

ISSUES OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN
CONTEMPORARY FESTIVALS AND PERFORMANCES OF UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: This article examines the concepts of national identity and artistic expression in the directing of national celebrations, performances, and international festivals held in Uzbekistan. It analyzes the integration of national and artistic elements in the dramaturgy and directing of modern celebrations and performances, reveals unique creative processes, and provides methodological recommendations for further improvement of these processes.

Keywords: culture, art, celebration, performance, dramaturgy, stage, director, national identity, artistic expression, modernity, stage artistic means.

Introduction. The primary objective of festivals and performances, which serve as a key instrument in shaping the spiritual image of the New Uzbekistan, is to celebrate national identity and to create artistically refined spectacles. Within this framework, based on the integration of national traditions and modern trends, Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage, customs, and rituals are being revived, widely promoted, and artistically staged at a professional level.

In particular, in the directing of unconventional stage performances, special emphasis is placed on the issues of national identity and artistic expression, and innovative methods are employed to stage highly artistic theatrical productions.

Notably, the Navruz celebration held in 2017 and the theatrical performances dedicated to the “Day of Remembrance and Honor” conducted between 2017–2019 were presented on non-traditional stages.

Research Methodology

The celebration of Navruz plays a significant role in educating the younger generation, shaping their worldview based on the finest examples of the creative heritage of our people, and fostering a deep understanding of national identity [3].

The Navruz festivities held in 2017 in the Abdulla Qodiriy Culture and Recreation Park in Tashkent showcased the contemporary state of national art, presented with high artistic professionalism and modern performance techniques.

At the entrance to the celebration area, pavilions reflecting the history, culture, customs, and traditions of the Uzbek people were arranged. Along the pathway, artisans, craftsmen, woodcarvers, embroiderers, and seamstresses demonstrated national costumes, folk musical instruments such as the *dombira* and *doira*, as well as various traditional items and handicrafts.

Traditional folk performances, including *lapars* (antiphonal songs), national songs, epic chants, and humorous *asqiya* duels, enlivened the atmosphere. The melodies and songs performed by folklore ensembles harmoniously blended with the chirping of birds and the gentle sound of the decorative fountains, creating a vivid expression of national spirit and artistic aesthetics.

Performances by children—the future heirs of our nation—with their joyful laughter, along with melodious songs and captivating dances glorifying the Motherland, spring, and a happy childhood, filled the audience with inspiration and delight. The harmony of Navruz, youthfulness, and spiritual perfection vividly unfolded before the eyes of the spectators.

The Navruz celebration has become a nationwide festival eagerly anticipated by all citizens of our country, regardless of their nationality, language, or religion. Today, representatives of more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups live in peace and mutual harmony in Uzbekistan.

They are contributing selflessly in all fields for the prosperity of our common homeland – Uzbekistan [12].

Songs praising the homeland and the arrival of spring were performed. Young children distributed symbols of spring such as snowdrops, mint, and violets. On one side, the cheerful laughter of elderly storytellers engaging in *asqiya* (traditional humorous duels) echoed through the air, while on the other side, the lively rejoinders of young girls participating in singing contests created an atmosphere of joy and cultural unity.

The vibrant songs and dances of folkloric and ethnographic ensembles, the playful *yalla* performances, and the displays of traditional sports such as wrestling and horse-riding showcased the diverse and unique facets of Navruz, emphasizing its deep ethnocultural heritage and symbolic significance.

The celebration continued with cheerful songs and energetic dances, showcasing a vibrant atmosphere of joy and unity. On stage, the traditions, distinctive art forms, and folk games of each region of our country were artistically represented. Folkloric and ethnographic ensembles performed songs invoking prosperity for agriculture, glorifying Navruz, nature, and human kindness. Performances by pop singers and joyful games of children infused the audience with enthusiasm and festive spirit.

Representatives of government and public organizations, members of parliament and the cabinet, citizens who have contributed significantly in various fields, as well as members of the diplomatic corps operating in our country, participated in the celebration.

The theatrical performance held on 9 May 2017, dedicated to the “Day of Remembrance and Honour,” exemplified the creative and organizational aspects of modern mass celebrations and public performances. This theatrical event was staged on the basis of a synthesis of the functional activities of creative teams, artistically revealing historical, national, and contemporary elements through symbolic imagery.

The festive event dedicated to the Day of Remembrance and Honour and the 72nd anniversary of the Victory in World War II took place in the garden of the Academic M. Mirzayev Research Institute of Horticulture, Viticulture, and Winemaking in the Zangiota district of Tashkent region.

