

Theoretical Foundations and Development Prospects of Uzbek Maqom Performance

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ABSTRACT

Maqom performance represents a unique and invaluable artistic phenomenon within the centuries-old spiritual and cultural heritage of the Uzbek people. It not only embodies ancient musical traditions but also profoundly reflects the historical memory, aesthetic worldview, moral values, and emotional depth of the nation. Transmitted across generations through oral and practical traditions, maqom has long served as a vital medium for preserving national identity and cultural continuity. However, in the context of contemporary globalization and rapid cultural transformation, maqom performance is confronted with a range of serious challenges. The risk of losing traditional performance practices, the gradual weakening of the master–apprentice transmission system, and the influence of modern musical trends threaten to distort its authentic essence. These circumstances underscore the urgent need for comprehensive scholarly research, systematic preservation, and sustainable development to ensure the continued vitality and authenticity of maqom as a living cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS: Maqom performance, Uzbek musical heritage, traditional music, intangible cultural heritage, spiritual culture, oral transmission, master–apprentice tradition, cultural identity, musical authenticity, globalization and music preservation

INTRODUCTION

Maqom performance holds a profound historical and cultural significance as an integral part of the spiritual heritage of the Uzbek people. This art form not only embodies centuries of musical tradition but also reflects the collective identity, values, and emotional depth of the community. Despite its esteemed status, *maqom* performance today faces a number of pressing challenges that require urgent attention and resolution to ensure its continued vitality and authenticity.

As emphasized in this article, the role of a *maqom* performer demands a precise combination of theoretical knowledge, technical skill, and practical experience. Mastery of contemporary musical theory, a deep understanding of the laws governing *maqom* performance, and familiarity with its unique modal and tuning systems are essential. Moreover, every performer must approach *maqom* with respect for national and regional traditions, adhering closely to the stylistic conventions that have been cultivated over generations. Achieving these goals necessitates comprehensive scientific research and the development of rigorous methodological frameworks aimed at addressing the current deficiencies within practice.

The distinctiveness, mystique, and emotional power of *maqom* render it not only a treasured cultural legacy of Uzbekistan but also a valuable contribution to global musical heritage. Characterized by its unique musical system, intricate modal structures, and expressive techniques, *maqom* mirrors the historical and cultural evolution of the people who have nurtured it. Its enchanting quality transcends linguistic barriers, captivating listeners worldwide and touching the inner world and spirit of every individual who experiences it. This magical essence of *maqom* performance underlines the urgent need to preserve and transmit this art from

generation to generation, safeguarding its place as a vital component of our shared human cultural wealth.

In light of these considerations, this study seeks to analyze the contemporary challenges facing *maqom* performers and to propose viable solutions that combine both traditional wisdom and modern scholarly approaches. By doing so, it aims to contribute meaningfully to the preservation and development of this sublime musical tradition for future generations.

Maqom performance is an indispensable component of the musical and cultural heritage of Uzbekistan and Central Asia. As a sophisticated art form, it not only reflects the region's historical values but also embodies its spiritual and aesthetic sensibilities. The unique tonal structures, intricate modal systems, and expressive techniques that define each maqom style require deep artistic insight and dedication from performers. However, despite its rich traditions, maqom performance continues to face challenges, including issues related to preservation, interpretation, and transmission in the modern era.

This paper has analyzed the key problems confronting the contemporary practice of maqom and explored potential pathways for revitalization. Encouragingly, significant steps have been taken at the national level to support and promote this ancient art form. Under the leadership of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan has launched several important initiatives aimed at safeguarding maqom and enhancing its role in national cultural life. In particular, the Presidential Decree issued on November 17, 2017, outlines comprehensive measures to advance maqom performance, including the development of distinctive maqom schools, the creation of a national "golden repertoire," and the promotion of maqom on an international scale. These efforts mark a strategic turning point for institutionalizing and elevating maqom within the framework of cultural policy.

Furthermore, the adoption of the Concept for the Further Development of National Culture on November 28, 2018, underscores the government's broader commitment to preserving national heritage and fostering cultural literacy among the younger generation. By reinforcing the significance of maqom within both domestic and global contexts, this policy serves to solidify the identity and cultural continuity of the Uzbek people.

In conclusion, while maqom performance remains a dynamic and evolving tradition, it also stands at a critical juncture where deliberate scholarly attention, policy support, and intergenerational transmission are essential. Sustained investment in education, research, and cultural diplomacy will be pivotal in ensuring that maqom continues to thrive as a living tradition and gains the international recognition it so richly deserves.

