

The Art of Music: A Priceless Treasure of Human Spirituality and Aesthetic Perception

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ABSTRACT

Music holds a unique and vital place in the cultural and historical fabric of Uzbekistan. Among its diverse traditions, maqom and folk music stand out as two deeply intertwined and mutually enriching art forms. These genres not only reflect the rich musical heritage of the region but also embody the collective memory, values, and identity of the Uzbek people. The development of maqom and folk music over centuries illustrates the dynamic interplay between formal court music and the vibrant traditions of the common people. This article explores the historical evolution, aesthetic characteristics, and performance traditions of these two significant streams of Uzbek music, highlighting their role in shaping national culture and sustaining the spiritual essence of the community. Through this examination, we gain a deeper understanding of how music serves as both an artistic expression and a vital conduit of cultural continuity in Uzbekistan.

KEYWORDS: uzbek music, maqom tradition, traditional music, cultural heritage of Uzbekistan, court music and folk culture, musical aesthetics, performance traditions, spiritual heritage, cultural continuity.

INTRODUCTION

The art of music represents an invaluable asset of human spirituality and aesthetic worldview. This form of art awakens a desire for beauty and sensitivity within the human heart, while simultaneously enriching one's emotional world. Music penetrates deeply into the inner being of a person, stirring the soul and uplifting the spirit. It is a captivating realm that conquers both the heart and the mind, guiding humanity toward spiritual purification. For this reason, every individual should strive to understand, appreciate, and express aesthetic beauty in their personal and professional life.

The role of music in human life is immeasurable. It inspires moral integrity, adherence to ethical norms, and encourages individuals to evolve into culturally and intellectually mature personalities. Today, the music festivals, traditional ceremonies, national events, and local celebrations held in Uzbekistan serve as vivid reflections of our people's historical, social, and cultural progress. Through these events, the ethnopsychological characteristics of the Uzbek people, along with the customs, beliefs, and life experiences shaped over centuries, are passed down from generation to generation.

Music is not merely an art form; it is an embodiment of a nation's historical memory, cultural heritage, and philosophical worldview. Therefore, through our musical culture, the younger generation is nurtured in love for the Motherland, mutual respect, high moral values, spiritual maturity, and refined aesthetic taste.

In the years since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has paid special attention to the development of its education system, particularly music education. During this period, a number of important regulatory and legal documents have been adopted in the field of music, and practical efforts have been undertaken to advance music education. The state policy has outlined the use of culture and the arts—especially music—as a powerful tool in the moral and spiritual upbringing of the younger generation. In order to ensure continuity in music

education at the preschool, general secondary, specialized, and higher levels, various curricula, textbooks, and methodological guidelines have been developed.

The musical culture of the Uzbek people is deeply rooted in history, having taken shape and developed over many centuries. In the region between the two rivers—the ancient land of Mawarannahr—the civilization that emerged gave rise to a rich tapestry of musical traditions. These include classical music, professional traditional performance, the art of composition, and folklore music rooted in oral creativity. These forms evolved in harmony, complementing one another over time. Each musical direction possesses its own stylistic characteristics, reflecting the spiritual worldview and everyday life of the people. This very musical heritage continues to serve today as one of the key pillars of our spiritual culture.

The formation of musical culture in the land of Great Turan dates back to ancient times. Prominent scholars and intellectuals of the Eastern world—such as Muhammad al-Khwarizmi, Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Ahmad al-Fergani, Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna), Mirzo Ulugbek, Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, and many others—made invaluable contributions to the development of music by authoring scientific treatises on the subject. In their works, they elaborated on the theoretical foundations of music, performance art, the structure of musical instruments, performance techniques, and the laws and principles of musical artistry.

The invention and refinement of musical instruments played a crucial role in the formation and development of this musical legacy. String, percussion, and wind instruments such as the *tanbur*, *rubab*, *nay*, *chang*, *surmay*, *karnay*, *qobiz*, and others were widely used in both folk creativity and professional performance. The literary scholar N. Mallayev, in his work *The History of Uzbek Literature*, emphasizes the close and organic relationship between music and literary art. During the 10th to 12th centuries, these instruments became widespread and, in harmony with literature, contributed to the creation of some of the finest examples of national culture.

In conclusion, music is not merely an art form - it is an inseparable part of a nation's historical memory, spiritual wealth, and national identity. Through music, the human soul is nurtured, and one's moral and spiritual world is refined. Therefore, the comprehensive study of national musical heritage, its transmission to younger generations, and the development of music education remain among the most pressing tasks of our time.

The period spanning the late 17th to the early 19th century marked a significant turning point in the development of musical culture in Uzbekistan. During this time, the mutual influence between *maqom* (classical modal music) and folk music became deeply rooted and highly productive. This era represents a distinctive phase in musical evolution, in which both traditions enriched and shaped each other, expanding the means of musical expression.

Regrettably, the complex musical processes of this period were not thoroughly analyzed from a scholarly perspective, and few comprehensive works were produced. This can largely be attributed to the political instability and fragmentation of the state structure at the time. Due to the feudal disunity, the once-unified territory was divided into independent khanates such as Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand. The political and cultural autonomy of these khanates led to the emergence of strong local characteristics in the field of music as well.

