

THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF VOICES IN TRADITIONAL SINGING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This article provides information about the various forms of traditional Uzbek music, which are distinguished by the highest examples of national performance style and vocal interpretation, the main criteria for pure timbre, expressive and perfect interpretation, wide range, unique volume and skill of the voice. In particular, the article discusses the Fergana-Tashkent traditions of Uzbek national vocal art, first of all, the qualitative characteristics of the voice of performers and methods of its use, the terms of their main types, divided into several categories.

Keywords: Fig'on, Giryra and Munojot, Nor ovoz, Tik ovoz (or sonorous voice), Jarangdor ko'krak ovoz, Kuyuk tik ovoz (or sonorous voice), Bo'zak ovoz (or fashionable voice), Pang ovoz, Ishkami ovoz.

Introduction

The Uzbek national musical art dates back to very ancient times. This can be clearly observed through national musical traditions, traditional musical instruments, and the high level of sophistication found in melodies and compositions. Within the sphere of musical performance, the traditional art of vocal performance occupies a particularly prominent place, possessing a broader scope and a certain predominance compared to other musical directions.

The beauty, enchantment, grandeur, and spiritual richness of music are fully revealed precisely through the interpretation of the vocalist. Moreover, the human voice is regarded as the primary source of all musical instruments. Throughout historical development, the human voice has served as a model for every work, invention, or musical instrument created by humankind. For this reason, the limitless possibilities, mysterious qualities, and countless expressive charms of the human voice continue to inspire profound admiration. In order to uncover these mysteries, numerous discoveries, experiments, and scientific as well as popular research studies have been conducted. This process continues to evolve in the modern era, with ongoing research in many directions, which is indeed a positive and encouraging development.

In Uzbek music, the traditional art of singing is expressed through a variety of forms distinguished by the highest examples of national performance style and vocal interpretation. Each of these forms embodies an entire system and tradition, within which all elements hold important and meaningful roles. The purity of vocal timbre, expressive and refined interpretation, wide vocal range, distinctive volume, and artistic mastery constitute the principal criteria. Such qualities can only be achieved through systematic education, profound knowledge, perseverance, and sustained practical training.



Throughout life, song accompanies human beings, becoming both a source of consolation and a means of moral guidance. The immortal spiritual power of music and song leads people toward life and virtue. When instrumental music sounds, vitality awakens within the human body: it manifests in the movements of the hands, feet, body, facial expression, appearance, and most importantly, in the voice. From this perspective, it can be concluded that a person conveys certain beliefs and sacred ideals to oneself and to others through powerful words and beautiful melodies, thereby inspiring them. As expressed in folk wisdom: “If God grants someone a beautiful voice, half of the kingdom is already his.” [1]

The timbre of the voice is closely related to the physical structure of a person. For example, singers with relatively large mouths, broad chests, and proportionally shaped noses often possess particularly resonant and multifaceted voices, enabling them to achieve high vocal performance without significant difficulty. In addition, the development and capacity of the lungs play an important role in the formation of a light and pure vocal tone.

Natural climatic conditions and physical constitution also exert a significant influence on vocal performers. Therefore, during international tours, performers sometimes encounter vocal difficulties—their voices may become unstable or weakened. However, the opposite may also occur: in some cases, the voice opens up more brightly abroad than it does at home. Such performance outcomes are influenced by the performer’s mood, adequate rest, breathing clean air, and even dietary habits. A decline in mood can negatively affect performance. Preparation for appearing on stage requires the elevation of the singer’s emotional state, as the performer’s feelings are directly transmitted to the audience.

Traditional vocal art relies on a number of continuously developing factors: the thorough mastery of melody and poetic text, the full realization of the performance concept, and the precise expression of ornamental vocal techniques. Among the primary tasks for masters of the art are the preservation of national color in the timbre and sound of the voice, the incorporation of musical ornamentation, and the comprehensive as well as comparative analysis of performance-creative, scientific, and theoretical aspects. To deeply study, analyze, and understand the essence of performance, innovative methods are required, including audio recordings and, of course, live master classes conducted by experienced mentors.

Among master performers, particular recognition is given to the qualities of naturalness and sincerity required for the performance of traditional songs. In earlier times, before performing, singers would undergo both spiritual and physical purification and engage in two days of devotional practice. The People’s Hafiz of Uzbekistan, Quvondiq Iskandarov, once emphasized the following about the profession of singing: “A singer’s throat, lungs, and stomach must be pure.” This statement highlights the necessity of teaching aspiring vocalists to exercise caution in their lifestyle and to avoid foods considered harmful or inappropriate.

