. She is so close and dear to me. She will always remain in my soul as my second mother.



Mansur Khasanov,
musician

I remember my first participation in Alfiya Avzalova's concert program, held in Ufa in 1981. The host N. Minkina announced A. Avzalova. Alfiya khanum came onto the stage, sang a song, and then began talking to the audience. I was impressed by her attitude toward the audience. She spoke to those sitting in the hall with such warmth and love, as if she had known them for a long time.

The people in the hall sat spellbound, listening to her attentively and looking at her as if she were a goddess. This is still true.

Two stars shone in the sky of the Tatar stage:

I. Shakirov and A. Avzalova. The concert lasted for about two and a half hours. It was so good that at the end the entire hall of 1,500 people gave a standing ovation to A. Avzalova for a long time.

My surprise did not end there. The audience formed a huge queue from the edge of the stage to the very last door of the hall. Everyone had either flowers or gifts in their hands. People came to Alfiya in turn and gave flowers and gifts. They hugged her with smiles on their faces and thanked her for a wonderful concert. Alfiya khanum hugged them smiling in response and thanked them not only for the gifts, but also for the words of gratitude.

I was amazed by her openness in communicating with people. I think today's young people have a lot to learn from Alfiya Avzalova. As long as I live, she will remain in my memory as a natural, real woman and a great artist. I am grateful for her existence