Each khanate fostered its own unique cultural environment and artistic schools. Musical instruments, performance styles, melodies, and vocal traditions began to take on distinct regional forms. Even the *maqom* tradition came to be expressed differently in each khanate, enriched with new elements and innovations. At the same time, performers made great efforts to preserve existing musical traditions and uphold the fundamental principles of *maqom*. As a result, despite regional variations, the unity of the *maqom* art form was largely maintained across the territory.

In the art of performance, individual interpretation played a vital role. Each musician, when performing *maqom*, infused the music with their own emotions, experience, and artistic mastery, introducing unique and innovative elements. Particularly notable during this period was the dominance of oral tradition in musical transmission, which became a defining feature of the era's music. Through this method, melodies, *maqoms*, and compositions were passed down from generation to generation orally and preserved in the collective memory of the people. Oral creativity not only ensured the continuity of musical heritage but also played a crucial role in the dissemination and enrichment of music across different regions.

In each khanate territory, new genres and forms of folk music emerged. This creative process was deeply inspired by the people's everyday lives, customs, celebrations, and cultural performances. Festive melodies, musical pieces composed for public spectacles (such as performances featuring tightrope walkers or puppet shows), and newly developed dance tunes were particularly distinguished by their liveliness and spirited character. These musical forms vividly reflected the cheerful disposition of the Uzbek people, their optimistic outlook on life, and their deep affection for musical creativity.

METHODS

Between the 17th and 19th centuries, a variety of genres and styles took shape within Uzbek music, laying a rich cultural foundation for future generations. Complex musical forms such as *Katta Ashula*, *Katta O'yin*, *Shodiyona*, *Navro'z*, *Mavrigiy*, *Shashmaqom*, and *Chor Maqom* emerged during this period. Among these, *Shashmaqom* stands out for its extensive structure, artistic depth, and aesthetic sophistication. Each regional school of performance developed distinctive ensembles based on the local availability of instruments and musical styles. Traditional instruments such as the *ghijjak*, *dutor*, *chang*, *nay*, *qoshnay*, and *doira* formed the core of these ensembles.

The art of *Shashmaqom* deserves special attention. According to musicologist I. Rajabov, *Shashmaqom* consists of six principal modal systems (*maqoms*), each comprising instrumental sections known as *mushkilot* and vocal sections known as *nasr*. These six *maqoms*—*Rost*, *Buzruk*, *Navo*, *Dugoh*, *Segoh*, and *Iroq*—encompass between 20 and 40 musical parts of varying length and complexity. In total, the *Shashmaqom* repertoire includes approximately 250 musical components, and a single *maqom* performance could last several hours. The intricacy and refinement of this musical structure justify its recognition as one of the greatest achievements of Eastern musical heritage.

Uzbek folk instrumental performance is closely intertwined with the oral traditions and literary heritage of the people. This creative unity not only ensured the preservation of music but also contributed to its aesthetic and artistic elevation. Folk melodies were often performed in conjunction with *dastans* (epic tales), poetry, or theatrical performances, creating a multidimensional artistic experience.

In conclusion, the period between the 17th and 19th centuries represents a particularly significant era in the history of Uzbek music. The productive fusion of *maqom* and folk music, the emergence of new genres, and the enrichment of musical instruments and performance schools distinguish this period as a formative phase. The musical legacy established during these centuries continues to hold its cultural and artistic value today and remains a source of inspiration for contemporary artists.

Our understanding of folk instruments and their historical development is often enriched through literary sources and visual art. For instance, ancient manuscripts and miniature paintings provide detailed depictions of musicians, their stylistic postures, the manner in which instruments were held, and their attire, offering valuable insights into the musical culture of the time. Prominent poets and writers -such as Ferdowsi, Sa'di, Navoi, and Dehlavi - mention more than 60 traditional musical instruments in their works, highlighting their significance in the broader landscape of artistic expression.

Maqom compositions were traditionally performed in courtly settings, during special ceremonies, or at artistic

celebrations, and at times took the form of competitions among master performers. The close relationship between *maqom* and folk music is particularly evident in the comprehensive and structured format of *maqom*. Traditionally, each *maqom* consists of two principal parts: the *mushkilot*, an instrumental section, and the *nasr*, a vocal section. The *nasr* component often included dance melodies, reflecting the organic connection between music and the performing arts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout history, Uzbek musicians sought to develop unique notation systems to record musical sounds. In this field, Pahlavon Niyoz Mirzaboshi—also known as Komil Khorezmi - played a pivotal role. During his travels abroad, he observed musicians performing using Western musical notation and was deeply impressed. Upon returning home, he began transcribing Uzbek *maqoms*. His student, the renowned instrumentalist and calligrapher Muhammad Yoqub Kharratov (1867–1939), made significant contributions to this endeavor. A master of the *ghijjak*, he deeply mastered the art of instrumental performance, was active in the court ensemble, and took part in the documentation of *maqom* music.

