

REGIONAL DUTOR TRADITIONS OF UZBEKISTAN FERGANA, BUKHARA, AND KHOREZM

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Abstract

This study examines the regional differentiation of dutor performance traditions in Uzbekistan by conducting a systematic comparative analysis of the Fergana, Bukhara, and Khorezm schools. Through the evaluation of stylistic parameters, performance techniques, repertoire sources, and transmission mechanisms, the article identifies both shared structural foundations and distinctive regional characteristics. The findings demonstrate that, although the three schools originate from a common national musical framework, each has developed unique aesthetic priorities and technical principles shaped by historical, cultural, and socio-musical factors. The research emphasizes the necessity of further documentation, pedagogical standardization, and preservation strategies to ensure the continuity of this orally transmitted musical heritage.

Keywords: Dutor performance, regional musical traditions, Fergana school, Bukhara school, Khorezm school, maqom system, oral transmission, musical heritage.

Introduction

The dutor, a two-stringed long-necked lute, occupies a central position within the system of Uzbek traditional musical instruments and represents one of the most historically stable components of the region's oral-professional performance culture. Scholarly sources indicate that the regional differentiation of dutor performance emerged over an extended historical period, during which musical practice was transmitted primarily through the master–apprentice (ustoz–shogird) system rather than through formalized written instruction. As a result of this gradual and largely organic process of cultural formation, three principal performance schools—Fergana, Bukhara, and Khorezm—have been recognized as constituting the core typology of dutor traditions in present-day Uzbekistan.

The purpose of this research is to provide a detailed analytical description of the stylistic characteristics of these schools and to determine their respective roles within the broader context of national musical heritage. By synthesizing available ethnomusicological observations and existing performance practices, the study seeks to demonstrate how regional variation contributes not only to the artistic diversity of dutor performance, but also to the preservation of cultural identity.



The Fergana school is characterized by lyrical melodic structures that rely on smooth contour development, controlled dynamic shaping, and a refined timbral palette. Rather than emphasizing heightened rhythmic intensity or abrupt articulation, the performance aesthetic prioritizes gradual melodic expansion and subtle ornamentation. These features collectively produce a relatively soft and introspective sound, which distinguishes the Fergana style from the more assertive tone production found in other regions.

From a technical perspective, the Fergana school demonstrates a preference for finger-based tone production that minimizes percussive impact and instead focuses on sustained resonance. The rhythmic flow tends to be flexible rather than strictly metric, allowing performers to adjust phrasing according to the expressive needs of the melody. Furthermore, dynamic progression is typically realized through incremental increases rather than sudden contrasts, which reinforces the school's overall aesthetic coherence.

The repertoire associated with the Fergana school draws primarily from the Fergana–Tashkent maqom tradition, supplemented by lyrical folk song material and improvisational practices. Because the transmission process remains predominantly oral, variations in melodic interpretation are common; however, these variations occur within culturally accepted boundaries that maintain stylistic continuity across generations.

The Bukhara school exhibits a markedly different stylistic profile, defined by close alignment with the maqom modal system and by the use of chamber-like (*kamer*) musical expression. Unlike the flexible rhythmic treatment characteristic of the Fergana school, the Bukhara tradition employs a more regulated and structurally disciplined rhythmic organization. The resulting sound is less lyrical and more contemplative, reflecting the philosophical and historical depth of the region's musical heritage.

Tone production within the Bukhara school is directed toward achieving deep resonance and intonational precision. Tempi are generally moderate and stable, leaving limited space for spontaneous fluctuation. Performers prioritize clarity of articulation and adherence to established interpretive norms, which reduces the degree of improvisational freedom but enhances the uniformity of stylistic presentation.

The repertoire basis of the Bukhara school is rooted in the Bukhara–Samarkand maqom tradition, with additional layers derived from religious-educational musical practices and ceremonial performance contexts. These connections underscore the school's strong orientation toward classical rather than folkloric musical structures.

In contrast to both the Fergana and Bukhara schools, the Khorezm tradition is distinguished by its pronounced expressivity, energetic rhythmic drive, and frequent association with dance-derived melodic patterns. The timbre is typically bright and sharply projected, contributing to an overall sonic profile that is both vivid and highly extroverted.

Technically, the Khorezm school employs strong striking gestures and rapid tempi, resulting in performance that is often characterized by virtuosic display. Improvisational freedom is significantly greater than in the Bukhara school, and performers frequently expand melodic material through spontaneous variation, thereby reinforcing the dynamic and celebratory nature of the style.



The repertoire originates from Khorezm folk traditions, including dance genres such as the well-known lazgi, as well as elements of oral-professional creativity. These influences collectively contribute to the school's distinct rhythmic and expressive identity.

A comparative evaluation reveals that, although the three schools are unified by their reliance on oral transmission and their shared role in national cultural identity, they diverge significantly with respect to melodic development, rhythmic organization, timbral production, and the degree of improvisational flexibility. The Fergana school emphasizes lyrical expressiveness and subtle articulation; the Bukhara school prioritizes structural discipline and maqom-based interpretation; and the Khorezm school foregrounds rhythmic intensity and virtuosic spontaneity. These distinctions demonstrate that regional variation within a single instrumental tradition can function as a mechanism for sustaining artistic diversity while maintaining cultural coherence.

The analysis indicates several critical challenges affecting the sustainability of regional dutor traditions, including insufficient notation and documentation, the absence of standardized pedagogical frameworks within formal educational institutions, and the gradual decrease in active practitioners capable of transmitting authentic regional performance practices. Furthermore, the limited availability of digitized archival materials creates obstacles to long-term preservation and scholarly accessibility. Addressing these issues requires the development of comprehensive recording initiatives, curriculum integration within conservatories, and coordinated cultural policies aimed at safeguarding intangible musical heritage.

Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that the Fergana, Bukhara, and Khorezm schools represent independent yet interrelated branches of Uzbekistan's dutor performance tradition. Their continued study, methodological integration, and preservation are essential not only for maintaining national musical diversity but also for ensuring the transmission of culturally significant knowledge to future generations. As such, the regional differentiation of dutor performance should be regarded as an important subject of ongoing ethnomusicological research and cultural policy development.

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