

Aziza Mustafa Zadeh - Shamans (2002)

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1 *Holiday Blessings* 4:30 2 *Ladies of Azerbaijan* 5:00 3 *Uv (Unutma Vjdani)* 5:48 4 *Sweet Sadness* 4:59 5 *M25* 2:58 6 *Ayrilik* 4:54 7 *Fire Worship* 4:34 8 *Shamans* 9:10 9 *Strange Mood* 5:26 10 *Uzun Ince Bir Yoldayim* 4:13 11 *Endless Power* 3:43 12 *Melancholic Princess* 4:20 13 *Bach-Zadeh* 2:56 14 *Portrait of Chopin* 5:36 Aziza Mustafa Zadeh - Piano [Steinway & Sons], Vocals, Composed By, Arranged By

Aziza Mustafa Zadeh was born in Baku, the Capital of Azerbaijan, to musical parents. Her father, Vagif Mustafa Zadeh, a pianist and composer, became famous by creating a fusion between jazz and the traditional Azerbaijani music known as mugam. His wife, Eliza Mustafa Zadeh, was a classically-trained singer from Georgia. As a young child Aziza enjoyed all forms of art - dancing, painting, singing - and at the age of 3 she appeared in public with her father, improvising with voice. But it was her talent for the piano that eventually shone through.

Having studied classical piano from an early age, and despite her enthusiasm for the compositions of JS Bach and Frederic Chopin, she soon began displaying a gift for improvisation. "I didn't practise enough," she admits. "If I don't feel like playing then I don't play." When her father died tragically on stage at the age of 39, it was a shocking blow to the young Aziza, and a major turning point in her life. Her mother's response to the crisis was to give up her own career as a classical singer and dedicate herself to nurturing her daughter's musical gifts. She now acts as her manager, and Aziza has come to rely on her judgment when she's writing or recording new pieces. "I trust her because she's extremely experienced as a classical musician and she had jazz experience with my father," Aziza points out. "And she knows a lot about music and history and literature."

When she was 17, she won the Thelonious Monk piano competition in Washington DC, playing some of Monk's compositions but in her own mugam-influenced style. Around the same time,

she moved to Germany with her mother, and concentrated on developing her own distinctive musical direction.

In 1991, she released her debut album, entitled simply Aziza Mustafa Zadeh. It was immediately clear that this was an artist with an unusual and remarkable voice, able to blend her ethnic roots with both classical and jazz inputs. Early favourable impressions were reinforced by 1993's *Always*, which won Aziza both the ECHO Award and the German Phono Association's Jazz Award. So impressive were her talents that a prestigious squad of jazz musicians chose to join her in the studio for 1995's *Dance Of Fire*. Many less self-assured artists might have been overawed by a line up comprising guitarist Al Di Meola, bassman Stanley Clarke, former Weather Report drummer Omar Hakim and saxophonist Bill Evans, but once again Aziza produced an album unmistakably imbued with her particular musical inclinations. 'Aziza is a genius, both as a composer and as a performer. Her music has much more meaning for me than just straight jazz because what I hear is her culture', said Di Meola. 'I hear Azerbaijan.'

With audiences now packing out her live concerts across Europe and beyond, from London and Paris to Istanbul and Tel Aviv, she created a mild frisson of excitement by wearing little more than long tendrils of hair on the sleeve of *Seventh Truth* (1996). Perhaps this image was designed to mirror the music within, which was mostly stripped down to solo piano and voice. The follow-up, *Jazziza*, mixed up her own compositions with jazz standards including *My Funny Valentine* and Dave Brubeck's *Take Five*.

Now there's *Shamans*, her first album under a new contract with Decca Records. The disc, recorded at Abbey Road Studios in London, draws together the varied strands of Aziza's music, brilliantly showcasing her classically-influenced piano playing on *Bach Zadeh* or *Portrait Of Chopin*, and giving full rein to her highly personalised vocal technique on compositions such as *Ladies Of Azerbaijan* or *Sweet Sadness*. The title piece is an unusual departure for Aziza, using only percussion, the chirruping of a cricket, and multiple overdubs of her own voice to evoke a mystical shadow-world. "For me, the spiritual part of life is the most important," she explains. "Shamans are special people - they can heal you." --- bremme-hohensee.de/aziza.htm#english

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