



... Culture, arts, & heritage of Azerbaijan & the Caucasus

Experiencing Jewish Azerbaijan Delights and Inspires Audience and Foundation

For Immediate Release

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Washington, D.C. December 23, 2011—"I had no idea"—many of the nearly 300 attendees at the December 22 program "Experiencing Jewish Azerbaijan" expressed surprise in learning about Azerbaijan's ancient Jewish community. The program was cosponsored by the Coming of Age program, an initiative of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington; the Karabakh Foundation; and the Jewish Residents of Leisure World in Silver Spring, Maryland, where the event was held.

"Experiencing Jewish Azerbaijan" afforded not only an overview of centuries of Jewish life in this South Caucasus country but also a taste of Azerbaijani culture and shared traditions of the broader region.

After an introduction by Coming of Age director Frieda Enoch, Karabakh Foundation executive director Diana Altman provided the audience with a multimedia presentation highlighting the history and milestones of Azerbaijan's deeply rooted Jewish community. Participants were especially intrigued by descriptions of the so-called Mountain Jews, inhabitants of the largely Jewish town of Quba in Azerbaijan. In 1926, the Azerbaijani census tallied 30,000 Mountain Jews. Several audience members remarked on Azerbaijan's longstanding record of ethnic harmony. The presentation emphasized that many Azerbaijanis express pride in the country's pluralism.



Baku-born Jewish violinist Vladimir Gamarnik dazzled the audience with songs from throughout the region. Some participants recognized the Russian Gypsy tune "Dorogoi dlinnoyu" as the basis for the hit song "Those Were the Days," sung by Mary Hopkin in 1968. U.S. lecturer and musician Jeffrey Werbock engaged participants in his own long-term fascination with Azerbaijani culture. Jeffrey's masterful performances on the Azerbaijani musical instruments the *tar* and *kamancha* enthralled the audience and impelled them to approach Jeffrey with numerous questions about Azerbaijani daily life, Jewish history, and more.



Adding to the stimulating atmosphere was the audience mix of Karabakh Foundation supporters, seniors from the JCC Coming of Age program, and residents of the Leisure World retirement community.

The program concluded with a traditional Azerbaijani tea presentation such as might be present at an Azerbaijani Chanukah celebration. Featured refreshments included candied orange slices, several flavors of Russian jam, dolmas, and a wide variety of holiday chocolates.

The Karabakh Foundation is already fielding requests for additional Azerbaijan Jewish heritage programs. Experts, performers, press, and others are encouraged to contact Foundation staff at info@karabakhfoundation.org.

About the Karabakh Foundation

The Karabakh Foundation is a U.S. 501(c)(3) cultural charity foundation based in Washington, D.C., that seeks to increase awareness and understanding in the United States of the cultural heritage and traditions of the country of Azerbaijan, the Caucasus area, and the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan. While coalescing significant artistic and scholarly talent, the Foundation is nurturing a new generation of artists and scholars toward important accomplishments. The Foundation serves as a dynamic facilitator and clearinghouse raising the public profile of Azerbaijan, its Karabakh region, and the Caucasus region in general. Main activities include preserving and disseminating cultural content via archival collecting, public programs, publications, exhibitions, speaking forums, international collaborations, scholarly exchange, artistic sponsorship, and related venues.

Foundation support comes primarily from Khazar University, the first private university in Azerbaijan and one of the country's leading institutions of higher learning. Support also comes from the U.S.-based Allaverdy Foundation. Additional information about the Karabakh Foundation may be found at www.KarabakhFoundation.org.