

DIVERSITY OF GENRES IN UZBEK FOLKLORE ART

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Abstract

This article examines one of the ancient and deeply rooted genres of the Uzbek national musical heritage—folklore art—and its performance traditions. The study highlights the significant role of folklore within Uzbek oral creativity, exploring how its diverse genres have been shaped, transmitted, and preserved across generations. Particular attention is given to the historical sources that document the evolution of Uzbek folklore forms, as well as the cultural functions they have fulfilled in various social contexts. The article also reflects on the artistic, ritual, and communicative features of traditional genres such as *yalla*, *olan*, *lapar*, *terma*, and *aytim*, demonstrating their contribution to the broader cultural identity of the Uzbek people.

Keywords: folklore; yalla; olan; lapar; terma; aytim; oral tradition; Uzbek musical heritage

Introduction

National musical art serves as one of the fundamental means of educating the younger generation to become mature, well-rounded individuals. The enduring traditions that have reached us across centuries form the core of our national musical heritage—an invaluable repository of cultural values. Knowing the history, traditions, values, culture, and art of one’s nation is among the essential duties that stand before every individual. Over

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thousands of years, our ancestors created artistic masterpieces that have been preserved through time, and the distinctive beauty, uniqueness, stylistic richness, and expressive qualities of this musical heritage testify to its ancient origins and its role as an inexhaustible source of spiritual strength.

As part of the priceless legacy of Eastern peoples—particularly the Uzbek nation—musical culture, and especially national musical art, folk melodies and songs, and diverse forms of oral creativity hold a special place. Folk songs and melodies, *lapars*, *olans*, *yallas*, epics, and other oral traditions that have been performed among our people since ancient times constitute an irreplaceable spiritual treasury of our musical heritage. The education system associated with learning and transmitting this art form is grounded in oral tradition, which has contributed to the emergence of several regional styles across Uzbekistan and has played a significant role in the popularization and continuity of this cultural practice.

Since independence, significant reforms have been implemented to study folklore art, promote Uzbekistan’s rich musical culture to the world, revive and preserve rare examples of oral creativity that are gradually disappearing, and identify and support talented practitioners of this tradition. A number of important legislative documents have been adopted to advance these goals, including: the Presidential Resolution of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the Organization of the International Festival of Bakhshi Art” (PQ–3990, 1 November 2018) [1]; the Resolution “On Measures for the Further Development of Bakhshi Art” (PQ–4320, 14 May 2019); the Presidential Decree “On Measures for Organizing the International Handicraft Festival” (PF–5841, 3 October 2019); and the Decree “On Measures to Enhance the Role and Influence of Culture and Art in Public Life” (PF–6000, 26 May 2020).

Additionally, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted several resolutions, including: “On Measures to Organize the International Festival of Bakhshi Art” (No. 946, 22 November 2018), “On the Organization of the Musical Maqam Theatre in Margilan City under the Uzbek National Maqam Art Center” (No. 732, 5 September 2019), as well as the resolutions “On Measures to Organize the Activities of Cultural Centers” and “On Approval of Regulatory Documents Related to the Activities of Cultural Centers” (Nos. 263 and 264, 30 March 2019). These efforts, along with the

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organization of international festivals such as “Nurli Navolar,” “Ipak va Ziravorlar,” “Boysun Bahori,” “Raqs Sehri,” and “Buyuk Ipak Yo‘li,” as well as various competitions, scholarly meetings, masterclasses, conferences, publications, and radio and television programs, serve as clear examples of the active and practical work being carried out in the field of folklore art [2, p. 35].

Main Part

By the 1980s, growing attention toward ensembles dedicated to promoting folk creativity laid the foundation for the emergence and development of numerous folkloric groups. These ensembles began to study, preserve, and present on stage the traditional songs, melodies, dances, customs, and rituals that had survived within the regions where they operated [3, p. 6].