In order to strengthen the memory and intellectual development of their students, master teachers traditionally placed special emphasis on memorizing refined poetic verses by renowned poets. The late People’s Artist of Uzbekistan, Hojixon Boltaev, repeatedly stressed this requirement, stating: “A singer should know at least one thousand, and preferably one and a half thousand verses.” This practice reflects the deep interconnection between poetry and vocal artistry within the tradition of Uzbek classical singing.



It is well known that the names of musical tones in Western music originate from the first syllables of sacred words. In this regard, it would be appropriate to make use of the names of maqoms in our native language. In my view:

«Ro» - The first two letters of a maqom signify growth and truth, embodying the very essence of reality.

“‘Mu’ — the first syllable of the word Muhayyor, meaning ‘to be amazed.’

‘Na’ — the first syllable of Navo, the name of the third maqom.

‘Cho’ — the first two sounds of Chorg‘o‘d, which occupies the fourth position in the Tashkent–Fergana and Khorezm–Bukhara traditions.

‘Se’ — the first syllable of Segox, the name of one of the maqoms.

‘Xo’ — the first syllable of Xoro, a branch of the Segox maqom.

‘La’ — used in Tarona, referring to maqom-based melodies.” [2]

Al-Farabi distinguished between two types of sound in music. The first is the natural voice, produced by the human throat, whose uniqueness lies in the fact that every individual voice is distinct; in the world, there are as many different voices as there are people. This type of voice possesses characteristics of variation, development, and impermanence.

The second type of sound originates from musical instruments, which are artificially designed to imitate the human voice and exhibit certain similarities among themselves: for example, the sound of tanburs resembles that of other tanburs, the sound of surnays resembles other surnays, and violins share similarities within their category. These instrumental sounds tend to be more stable and long-lasting compared to the human voice.

The human voice surpasses man-made instruments in significance because natural existence is primary, while artificial creation is secondary. Therefore, the voice is recognized as a natural musical instrument, while other instruments are created to imitate it.

Special attention must be given to melism. Melism (from the Greek, meaning “song” or “melody”) refers to a collection of tonal ornaments that embellish a melody without disrupting its tempo or rhythm. These are represented in musical notation through special symbols or small notes. Melism, in combination with glides and passing tones, also carries the distinctive timbre of each musical segment. Within the system of maqom-based singing, melism holds a central role and follows its own particular rules.

As the Uzbek art master Yusufjon Shakarjonov once observed: “If we compare Uzbek art to a tree, its roots lie in Khorezm, its trunk in Bukhara and Samarkand, its branches in the Fergana Valley, and it blooms in Tashkent.” The voices of Bukhara performers are comparable to those of Khorezm singers in terms of depth and weight, exhibiting expressive melancholy and charm in the lower registers. Singers from the Olot and Qorako‘l districts of Bukhara also demonstrate qualities characteristic of the Khorezm region. Meanwhile, the Samarkand schools are distinguished by the prominence of glides and passing tones and the fullness of their high-register vocal performance.

It can be said that the performance schools of the valleys reflect the entire musical cosmos. Here, monotonous or dull intonation is absent; the voice naturally resonates with shades of lament. During performance, singers are capable of astonishing audiences and inducing a state of ecstasy. Consequently, their repertoires are rich in emotive works such as Figon, Girya, and



Munojot. Even joyful dance melodies are interpreted with unique expressions of sorrow and melancholy, and these compositions cannot be performed in any other manner. When examining the Fergana–Tashkent traditions of Uzbek national vocal art, primary attention is given to the qualitative characteristics of performers’ voices and the techniques used in their application. This approach allows for the categorization of singers into several types. The main categories are defined by the following terms: [3]

“Nor voice”

“Tik voice” (or “resonant voice”)

“Resonant quvrak voice”

“Deep tik voice” (or “non-resonant voice”)

“Bozak voice” (or “fashionable voice”)

“Pang voice”

“Ishkami voice”

« The “Nor voice” (translated as “smooth voice”) is distinguished by a wide vocal range and rich tonal power. Regardless of its span from the lower to upper registers, this type of voice is characterized by a soft, delicate, and flexible timbre. Typically, performers with this voice type cannot reach extremely high notes. In terms of notation, its range can be represented approximately from the base note up to the first octave, and in some cases extending to the third octave. Achieving higher registers beyond the “Nor voice” is challenging.

