

Azeri Duo Wins Eurovision Song Contest

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Ell/Nikki won with the ballad “Running Scared.” Their victory means next year’s contest will take place in Baku. **Frank Augstein**

DUSSELDORF, Germany — A mother of two and an international relations student from Azerbaijan beat out the much-hyped Irish twins and 23 other finalists Saturday to secure their nation’s first-ever win in the Eurovision Song Contest.

Nigar Jamal and Eldar Gasimov, who go by the name Ell/Nikki, won 220 points for their classic pop ballad with a catchy refrain, “Running Scared,” meaning next year’s songfest will be hosted in Baku.

“Oh my gosh, we won, we won,” said Gasimov, 22, whose face was drenched with sweat as he celebrated on stage in front of 36,000 spectators in a football arena in the German city of Düsseldorf that had been converted for the event.

“I’m the happiest man in the world right now,” he said.

In the past three years, Azerbaijan has finished in the top 10 at the songfest but has never before reached the top.

“It’s unbelievable our dream came true,” Jamal, 30, said after winning the title.

“I’ve never been a singer before. I was a housewife, a mother of two children,” she said. “It was my dream to become a singer, and now my dream has come true.”

The Azeri entry had Swedish touches. It was composed by Swedes Stefan Orn, Sandra Bjurman and Iain Farquharson and four Swedish dancers accompanied Ell/Nikki.

The pair, clad in a white suit and a floaty white gown, were awarded the trophy from Germany’s 19-year-old Lena Meyer-Landruth, who had sought to make history by defending her title for a second consecutive year. She finished 10th in the contest with the sultry “Taken by a Stranger.”

Second place went to Italy — back in competition after a 14-year hiatus — with 189 points for Raphael Gualazzi for his jazz number “Madness of Love.” Close behind him in third place was Sweden’s Eric Saade, singing the dance pop song “Popular,” with 185 points.

Azerbaijan had been among the entries favored to win heading into the competition, but no other favorites, including the much-hyped Irish duo Jedward and the British bookies’ top pick, French tenor Amaury Vassili, came in among the top 10 finishers.

Several entries held up the competition’s reputation for quirky, kitschy costumes, with the boys from Jedward wearing sparkling red space jackets and spiky quiffed hairdos and Moldova’s punk rock entry taking the stage sporting tall, conical caps and featuring a woman on a unicycle.

More than 120 million viewers around the globe tune in to watch the spectacle that has taken place every year since 1956. Organizers said the production cost was 12 million euros (\$17 million).

Viewers in the 43 participating nations cast votes by SMS or phone that counted for 50 percent of the contestants’ final score. The other 50 percent had been determined by panels of juries selected by each nation.

Two rounds of semifinals held earlier in the week whittled the competitors down to 25 finalists who took to the stage Saturday for an extravagant sound-and-light display.

The Eurovision Song Contest has been a launching pad for international careers. Swedish pop group ABBA became famous after winning in 1974 with “Waterloo,” and Celine Dion took top honors in 1988 while competing for Switzerland.

Many deride the contest for serving up mediocrity, while others are enthusiastic followers.

From its start in Switzerland in 1956, the contest conceived by the European Broadcasting Union has grown into a giant event where performers, often dressed in spangly costumes, belt out their songs in different languages.

As well as French opera singer Vassili, British boy band Blue had also been tipped as a favorite by bookmakers but finished poorly.

Other famous participants in past contests included Julio Iglesias, Olivia Newton-John, Secret Garden, t.A.T.u., Lordi and Patricia Kaas.

✉(*AP, Reuters*)

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