In Uzbek oral creativity, folklore art holds a distinct and significant place. Broad in meaning and content, it encompasses a variety of forms and types, including vocal and instrumental expressions of traditional performance. Initially created by talented individuals either solo or collectively, these forms later spread throughout the community and gradually became widely practiced. In this way, folk songs and melodies have been transmitted orally across many millennia, passed from generation to generation. However, because these traditions were preserved and taught orally, they underwent various transformations over time, giving rise to diverse musical-folkloric variants shaped by the abilities and interpretations of individual performers. Folk vocal traditions are characteristically syncretic, combining poetry, melody, and movement (such as dance or ritual gestures) into a unified artistic expression. Musical folklore, in its origins, emerged from the lived experiences of the people and is closely linked with social activities such as labor, family ceremonies, customary rituals, festive gatherings, and other communal events [4, p. 195].

Classification of Musical Folklore. Musical folklore samples may be classified into two major groups based on their functional and situational characteristics:

1. Songs tied to specific contexts or situations
2. Songs of free thematic expression (including improvisational forms)

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Songs belonging to the first category are performed during labor processes, seasonal ceremonies, and family rituals and are associated with particular circumstances. For example, “*Alla*” is sung to lull a child to sleep; “*Yor-Yor*” accompanies wedding rituals; and “*Qo ‘sh hayda*” is performed during plowing activities.

Songs of free thematic expression include genres such as *terma*, *yalla*, *lapar*, and *olan*. These genres are not bound to specific times, seasons, or events and may be performed spontaneously.

Labor Songs. Labor songs in Uzbek oral folklore are linked to various forms of human activity—plowing, milling grain, spinning thread, harvesting, and other work processes. These songs can be divided into three subgroups:

1. Pastoral (animal husbandry) songs
2. Agricultural songs
3. Craft (artisan) songs

Labor songs are often composed in quatrains, expressed through narrow melodic intervals (typically fourths or fifths), and follow rhythmic structures built upon seven-syllable poetic meters. They rarely employ independent refrains but may include repetitive words or phrases (such as *xo ‘sh-xo ‘sh*, *turey-turey*, *mayda-mayda*) that serve as miniature refrains. They are typically performed solo and without instrumental accompaniment [4, p.197].

Pastoral Songs. These are among the oldest forms of traditional vocal art, sung during the milking of cattle, sheep, goats, mares, camels, and other domestic animals. The melodies—such as “*Xo ‘sh-xo ‘sh*”, “*Turey-turey*”, and “*Churey-churey*”—were performed softly and steadily to calm the animals and increase milk yield. They are typically sung within narrow melodic ranges of fourths and fifths.

Agricultural Songs. Agricultural songs accompany plowing, milling grain, harvesting, and other agricultural activities marking the beginning of the spring season. These pieces express the laborers’ emotions and experiences through improvised quatrains arranged in question-answer form. Examples include “*Qo ‘sh hayda*”, “*O ‘rim qo ‘shig ‘i*”, “*Xo ‘p mayda*”, and “*Mayda-mayda*”.

Craft Songs. Craft-related songs were mainly performed by women while engaging in spinning, carpet weaving, embroidery, cap-making, and sewing.

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These songs express the inner emotional world of the performers. The melodies often transition from labor-related motifs into lyrical patterns known as “*Dil yozdi*” songs.

Seasonal Ritual Songs. Seasonal ritual songs are associated with specific events and natural cycles, such as:

- Spring: *Navro‘z, Sust xotin, Shox moylar, Gul bayrami*
- Summer: *Choy momo*
- Autumn: *Hosil bayrami, Oblo baraka, Shamol chaqirish*
- Winter: *Yas-yusun, Gap-gashtak*

Spring ritual songs are particularly abundant, and children’s participation in Navro‘z festivities has been noteworthy. Songs such as “*Boychechak*”, “*Laylak keldi*”, and “*Oq terakmi – ko‘k terak*” are enduring examples of children’s folk creativity [5, p.1].

Family ritual songs include “*Yor-Yor*”, “*Kelin salom*”, “*Yig‘i*”, and various religious-themed chants, all of which hold distinct traditional functions.

Songs of Free Expression

The Folksong. *Qo‘shiq* is a genre combining poetry and melody, widely created and performed by the people. Traditionally composed simultaneously in poetry and music, these songs encompass themes of rituals, labor, love, lyricism, and heroism. They are typically structured in quatrains following simple syllabic meters and may cover melodic ranges extending up to an octave [6, p. 35].