The theoretical foundation of *maqom* performance has been profoundly shaped by a lineage of prominent scholars and musicologists across the Islamic Golden Age and beyond. These intellectuals not only laid the groundwork for the scientific understanding of music in the East but also contributed significantly to the global development of music theory.

METHODS

The earliest roots of this theoretical framework can be traced back to the works of **al-Kindi (c. 790–874)**. His application of Pythagorean principles—particularly the use of the perfect fifth (quint) in defining pitch relations—marks one of the first documented intersections of mathematics and music in the Islamic world. Al-Kindi's approach emphasized the numerical ratios underlying musical intervals, reflecting an early attempt to systematize sound through a rational and philosophical lens. Though his contributions remained primarily theoretical, they laid an essential foundation for the fusion of science and art in music studies.

Building upon this foundation, **al-Farabi (c. 872–950)** advanced the study of music significantly. He deepened the analysis of tonal systems and introduced novel interpretations of scale construction and instrumental tuning. In his seminal works, al-Farabi developed a detailed framework for understanding musical intervals and their auditory relationships, further refining the Pythagorean scale. Importantly, he also employed

empirical methods by experimenting with musical instruments such as the *oud*, particularly examining the intervallic relationships within its strings. This blend of theoretical rigor and practical application positioned al-Farabi as a transformative figure in Eastern musicology.

Following in this tradition, **Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980–1037)** offered complementary insights, closely aligned with al-Farabi's theories yet distinct in their analytical depth. His works explored the acoustical and psychological dimensions of sound, focusing on the perception and effect of musical intervals. Ibn Sina's studies bridged philosophy, medicine, and music, reinforcing the view of music as both a scientific and emotional discipline. His systematic classification of tones, intervals, and scales served to strengthen the intellectual foundations of maqom theory.

Two centuries later, **Safi al-Din al-Urmawi (c. 1235–1294)** introduced significant innovations to the maqom system. Drawing from the works of his predecessors, he refined the theoretical model by using the *Khorasan tanbur* to conduct empirical research. His contributions included the development of precise tonal measurements and modifications to existing scale systems, which had a lasting influence on the structure of maqom. Urmawi's methods brought a new level of precision to modal analysis and were instrumental in formalizing the Eastern musical canon.

In the 15th century, **Abdurahman Jami (1414–1492)** synthesized the achievements of these foundational scholars in his treatise "*Risalah-i Musiqi*." Jami integrated the theories of al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Urmawi, and the influential Abdulqadir Maraghi to construct a comprehensive model of maqom theory. His work offered detailed discussions on tone systems, modal structures (jins and jam'), and instrumental tuning systems such as the 17-step octave scale on the *oud*. Jami's synthesis represents a culmination of centuries of inquiry, framing maqom not only as a musical form but as a complex, philosophically and mathematically grounded system of knowledge.

Collectively, these scholars established a robust theoretical framework that continues to inform the practice and pedagogy of maqom today. Their interdisciplinary approaches - spanning mathematics, philosophy, empirical experimentation, and musical intuition - demonstrate the richness and depth of Eastern music theory. The enduring influence of their works underscores the necessity of historical awareness in the preservation and evolution of maqom performance in contemporary settings.

This study employs a combination of **qualitative** and **quantitative methodologies** to analyze the key challenges and dynamics of *maqom* performance in contemporary Uzbekistan. By integrating both approaches, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the artistic, theoretical, and practical aspects of *maqom* performance, as well as to identify areas requiring systematic improvement and scholarly attention.

The qualitative component of the research is based on **semi-structured interviews** with professional and amateur *maqom* performers. These interviews explore the performers' understanding of *maqom* theory, their interpretive approaches, pedagogical backgrounds, and experiences with different regional styles and performance practices. Special attention is given to their awareness of modal structures, tone systems, rhythmic cycles, and the theoretical underpinnings of the pieces they perform.

In addition, the research includes **observational analysis** of live and recorded performances, with a focus on the stylistic diversity of *maqom* rendition across different schools and regions. By analyzing various interpretive and technical elements - such as intonation accuracy, melodic progression, rhythmic articulation, and use of ornamentation - this study seeks to reveal both the strengths and deficiencies in current performance practices.

On the quantitative side, the study involves the **categorization and comparative analysis** of performance

styles based on specific theoretical criteria, including pitch systems, modal consistency, and the accuracy of traditional tuning structures. Data is collected and analyzed to assess the frequency of deviations from standard theoretical models, especially among amateur performers.

