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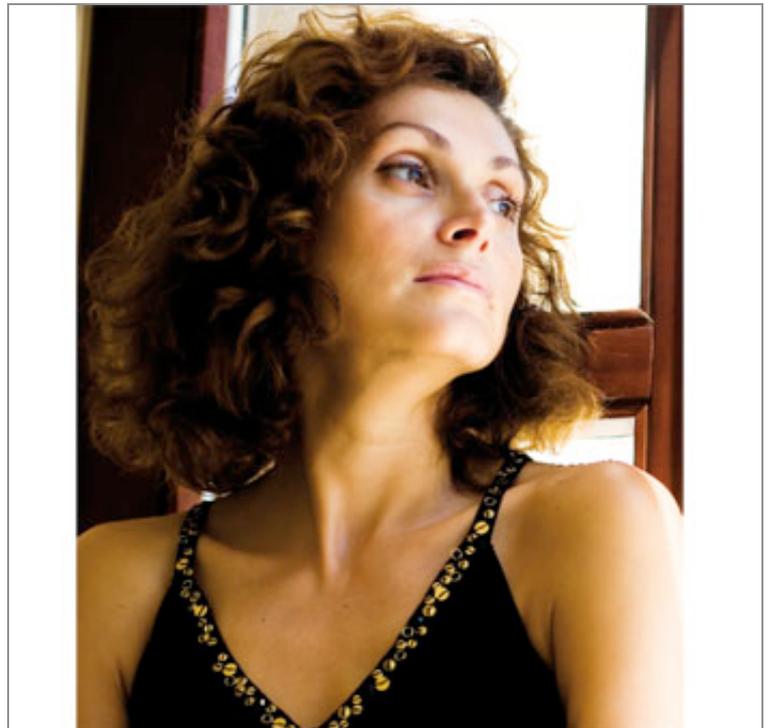
Stop, instant ...

DIFFERENT ANGLES ON THE LIVES OF GREAT MUSICIANS WILL BE SHOWN AT AN EXHIBITION BY OUR COMPATRIOT AND FAMOUS PARISIAN PHOTOGRAPHER, ALEXANDRA KREMER-KHOMASSOURIDZE

Irada QARACAYEVA

Baku

On September 20, within the framework of the East-West International Film Festival in Baku, the Azerbaijani State Magomayev Philharmonia Hall will host a Live Music exhibition of photography by the famous Parisian photographer Alexandra Kremer-



Khomassouridze, who spent her childhood in Baku. The theme of the exhibition is the lives of musicians, the world's greatest maestros - the parts that are hidden from people like the invisible parts of icebergs. This is a world in which great people live and create. A R+ correspondent had the opportunity to get acquainted with Alexandra's works long before the fruits of her 15-year career are presented in Baku. This came about during a brief visit to her native city. Looking at her photographs, you begin to understand how happy Alexandra is – she works hard on the process of capturing a moment in a kind of invisible shell of being in which the picture lives out its emotional life. This requires a unique sense of light and shade, an excellent knowledge of specific subjects and the ability to capture their key points. Alexandra herself believes that she has the perfect opportunity to show her works in her native and beloved city - in the Philharmonia Hall, which has been restored and which is dear to her heart. "The Baku exhibition is an exciting event for me; this is an invitation to visit an old, beloved and hospitable friend. This is a meeting, a dialogue and a visual bridge between the past, the present and the future," she said.

- Why did you decide to take pictures of musicians, rather than, say, politicians?

- This was a confluence of circumstances. My personal life was with a man from the music world - Gidon Kremer - and so it was necessary to engage in a profession that would allow me to move and travel... Since my basic profession is painting, photography is very close to me. On the other hand, my interest in musicians stems from the fact that



no-one had taken their pictures in this way before me. Initially I just took pictures – I had no intention of engaging in such a project. I had already prepared another book of photographs of the world in general. It was called “Contrast”. Once Yuriy Karsman saw them, he offered to publish them and remarked casually: “You surely have a unique archive.” I can say it was then that the idea of the exhibition crossed my mind. And I began work on the project. In total, I spent two years compiling the material that I already had and photographing other musicians who I think complement the overall composition.