Alfiya Avzalova and Ilham Shakirov, Salavat
Fathetdinov, friends





Alfiya Avzalova and artists





1995



2003



2008



2013



2009





PHOTO GALLERY

Events and Meetings



Alfiya Avzalova and
Ilham Shakirov



Alfiya Avzalova and Salavat Fathetdinov





Alfiya Avzalova and Razil Valeev



Alfiya Avzalova and Ilshat Aminov



Alfiya Avzalova, Gulshat Zaiynasheva and Rabit Batulla



Alfiya Avzalova with Airat Sibgatullin and his wife



Alfiya Avzalova, Ilham Shakirov and artists, Asnakay District, August 7, 2008



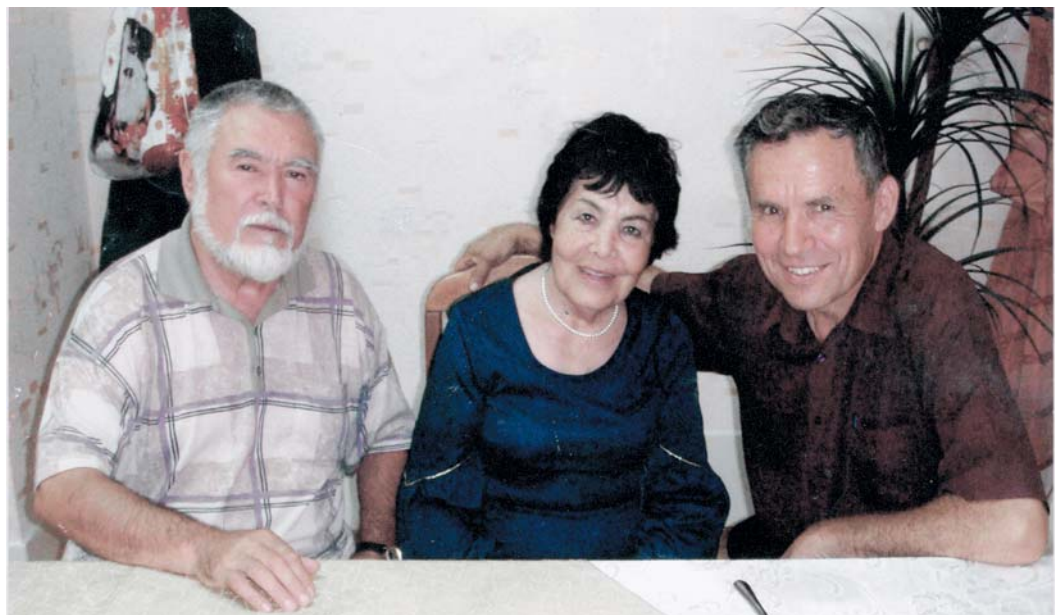
Moscow, 1993



Alfiya Avzalova and famous singres, friends



Alfiya Avzalova and
Kadim Nurullin, Aidar
Faizrahmanov



Alfiya Avzalova and Rabit Battula with a professor from Sweden



Zulfiya Avzalova and Vahtang Kikabidze

Zulfiya Avzalova and Ruslan Saifutdinov,
Alina Stepanova-Davletyarova



Zulfiya Avzalova and famous artists at TNV studios



Zulfiya Avzalova and Famous artists



A concert performance by Alfiya Avzalova

Sofiya Gubaidullina and
Ravil Nigmedzyanov



Roald Sagdeev, Ravil
Nigmedzyanov and
famous athletes

Zurab Tsereteli, Marina
Kovaleva and Ravil
Nigmedzyanov



Zulfiya Avzalova and
Radik Abdrakhmanov



A National complex
«Tugan aulum», Kazan
City

Zulfiya Avzalova
and Alfiya Avzalova
Foundation Laureates.
Tugan Aulum, Kazan
2019



**I International Festival Contest named after Alfiya Avzalova.
October 19-22, 2018, Kazan City**





Alfiya Avzalova Foundation Laureates in Baku, Azerbaijan, 2019



Zulfia Avzalova and famous artists. Moscow, 2018



Zulfiya Avzalova and Alfiya Avzalova Foundation Laureates





Alfiya Avzalova Foundation performances, Kazan, 2018



Overseas Performances

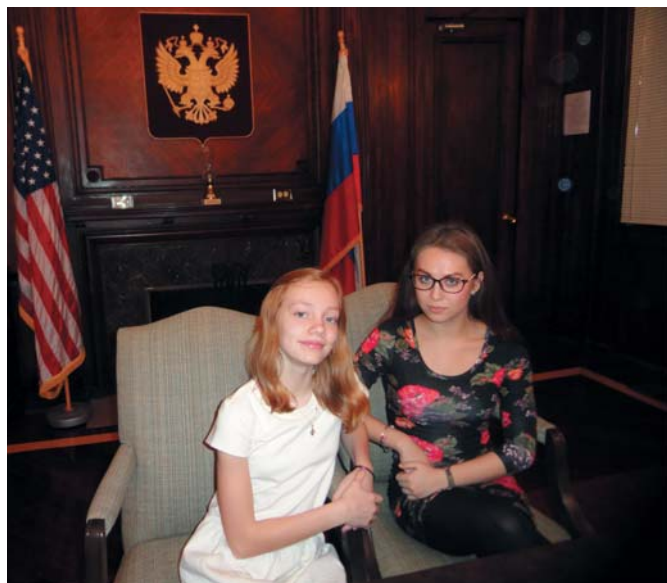


Alfia Avzalova Foundation Laureates performances. BBB International Festival Contest, Los Angeles, California, United States, August, 9-11, 2019

Official Meetings



2013-2014



2008 – 2010

Family, Relatives and Friends



1996

Zulfia Avzalova and her aunt, 1965



1990



1996



1997



2011



2003



2014



2014



2016



2018



2005





Alfiya Avzalova and Family



2006



Zulfiya Avzalova and Great-grandsons Tristan, Sebastian, D. Orlov, NHL



Eva, great-granddaughter



Leysan, granddaughter and her husband Ruben



Alfiya Avzalova and her granddaughter
Renata



Renata at the graduation ceremony,
Washington, DC, 2013



Alfia Anzalova and her daughters Guzel, Zulfiya



Alfiya Avzalova's
great-grandchildren



Granddaughter Leysan with her family



Great hockey Russian, NHL players Alexander Ovechkin, Evgeny Kuznetsov and Tristan Alfa Avzalova's great-grandson



Tristan, great-grandson

Famous basketball NBA player
Grevis Vascos and Sebastian Alfiya
Avzalova's great-grandson



Zulfiya Avzalova and her friends



Zulfiya, Guzeli Avzalova and Alexander Ovechkin



Leysan Nigmedzyanova with her children and Alexander Ovechkin

Keeping Memory of Alfia Avzalova





2019



2020



Zulfiya Avzalova Nigmedzyanova, Alfiya Hadeeva, Rustem Sarvarov and Ravil Nigmedzyanov.