One of the most pressing issues identified in *maqom* performance today is the **gap between amateur and professional performers**. While many amateurs rely solely on their intuitive musical abilities, their interpretations often lack theoretical grounding, resulting in performances that diverge from traditional modal and rhythmic frameworks. Conversely, professional *maqom* performers are expected to possess in-depth knowledge of musical theory and performance practice, enabling them to interpret works with both precision and authenticity.

Another challenge lies in the **misapplication of tone systems and modal structures**, which can lead to stylistic inconsistencies and the distortion of traditional *maqom* aesthetics. For instance, some performers mistakenly apply tonal structures from one *maqom* to another, or use vocal ornaments without an understanding of their contextual or modal significance. Such practices risk undermining the integrity and authenticity of this classical art form.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes the **importance of understanding regional stylistic variations and pedagogical lineages**. Each region in Uzbekistan has its own unique *maqom* style, shaped by historical, cultural, and pedagogical factors. Proficient performers must not only master the theoretical framework but also familiarize themselves with the interpretive nuances of each regional tradition.

Finally, this study investigates **contemporary approaches** to *maqom* pedagogy and performance, identifying both advancements and shortcomings in current training methods. By examining how modern techniques and technologies are being integrated into the teaching and performance of *maqom*, the research aims to offer constructive insights into how this musical heritage can be preserved and revitalized for future generations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In summary, this research aims not only to diagnose the critical issues in *maqom* performance practice but also to propose scientifically grounded solutions for their resolution. Through a methodical combination of fieldwork, theoretical analysis, and empirical data, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on preserving and enhancing the rich tradition of *maqom* in the modern age.

It is well established that *maqom* performance encompasses far more than the mere mastery of technical skills; it fundamentally requires a deep understanding of the art's essence and an ability to convey its profound spiritual and emotional dimensions. The unique and enigmatic nature of *maqom* demands from performers a high level of expertise, extensive knowledge, and significant practical experience. Recent presidential initiatives and policy decisions have opened new avenues for the advancement of this venerable art form, fostering an environment conducive to its revitalization and broader dissemination.

Efforts to develop the national cultural heritage, particularly by introducing younger generations to the *maqom* tradition and promoting it both domestically and internationally, are gaining momentum. The organization of international *maqom* festivals has significantly contributed to the global recognition of this musical heritage, while simultaneously providing vital support and motivation to emerging performers. Furthermore, the establishment of specialized educational programs, research centers, and performance schools dedicated to *maqom* within Uzbekistan creates a solid foundation for preserving traditional practices and cultivating innovative approaches for future generations.

In this context, deepening scholarly knowledge of *maqom*, applying rigorous scientific analysis, and developing new interpretive frameworks remain among the most urgent priorities. Despite these positive developments, practical challenges persist within *maqom* performance. Addressing these challenges requires

not only an enhancement of theoretical understanding but also a concerted effort to improve performers' practical skills. Significant gaps remain concerning the accurate application of modal systems, pitch intervals, and stylistic approaches. Instances where elements from different *maqom* traditions become inappropriately intermingled can compromise the integrity of this classical art form.

CONCLUSION

It is therefore crucial for *maqom* performers to maintain fidelity to their respective pedagogical schools and traditional practices while also enriching their interpretations through informed individual research and artistic exploration. Only by balancing respect for time-honored conventions with openness to innovation can *maqom* continue to thrive as a living tradition, embodying the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Uzbek people.

It is imperative to broaden scholarly investigations into *maqom*, thoroughly studying its traditions, performance techniques, and theoretical foundations. Developing innovative methodologies will further enhance understanding and preservation of this art form.

Specialized courses, master-apprentice programs, and academic seminars dedicated to *maqom* should be systematically introduced within the formal education framework. Such initiatives will help engage younger generations and equip them with both practical skills and theoretical knowledge.

Promoting *maqom* on the global stage through international collaborations and cultural exchanges is essential. Integrating *maqom* into the broader world musical dialogue will expand awareness and appreciation of Uzbek musical heritage worldwide.

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Incorporating contemporary technologies - such as audio-visual recording, digital platforms, and online educational resources - into *maqom* practice and dissemination can attract young audiences and foster innovative approaches to teaching and performance.

In conclusion, preserving the uniqueness and intrinsic value of *maqom* requires the development of modern, scientifically grounded, and practically effective strategies. The reforms and initiatives led by the President have created substantial opportunities for advancing Uzbek *maqom* art. Nonetheless, continuous research and practical efforts remain vital to resolving ongoing challenges and ensuring *maqom* attains deserved international recognition. This ongoing process will not only safeguard the heritage of the Uzbek people but also introduce this profound musical tradition to the global cultural community.

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