Among the prominent representatives of the “Nor voice” are renowned Uzbek hafizes such as Umrzoq Polvon Saydali, O’rtiqxo’ja Imomxo’jayev, Abdulla Taroq Fayzullayev, Jumavov Polvon, and Sayidxon To’ram.

Additionally, the “Nor voice” is notable for the pleasant resonance produced within the oral cavity. It enables expressive and confident performance of folk and composed songs, yalla dances, large-scale compositions, and maqom sequences. In performing major compositions, typically two or three singers participate, with the “Nor voice” performer initiating the part, followed sequentially by the others, ultimately concluding the piece in a choral ensemble.

The “Tik voice” (or “resonant voice”) is primarily associated with the Fergana–Tashkent local style and holds a special role in the interpretation of various songs, particularly larger-scale compositions. Traditionally, a singer without a true “Tik voice” was not considered a complete vocalist. Some musicians, it is known, even performed songs on stringed instruments such as the dutor or tanbur. The “Tik voice” allows comfortable reach to the re and mi notes of the third octave. Notable hafizes with this voice type include Berkinboy Fayziev, Komiljon Qurmonov, Turg’un Novcha, Mulla Kenja Xoliqov, Mirzaolim, Abdurayim Qori, Musajon aka, as well as Foziljon and Ikromiddin. These masters perfected both maqom sequences and large-scale song performance.

The characteristics of the resonant chest voice (“Jarangdor ko’krak ovz”)

Among Uzbek singers, the resonant chest voice type is widespread. This voice retains its power and richness across both lower and upper registers, and due to its resonance and clarity, it can be easily distinguished even in public performances. The upper register can reach high notes, up to the do of the third octave, while the lower register produces a smooth and clear tone. The



voice often features playful inflections, melismatic ornamentation, and expanded pitch variations. Notable singers of this type include Ma'murjon Uzoqov, Akbar Xaydarov, Rasul Qori Mamadaliyev, Komiljon Xamroqulov, and Zokirjon To'rayev.

The “Deep Tik Voice” (or “non-resonant voice”)

The “Deep Tik Voice” is primarily characteristic of senior singers, allowing them to reach the highest registers of a song. It is heard with less resonance: while the lower range may be somewhat indistinct, the middle register projects clearly. With the development of the performance, the upper registers can extend to the third octave mi, fa, and even fa-sharp. Prominent representatives of this voice type include Jo'raxon Sultonov, Abbos Qori, Xaydarali Hikmatov, Xudoyberdi Qori, Nabijon Saidnazarov, Muyiddinxoji Alixujayev, Mannon Qori, Mamatxo'ja Eshon, and Nazir Polvon.

The “Xasta Ishkami Voice”

Among Uzbek singers, the “Xasta Ishkami” voice type—characterized by a plaintive, lamenting quality—is also fairly common. This voice does not fully occupy the upper registers, yet it stands out for its expressiveness and emotional depth. It sounds as if conveying a tone of complaint or heartfelt lament, which evokes a strong emotional response and creates a profound impression on listeners. However, in both the lower and upper registers, it is relatively weak in terms of resonance.

In Tashkent, numerous independent schools of vocal performance are recognized, where the mournful tonal qualities and intonation of this voice type dominate, shaping the overall vocal style. Tashkent singers often place less emphasis on the vocal qualities themselves and more on precise articulation of words, with their repertoires primarily featuring advisory or didactic songs.

In vocal art, it is important to account for the natural diversity of voice characteristics, including timbre, vibrato, strength, range, expressiveness, and the possibilities of their application. Historically, literate musicians used specific terms and expressions to classify, categorize, and professionally evaluate voices. While many of these concepts were transmitted orally, they were actively applied in practical and scholarly contexts. However, in the modern music education system of the republic, much of this earlier knowledge is no longer applied in practice. Although academic vocal types are clearly defined, the nuances of Uzbek national song performance remain largely indistinct to a broader audience. Moreover, the achievements of traditional “master–student” schools in ensemble performance are often omitted from collective memory. [4]

In conclusion, effective use of the diverse characteristics of voice types within the maqom system can enhance performance. Leveraging their expressive capabilities strengthens the beauty of Uzbek singing and contributes to the continued refinement and advancement of national maqom performance. [5]



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