We are grateful to everyone who participated in the creation of the book “Alfiya Avzalova” – a unique story of the life and work of a great Tatar singer Alfiya Avzalova. We hope that this book fully reflects the stages of her life, from a simple village orphan girl becoming a singer who went down in history of Tatar culture. She is as a founder of pop performance of folk songs and our new generation now studies and uses the creative heritage of Alfiya Avzalova. We hope that the book will appeal to everyone who is interested in the creative heritage of the great Tatar singer.

GLOSSARY

aBly[лЪы] – uncle, the word is used when someone addresses an elder brother or a man (from Tatar)

apa[.pAj – aunt, the word is used when someone addresses an elder sister or a woman (from Tatar)

aziam – a sort of long caftan worn by peasants (from Tatar) beshmet– kind of quilted jacket (from Tatar)

cooperative – a farm, business, or other organization which is owned and run jointly by its members, who share the profits or benefits (from Russian) jingeyfdjjiqgej] – aunt, uncle's wife (from Tatar) jizniyfdjiznril – aunt's husband (from Tatar)

Jyrakay [d^irAkyj] – aunt, who lives far away (from Tatar)

Kaban – a village in Kaltasinskiy District (now Krasnokamskiy) of the Bashkir ASSR

karlygachl к л rl ig.\tjj – swallow (from Tatar) katyk [k\tyk] – sour milk (from Tatar)

kelje[kæld3o] – pancakes made from a mixture of rotten potatoes and saltbush flour (from Tatar)

khanum[hAnum] – madame, (used in postposition); form of polite address for a married woman (from Tatar)

kh r om ka [hrom кл] – a type of Russian garmon (from Russian) kolkhoz– a collective farm (from Russian)

Krashen [kryajn] – Baptised Tatars. A sub-group of the Volga Tatars, frequently referred to as one of the minority ethnic groups in Russia Kronshtadt – a city close to Saint-Petersburg in Russia kumgan[kumgAn] – high pitcher with a spout (from Tatar) mufti[mufti] – senior member of the Muslim clergy

ochpohcmak[,eJ'puf ma:k] – a triangular pastry, filled with minced beef, onion and potatoes (from Tatar), Tatar national and Bashkirs dish, sake [shekel – a wide wooden bench in a house (from Tatar) sypushkatsypu/кл] _ a type of a house (from Russian) yapaЦлдл] – new (from Tatar)

CONTENTS

Alfiya Avzalova – Memories

Rustam Minnikhanov President of the Republic of Tatarstan Introduction	3
Swallowing Sorrow From An Early Age... ..	6
A Candle Only Burns In Candlesticks... ..	29
My Blossoming Youth	39
On The Unfamiliar Roads... ..	69
My Family And My Friends	92
How Songs Are Composed	121
I Was Never Blinded by Fame	131
My Benefit Performance	142

Memories of Alfiya Avzalova

Mintimer Shaimiev	148
Ilsur Metshin	151
Engel Fattakhov	153
Guzel Avzalova	154
Zulfiya Nigmedzyanova	155
Ravil Nigmedzyanov	156
Leysan and Renata Nigmedzyanova	157
Ideliya Iskhakova	159
Oskar Avzalov	159
Ilham Shakirov	160
Zilya Valieva	162
Azat Khamaev	163
Alsu Nabieva	164
Albina Nasyrova	165
Albina Shagimuratova	165
Kadim Nurullin	166
R. Abdrakhmanov	167
Aygul Nurislamova	168
Karim Gabidullin and his wife Saniya Gabidullina.....	169
Leysan Khametova-Mustafina	170
Mansur Khasanov	171

Photo Gallery	177
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Glossary	206
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