Terma. *Terma*—literally meaning “selected” or “collected”—has two forms in folk tradition:

1. Performances by *baxshi, go‘yanda*, epic narrators, and poets
2. Popular *terma* pieces created by combining melodic fragments into rhythmic, dance-like compositions

Terma is performed at public celebrations, weddings, and gatherings. Folk *termachi* artists enliven festivities by selecting lively and danceable melodies. The tradition remains vibrant today, continuously expanding with new creative expressions.

Lapar. The term *lapar* is thought to derive from “par” (pair) and the verbal suffix “-la” (to sing or express), indicating a dialogic duet. Traditionally performed between a young man and woman during wedding festivities or



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girls' gatherings, *lapar* songs served as a medium of courtship, mutual affection, and social interaction. Performers would sometimes exchange gifts during the singing if mutual affection developed [4, p.205].

Lapar is a very ancient genre, characterized by its ritual context, dialogic performance between genders, and syncretic combination of poetry, music, choreography, and dramatic elements. Dance rhythms are integral, and performers often alternate between singing and dancing [8, p. 90].

The scholar Elbek made major contributions to collecting and publishing *lapar* songs, notably in his 1922 collection "*Laparlar*". He documented their cultural role within pre-wedding celebrations managed by elder women who ensured the smooth continuation of the festivity [9, p. 22].

Yalla. *Yalla* is a lively genre closely related to *lapar* due to its use of dance and group participation, though it emphasizes the unity of poetry, music, and dance rather than dialogic exchange. Often described as a "dance-song" (F. Karomatov), the term *yalla* is associated with joyful movement and play. *Yallas* typically follow a verse-refrain structure performed by a soloist (the *yallachi*) accompanied by *doira*, *dutor*, or ensemble, while the refrain is sung collectively.

Its rhythmic vitality—often expressed in 6/8 time with variations of the *ufar* dance rhythm—makes *yalla* particularly energetic and expressive [10, p. 23].

Folk Classical Songs. In the Fergana-Tashkent musical tradition, *xalq ashulalari* occupy an influential position. Distinguished by wide vocal ranges and refined melodic contours, these songs draw upon syllabic or classical *aruz* poetic meters. They may develop through two pathways:

1. Songs emerging from oral folk musical creativity
2. Songs composed by master professional musicians

Classical folk songs such as "*Tanovar*", "*Ey Nozanin*", "*Oydek to 'libdur*", "*Farg'ona*", and "*Ul parivash*" have been widely performed not only by professional singers but also by artisans, craftsmen, and women performing within domestic spaces. Many pieces—such as "*Chaman ichra*", "*Tanovar*", and "*Qora sochim*"—remain popular among women who perform them with *dutor* accompaniment [10, p. 24].

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Conclusion

The study of Uzbek folklore art demonstrates that traditional musical genres have played a vital role in shaping the cultural identity, worldview, and aesthetic values of the Uzbek people. For many centuries, these genres—whether labor songs, ritual melodies, children’s creative expressions, or freely themed vocal forms—served not only as artistic reflections of communal life but also as powerful tools of social communication, emotional expression, and intergenerational continuity. Their syncretic nature, combining poetry, melody, dance, and dramatic elements, reveals the complexity and richness of the traditional performance culture that has evolved organically within the daily practices, rituals, and celebrations of the nation.

The genres examined—*qo’shiq*, *terma*, *lapar*, *yalla*, *xalq ashulalari*, and others—each embody unique stylistic features shaped by historical contexts, regional traditions, and the creative capacities of performers. Despite their diversity, all these forms share a common function: to transmit collective memory, reinforce social cohesion, and preserve the values and emotional experiences of the community. The oral transmission of folklore, though subject to transformation over time, has allowed these traditions to remain vibrant, adaptable, and relevant.

In the years of independence, state-level support, cultural reforms, and numerous festivals, competitions, and scholarly initiatives have significantly contributed to the preservation, revitalization, and global promotion of Uzbek folklore art. These efforts ensure that the ancient performance traditions of our ancestors continue not only to survive but also to flourish in contemporary cultural life. Consequently, Uzbek folklore remains a living artistic heritage—constantly renewed through creative reinterpretation and actively inspiring both performers and audiences today.

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