

# Uzbek national ensembles: traditions and modernity

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**Abstract:** Uzbek national ensembles represent a unique synthesis of traditional musical heritage and contemporary artistic trends. Rooted in the rich history of Uzbek musical culture, these ensembles embody the essence of folk and classical music, incorporating various instruments, vocal styles, and performance techniques. This article explores the historical evolution of Uzbek national ensembles, their role in preserving cultural identity, and the impact of modernization on their artistic expression. It highlights the ways in which traditional musical elements are adapted to contemporary performance settings, ensuring their relevance in the globalized world. Additionally, the study examines the influence of technological advancements, new educational approaches, and international collaborations on the development of Uzbek national ensembles. The research emphasizes the importance of maintaining the authenticity of traditional music while embracing modern innovations to ensure its sustainability for future generations.

**Keywords:** International music festivals, Musical ensembles, Classical music, Performing arts, Singing and dance ensembles, Dutar players' ensemble, Nay, chang, gijjak, tanbur, Uzbek State Philharmonic, Maqom musicians' ensemble, National and contemporary ensembles, Television and radio company, Folk musical instruments, Masters of art, Culture houses, Uzbek musical heritage.

**Introduction:** The emergence of instrumental ensembles is closely connected with the rich and diverse traditions of Uzbek music. Uzbek musical instruments, including the rubab, dutar, tanbur, saz, nay, doira, gijjak, and other folk instruments, have a long history. In fact, instrumental music plays a crucial role in the ancient forms of Uzbek folk music, including maqoms, dastgahs, and various modern songs. Historical sources mention that culture and art in Central Asia have been highly developed since ancient times. This is clearly reflected in archaeological finds in various regions of our country, where artistic monuments provide evidence of this rich cultural heritage. Some of these artifacts even depict early examples of ensemble performances, proving that group music-making existed as early as those times. Musical instruments were traditionally made from reeds, bamboo, wood, stone, bone, metal, leather, silk, coconut shells, gourds, and other natural materials. Historical records indicate that Uzbek folk instrumental ensembles performed songs and dances during public celebrations and cultural events. Cultural monuments, visual arts, wall paintings, ceramic figurines, and

various miniatures from as early as the 7th century AD provide evidence of the existence of two main types of ensembles: wind and percussion instruments, as well as plucked string instruments played with a plectrum. Discussions on ensemble-related issues in music have been presented in various ways in the treatises of scholars and musicologists such as Farabi, Maraghi, Kavkavi, Darvesh Ali Changi, and, in more recent years, Fitrat. Historical sources provide specific information about certain directions in the art of music based on concrete evidence. Although the concepts of group performance and ensemble are not explicitly mentioned, the development of life and performance traditions, as well as the practice of collective musical execution, indicate that they were common practices. For instance, in the 17th-century treatise of Darvesh Ali Changi, it is stated: "Darvesh Ali learned the basics of music from his father, Mirzo Ali Changi. Later, he studied the principles of musicianship and ethical, humanistic virtues from renowned musicians who preceded him, such as Khujandi Ja'far Qonuniy, Ali Dust Nayi, Hasan Kavkavi, Hafiz Mahmud, and Hafiz Miraq Ibn Majruhi."

The treatise by Changi also highlights that, during that era, many artisans actively participated in musical performance practices. Among them were tailor Boqi Dirziy, physician Poyanda Tabib, judge Abdulkarim Qozi, astrologer Boqi Shohidiy, Hafiz Qosim Bazzoz, and potter Pirmuhammad Kulollar, who were highly skilled in playing musical instruments. This suggests that musicians gathering together may have been an early form of ensemble performance.

By the 16th and 17th centuries, the cultural development in the regions of Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva, and Kokand had significantly advanced. Musical perspectives not only connected people more closely but also played a crucial role in the flourishing of music. Special musicians were assigned to perform for palace nobles, and a designated leader was appointed to oversee them. These court musicians were expected to strictly adhere to musical laws and traditions while remaining obedient to their appointed leader.

Historical information about musical instruments can be found in works such as "The Great Book of Music" (Kitab al-Musiqā al-Kabir) by Farabi (873-950), "The Book of Healing" (Kitab al-Shifa) by Abu Ali Ibn Sina (980-1037), "The Key to Knowledge" by Al-Khwarizmi (10th century), "The Book of Nobility" (Sharafiya Kitabi) by Sayfuddin Urmavi (1216-1294), and "A Treatise on Music" by Jami (1414-1492).