- And how did you negotiate with the musicians?

- Firstly, Gidon always helped me. Secondly, I studied their schedules carefully and decided where I could turn up; I looked at their sites and photos, because I did not want to repeat myself etc. Then I called their agents and waited for the maestros to give the go-ahead.

- Was it hard to photograph stars of this magnitude?

- It was hard to photograph Pletnev, because he never betrayed his emotions. He is in a constant state of “Zen”. I only managed to shoot a couple of frames when he played.

- What were your feelings after the shoots?

- On the one hand, very good - if I had managed to take a great shot and, on the other, a terrible feeling, because it is very hard work. After all, you constantly interfere with their work, get under their feet and intrude into the world of sound by clicking the camera.

- Were you not intruding into their "personal space"? After all, creative people do not like to be filmed...

- I tried to make sure that they got used to me. Firstly, many of them have known me for years. I myself have known this world for a very long time: I know how to shoot, where to shoot, at what moments... I feel it and try not to touch my heroes, because I respect their work. I try not to disturb them, as ordinary photographers do who emerge on the scene, and so on... (smiles). I have the appropriate equipment - very quiet. In this way, I am a professional. So I was totally on my own. And they were on their own, of course.

- What is it like to shoot pictures surrounded by sound? Did you manage to combine the two - both to shoot and to listen to the music?

- No, that is absolutely impossible. Only now that I have completed work on this project do I think to myself: now can I really sit in the concert hall and listen to the music and enjoy it? During shooting, it was impossible to listen to the music, because you're always on the lookout for the moment for a great shot. Even during the concert you are behind the scenes and waiting for the musician to come out. You are waiting to see how he comes out, with what emotions, how he changes his clothes etc. But at the same time, there have been instances when the music turned out to be stronger than my work and, enjoying it, I just could not shoot. For example, I could not photograph Yevgeniy Kisin for a long time. He allowed me to take pictures during a rehearsal. His playing was so amazing that I could not shoot. In a great hall where there was not a single soul, except for me and his mother, who is also his teacher, I forgot why I had gone there. I could not afford to click the shutter. That was the most difficult shoot in the history of the project.

- Did you think of giving it up and getting an easier job?

- Of course I did, and more than once. Simply, I had, and was obliged, to complete the job.

- Did any musicians approach you with the question “Do you not want to photograph me?”

- No, never. They absolutely do not need our pictures.

- Did you show the maestros the results of your work? How did they react to their photos?

- Well, they saw some photos and did not see others... It was not necessary. Everyone likes them, they are very emotional. Thank God, I have not had any problems yet. Everything has always been very positive. They were surprised, of course, laughed at each other: "Wow!" They especially liked to see how their colleagues came out.

- Do your heroes like to pose?

- No, no, no, no-one likes to pose! Of course, they sometimes tried to look at the camera, but I always said: "Don't look, I'm not here. Don't be polite and try to pose for me. That's just what I don't want. I need to be ignored because I am part of your life, I want to photograph you."

- Why are your photos black and white?

- Black and white is my favourite style. I really like the Sfumato method (In Italian, Sfumato means shaded, literally disappearing into thin air. It is a manner of painting: the mitigation of the outlines of objects, landscapes and figures (and modelling in light and shadow in general), which allows you to convey an atmosphere that envelops them. The Sfumato method is one of the most important elements of aerial perspective, a principle of dispersion which was substantiated theoretically and practically by Leonardo da Vinci). And then the musicians are associated with a monochrome picture: music, clothes and instruments are all black and white. I think that with the advent of colour some of the emotions may disappear. And shooting conditions are different. There is very little light. If you take a colour photo, it will be yellow. The light will disappear, i.e. there will be colour, but no light. I cannot even explain why I like black. A coloured version of a musician's portrait means absolutely nothing to me. I do not see harmony there. With this topic, I do not see colour. Maybe in the next...

- And what is the next theme?

- Oil.

- After classical musicians - oil?