Another key figure in the development of Khorezm's musical culture was Niyozkhoja Hoji. After traveling to Bukhara and studying *Shashmaqom* in depth, he introduced it to Khorezm, facilitating the widespread dissemination of Bukharan *maqoms* in Khiva. Prominent musicians such as Muhammadrahim Feruz, Komil Khorezmi, and Mirzo Muhammadrasul Niyozkhoja enriched these *maqoms* with new instrumental sections, expanding their artistic and stylistic scope.

In the second half of the 19th century, the city of Kokand emerged as a major musical center, home to many prominent instrumentalists. Under the leadership of Usta Khudoyberdi, a professional school of performance was established in Kokand.

One of the most influential *maqom* performers of his time was Ota Jaloliddin Nosirov (1845–1928). In addition to being a distinguished performer, he was a respected pedagogue. He received his initial musical education from his parents and later served as the permanent director of a folk instrumental ensemble at the courts of Amir Olimkhan, Amir Muzaffarkhan, and Amir Otajon. Another significant figure, Ota Ghiyas Abdughani (1858–1924), was celebrated for his mastery of the *mushkilot* section of *Shashmaqom*, performing each *maqom* in a unique and highly refined style. Meanwhile, Khoji Abdulaziz Rasulov (1852–1936) earned renown as a performer of both Uzbek and Tajik music and was recognized for his deep understanding of *Shashmaqom*.

Following the 1917 revolution, a new chapter was opened in the history of Uzbek musical art. Significant achievements were made in the areas of music education, performance, and folklore research. The establishment of the Turkestan People's Conservatory in Tashkent in 1918, along with its branches in Samarkand, Fergana, and Bukhara, laid the foundation for the study of traditional Uzbek folk instruments. These institutions became the first centers of instruction in elementary music theory, instrumental performance, and the history of folk music.

Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy made an invaluable contribution to the development of Uzbek music. His efforts played a key role in continuing traditional music created by folk musicians in a modernized form. In 1919, Shorahim Shoumarov founded a folk instrumental ensemble in Tashkent, which would later evolve into the foundation for the Tashkent Music Technical School.

During the 1930s, music ensembles began to be established in rural areas as well. Folk instrumental ensembles were formed in the Fergana, Andijan, and Samarkand regions. These groups were led by experienced musicians who trained the younger generation in the secrets of the art. In 1936, the renowned artist Qori Yoqubov founded the State Philharmonic Society and was appointed its first director.

Yunus Rajabiy (1897–1976) played a crucial role in collecting, arranging, and promoting the rich heritage of

Uzbek folk music. He formed a national ensemble composed of 12 vocalists and instrumentalists, whose repertoire included both traditional and contemporary musical works. The activities of the Tashkent Conservatory were instrumental in the advancement of Uzbek folk instrumental performance. Particularly after 1948, the conservatory began offering formal, professional education in folk instrumental music.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, folk instruments and the *maqom* tradition constitute an inseparable, ancient, and invaluable part of Uzbek national music. Preserved through centuries of oral tradition, performance schools, and the master-apprentice system, these musical forms continue to serve as a source of inspiration for contemporary musicians. These historical developments have played a critical role in the evolution of national culture, the emergence of professional artists, and the international recognition of Uzbek music.

This article has provided an in-depth analysis of the two principal branches of Uzbek musical culture-*maqom* art and folk music-exploring their historical evolution, aesthetic characteristics, and performance traditions. Over centuries, *maqom* art has developed across the territory of Uzbekistan through a synthesis of folk creativity, ancient musical practices, and interregional exchanges. In turn, folk music has remained closely intertwined with *maqom* performance, giving rise to region-specific musical styles, instruments, and performance techniques.

During the 17th to 19th centuries, the formation of independent khanates led to the geographical diversification of musical schools. However, this differentiation did not fragment the musical tradition; rather, it enriched and expanded it in diverse and vibrant forms. The khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand each established their own musical schools, allowing *maqom* art to evolve uniquely in each region. The *Shashmaqom* system, as the highest expression of the *maqom* tradition, not only flourished in Bukhara but also spread to other regions, integrating with local folk creativity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Traditional instruments such as the *dutor*, *ghijjak*, *chang*, *nay*, *doira*, and others served not only as the foundation for *maqom* performance but also as aesthetic tools that conveyed the spiritual state of the people. Thanks to generations of master musicians and the enduring master-apprentice tradition, this rich musical heritage has been preserved and passed down to the present day. From the latter half of the 19th century onward, the documentation, notation, and academic study of these musical traditions provided a new foundation for their systematic preservation and development.

The early 20th century marked a turning point in Uzbek musical culture with the establishment of formal music education systems-including the Turkestan People's Conservatory, music technical schools, and performing ensembles. Devoted artists and scholars such as Yunus Rajabiy and Hamza Hakimzoda Niyoziy made historical contributions to this field, laying the groundwork for the academic institutionalization and modern evolution of Uzbek music.

Therefore, the inseparable connection between *maqom* and folk music should be regarded not merely as a musical phenomenon, but as a profound expression of national culture, history, and the spirit of the people. These art forms embody the spiritual, moral, and aesthetic values of our nation, representing a sacred heritage that must be preserved, nurtured, and transmitted to future generations.

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