Sayfuddin Urmavi, who was born in the city of Urmia (present-day Azerbaijan), was a talented oud player, performer, and renowned musician. His greatest achievement was the development of a perfect system of musical modes (maqam). In the 17th century, the Bukharan musicologist Darvesh Ali provided detailed descriptions of musical instruments such as the tanbur, chang, qanun, rubab, qobiz, and gijjak in his treatise. The legacy of great Eastern scholars holds immense historical significance in the study of folk musical instruments.

One of the most important works in this field is "Kitab al-Musiqā al-Kabir" ("The Great Book of Music") by Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi. In this book, the medieval scholar categorizes musical performance into two types: reproduction of melodies using the human voice (singing) and through musical instruments. As a skilled performer, Farabi studied the role of musical instruments in social life, stating: "There are special musical instruments used in wars and battles, dances, wedding celebrations, entertainment gatherings, and love songs."

These insights and citations further illustrate that Uzbek musical heritage is deeply rooted in rich traditions and ancient history.

In the lives of Central Asian peoples, traditional public celebrations and festivals such as Navruz, Lola Sayli (Tulip Festival), Harvest Festival, Melon Festival, Grape

Festival, and Cotton Festival have long been accompanied by musical instruments such as karnay, surnay, doira, and nog'ora. These festivities also featured popular folk dances, including qosh o'yini (eyebrow dance), yelka o'yini (shoulder dance), and bosh o'yini (head dance). One of the distinctive art forms that emerged from these performances was Qarsak O'yin (Clapping Dance), a unique element of traditional performing arts. The Qarsak O'yin involved rhythmic clapping combined with synchronized movements, and historical records indicate that it had two main forms: Besh Qarsak (Five Claps) and Mayda Qarsak (Small Claps). Originating from ancient hunting and ritual dances, this tradition has evolved over centuries, becoming a refined cultural expression. To this day, Besh Qarsak and Mayda Qarsak dances are still performed in the mountainous and desert regions of Jizzakh (Forish), Surkhandarya (Sherobod), and Samarkand provinces.

Just as social life has evolved, ensemble performance arts have also progressed and diversified. Different instrumental ensemble combinations have been used in practice, such as:

- Chang, ud, doyra
- G'ijjak, ud, doyra
- Ud, chang, g'ijjak, nay, doyra

Chamber ensembles composed of tanbur and doira played an important role in performing Shashmaqom pieces and vocal maqom melodies. Large instrumental ensembles, featuring tanbur, dutor, rubob, gijjak (or qobiz), chang, nay, and qo'shnay (or bulaman), were essential for grand ceremonies and festive events.

At the beginning of the 20th century, as Uzbekistan underwent social transformations, perspectives on music also changed positively. The restructuring of communal labor in different regions of the republic influenced the development of collective musical performances.

During the 1920s and 1930s, instrumental ensembles began to form as a result of the growth of musical traditions, the merging of folk and academic music, and the establishment of musical institutions. With the founding of music and art schools, particularly in Tashkent, Uzbek instrumental music began to develop new forms and styles. This period saw the integration of traditional instruments into large orchestras and the creation of new musical genres.

Several factors influenced the evolution of instrumental ensembles. Initially, musical groups primarily performed folk music, maqom, and shashmaqom styles. However, over time, they embraced contemporary musical forms, including symphonic orchestras and pop music.

During the 1930s-1950s, Uzbek instrumental music was enriched by international influences and the expansion

of musical culture. Large orchestral ensembles emerged, incorporating external musical elements, especially from Russia and other regional traditions. This interaction broadened the range of performance techniques, introduced new instruments, and further advanced the technical and artistic quality of Uzbek instrumental ensembles.

After the 1950s, Uzbekistan began organizing international music festivals and competitions, which allowed Uzbek instrumental ensembles to gain global recognition. During this period, Uzbek music and instrumental ensembles spread worldwide, leading to the formation of unique musical genres and styles.

Adapting to the times, instrumental ensembles were gradually introduced in different regions, making it possible for musical traditions to evolve. One of the key ideas of this era was the establishment of leading instrumental ensembles within musical communities. The formation of such groups marked a new stage in Uzbek musical heritage. Each ensemble incorporated various musical instruments and was designed for mass performances. As a result, these ensembles' playing styles gained popularity among the public. The 1930s-1950s witnessed a significant advancement in the field of music, with notable and refined musicians emerging from different regions.