- Yes, I went to all these drilling rigs. There are wonderful people working there. It is another world, with particular facial expressions. There is everything to shoot - light, colour and people. I love this theme.

- What is it that attracts you so much?

- A photographer must shoot what he knows well. Then you get something really interesting. I have already shot at Oil Rocks. I intend to cover all the oil fields - Siberia, Kazakhstan, the Gulf of Mexico, and I also want to shoot in the Persian Gulf.

- You said that you started to photograph musicians because there was a musician next to you at that time. Are you going to shoot oil wells because there is a man in your life associated with the industry, say, an oil tycoon?

- No, there is no tycoon (smiling). I grew up in Baku. This theme is very close to me. I often hear: "Why do you want to shoot oil, it is so smelly?" Why not if I see beauty in it? I will not go into detail, you will see when the draft is ready. The previous music theme was very complex. There is generally no landscape. After music, oil is a dessert with cherries.

- It is well known that men and women look at things differently. What about the art of photography? What do you think is interesting from the "women's view" of photo art? This profession is actually a man's job.

- I believe that the women's view is softer, sentimental and artistic. A man's view is purely informational. Maybe it is not quite right to draw parallels as, in percentage terms, men dominate. It is something like 80 to 20 per cent. Women want more light, colour and many pleasant things while filming. Personally, I like women's photography.

- And what is the attitude of male photographers towards their female colleagues?

- Just as they think of women who drive (laughs). They regard it with some irony - well, come on, let's see what happens. You must agree that today, despite the huge number of women drivers, men's attitude towards them is ambiguous, although I must confess that men take better pictures of models. They look at it differently. We look simply at an object, but they see, above all, a woman. They shoot war better as well. Women have no place in war, or on the catwalk: you need agility and quickness there. While we are looking at what the model is wearing, what accessories she has and so on, the man will take a dozen photos. Women have a different approach to thematic projects - deeper and more sensual.

- Are you not under pressure from having to travel in pursuit of the next frame? Do you shoot other things when you travel?

- I like to travel. During a trip, I have to have some kind of target. As a rule, it is work. I love Asia. However, I cannot shoot anything else in parallel. If I am in a country with a specific purpose, for me there is nothing but work. Leisure is one thing and work is another. Everything must be organic. When I photograph musicians, I live with it and shoot as necessary at a specific moment.

- You have been in the music community all your life. Have you never thought of taking up music?

- No, unfortunately, it is impossible to take up music just like that. My family were almost all musicians. The Philharmonia Hall and the Opera and Ballet Theatre in Baku were my second homes. I very much regret that, after all, my mother decided not to teach me music. Then I would have had another "foreign" language in my life, a completely different view of things. I believe that everyone should have an education in music. It expands the horizons and allows you to feel and understand music better. Every child should definitely study music. He may not become a musician, but he must understand it.

- And what would you advise the viewer who comes to the exhibition to pay attention to?

- I want the viewer who comes to the exhibition to feel the emotion of these photos - for me it is the most important thing. The main thing in life is emotion, feeling, love, passion... All this is in the photographs. And I very much want the viewer to understand how emotional the world of music is, how emotional these people from the world of music are and how hard their job is. Musicians often stand with their backs to the audience, while conductors always stand with their backs to the auditorium, so the audience has no opportunity to see what is happening on their faces. These are very special people. It was very interesting for me to shoot because it was important to understand their essence. My exhibition has a little bit about this - what they are onstage, backstage and in life in general.

- The exhibition will show over 80 works. Are there special, or favourite, works among them?

- They are all dear to me in their own way. I very much love the photo in which Mstislav Rostropovich is meeting Gia Kancheli. I like the photo with the cellist Butman laughing, because she is rarely seen smiling, but this shot turned out great. I love emotional pictures very much. Musicians and conductors, in contrast to film directors and writers, are very emotional during their performance.

Photographer Alexandra Kremer-Khomassouridze has managed to display the music world backstage: the birth of sound and music, concerts and rehearsals, the passionate and hard daily work on what seems ephemeral, but which can arouse the greatest emotions.

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