One such figure was Ro'zimatxon Isaboyev (1885–1964), an Honored Art Worker of the Uzbek SSR, a master musician, an exceptional folk instrumentalist, and a dedicated mentor and organizer. His ensemble included renowned musicians such as:

- G'ijjak players: Inomjon, Bahridin, Sharif Xoji
- Chang player: Mallavoy
- Tanbur player: Ergashvoy
- Surnay players: Toshmirza and others

During this time, significant efforts were made to systematically develop musical education in regional music schools.

In 1919, To'xtasin Jalilov led the establishment of a folk instrumental ensemble, which, by 1923, participated in the All-Russian Agricultural Trade Exhibition in Moscow, successfully showcasing Uzbek music. Following this achievement, a 24-member amateur music group was formed, further expanding musical performance traditions.

In 1927, the Maqomchilar Ensemble was founded under Uzbekistan Radio, bringing together virtuoso musicians dedicated to classical music. The ensemble included:

- Nay players: Dadaali Soatqulov, Saydali Kalonov
- Qo'shnay player: Hayrulla Ubaydullaev
- Chang players: Nig'matjon Do'stmuhamedov, Faxriddin Sodiqov
- Dutor players: Abdusoat Vahobov, Orif

Qosimov

- Tanbur players: Rixsi Rajabiy, Mahsudxo'ja Yusupov
- G'ijjak players: Imomjon Ikromov, Nabi Hasanov
- Doyra player: Dadaxo'ja Sottiho'jaev

Their primary goal was to preserve and perform masterpieces of classical music and contribute to the development of musical art.

From this period onward, a new era of ensemble performance began, marking a transformation in Uzbek folk performance traditions. Group performances became more structured, and ensemble music gained prominence, shaping the future of Uzbek instrumental art.

By the mid-1930s, literature and arts festivals were increasingly organized to strengthen interethnic friendship. As a result, large-scale song and dance ensembles began to emerge. These ensembles, often consisting of 20-30 performers, were designed to fill the stage and create a sense of grandeur in line with the ideology of the time. To achieve a more powerful sound, the number of musical instruments was increased, producing a rich and majestic symphony of sounds.

During this period, various song, dance, and dutar ensembles, as well as vocal and orchestral groups, were formed and actively contributed to the performance traditions of Uzbek music. Over time, these ensembles developed alongside other musical genres, expanding their repertoires and gaining public admiration. Before long, these ensembles secured their place among Uzbekistan's top musical groups, earning the recognition of music enthusiasts.

A notable development in this period was the founding of the Uzbek State Philharmonic in 1936, under the leadership of Muhiddin Qori Yoqubov (director) and To'xtasin Jalilov (musical director). Within the philharmonic:

- The "Ethnographic Unison Ensemble" was established with 98 musicians.
- A 30-member dutar ensemble of female performers was also formed.

These ensembles played a crucial role in preserving and promoting Uzbek musical traditions, blending national and modern musical styles while showcasing the talents of master musicians. Their long-standing artistic contributions significantly enriched Uzbek musical culture and ensured its broad promotion.

In 1939, several Uzbek musicians gained All-Union recognition in Moscow:

- Nay players: A. Ismoilov, A. Umrzoqov
- Chang player: F. Sodiqov

They were awarded second-degree diplomas at the All-Union Folk Instrumentalists' Competition.

Following this success, numerous professional music ensembles were established under the Uzbekistan Radio and Television, as well as in regional and district cultural centers, schools, and educational institutions. These ensembles, many of which continue to perform today, include:

- Yunus Rajabiy Maqomchilar Ensemble (Uzbek Television and Radio Company, led by Abduhoshim Ismoilov)
- "Bahor" Folk Dance Ensemble (led by Ma'mura Ergasheva)
- "Shodlik" Song and Dance Ensemble (Philharmonic, led by Qodir Mo'minov)
- "Tanovar" Ensemble (led by Yulduz Ismatova)
- "Lazgi" Song and Dance Ensemble (led by Raxmatjon Qurbonov)
- "Bulbulcha" Children's Ensemble (led by

Shermat Yormatov)

- "Parvoz" Ensemble (Aviasozlar Cultural Palace, led by Sharip Janaydarov)
- "Qaldirg'och" Ensemble (Bog'ot District, Khorezm, led by Shermat Fayzullayev)
- "Ayqulosh" Ensemble (Karakalpak State Philharmonic)
- "Zarafshon" Ensemble (Bukhara region)

These creative ensembles have significantly contributed to the growth of Uzbek musical arts, keeping folk traditions alive while innovating performance styles to meet modern musical demands.

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