The garden was decorated festively. Slogans such as “9 May – Day of Remembrance and Honour,” “Congratulations on Victory Day!”, “May our homeland be at peace, may our sky always be clear!”, and “The Motherland never forgets its heroes” were prominently displayed, embodying themes of patriotism, historical memory, and national unity.

In the central part of the garden, a vivid reconstruction of the atmosphere of the years 1941–1945 was presented. Trenches and bunkers were constructed, and samples of military equipment and weaponry from that era were displayed. These installations symbolically reflected the courage and heroism demonstrated by our people on the battlefield, the sacred memory of thousands of compatriots who did not return from the war, as well as the labor efforts of our ancestors on the home front [12].

A ceremonial call of music was heard, signaling the beginning of the official part of the event. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev was invited to the podium. The Head of State congratulated those gathered and, through them, the entire nation on the occasion of 9 May – the Day of Remembrance and Honour and the 72nd anniversary of the Victory in World War II.

The recorded voice of the famous wartime announcer Yuri Levitan declaring the outbreak of war echoed through the venue. Young men symbolically set out to defend the Motherland. On the large screen behind the stage, archival footage depicting the events of World War II was displayed, immersing the audience in the historical reality.

Hundreds of our compatriots who displayed unparalleled bravery and resilience during the 1941–1945 war were awarded high state honors. Thousands sacrificed their lives in this struggle. Their heroism instills in our hearts a profound sense of pride. We bow in reverence to the memory of those who have passed and express deep respect for the veterans who are still with us.

The event also made extensive use of poetry and songs dedicated to the memory of fallen heroes and the spirit of resilience. This creative approach aligned perfectly with the ideological and thematic essence of the Day of Remembrance and Honour. When recitations were performed from the works of renowned poets such as Hamid Olimjon's "*Take Up Arms*," G'afur G'ulom's "*You Are Not an Orphan*," Abdulla Oripov's "*Woman*," and excerpts from Erkin Vohidov's epic "*The Cry*," the audience was deeply moved, experiencing emotional reflection and patriotic pride [12].

The song "*Awaken, My Child*," performed by the People's Artist of Uzbekistan Lutfixonim Sarimsoqova, resonated through the venue, symbolizing the emotional culmination of the performance. The announcement of the end of the war and the declaration of victory recreated the historical joy experienced 72 years ago, deeply moving the audience and evoking a sense of national pride and gratitude.

Visual footage presented during the ceremony illustrated the profound respect and support that has been provided during the years of independence to veterans of World War II and home-front workers. These episodes reflected both the state's care and the nation's collective memory of sacrifice and heroism. The contrast between the tragedies of war and the peaceful life enjoyed today created a powerful emotional impact on attendees.

It is well known that music, melody, and song serve as a universal language capable of uniting peoples of different nations, religions, and customs. At the same time, music functions as a significant cultural marker that reflects the unique identity of a nation. The traditional and spiritual depth of musical heritage contributes to shaping national consciousness, strengthening moral values, and fostering intergenerational continuity.

The international music festival "Sharq Taronalari" (Melodies of the East), held in Uzbekistan, serves as a vivid example of the unifying power of music. This festival promotes compassion, peace, and solidarity among peoples across the world and encourages the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. It also contributes to global stability by reinforcing principles of friendship, mutual respect, and intercultural dialogue.

The primary purpose of organizing this festival is to widely promote the national musical heritage of Eastern nations, to instill in the younger generation a deep appreciation for art—especially music—and to preserve noble traditions such as aesthetic upbringing, peacebuilding, and spiritual refinement. Additionally, the festival plays a crucial role in strengthening creative cooperation among nations and expanding cultural interactions on an international scale.

The art festival, embodying both national traditions and the spirit of the modern era, has become a platform of universal human values that reflects the spiritual world and aspirations of diverse peoples across the globe. It serves as a beacon of peace, friendship, and cultural cooperation. In today's world, where international interest in our national musical heritage is rapidly increasing, the significance and influence of this celebration of beauty and art are truly invaluable.

The primary objective of the festival, renowned across continents, is to organize it in an even more elevated and inspiring manner. Its mission is to further strengthen cultural and spiritual cooperation among nations. The growing prestige of this musical forum year after year is no coincidence. Indeed, this prestigious event, which harmoniously integrates national traditions

with the contemporary spirit, has emerged as a platform that expresses the spiritual identity and aspirations of different peoples of the world, calling humanity to unity, friendship, and collaboration.

The theatrical performance dedicated to the festival's official opening ceremony was staged under the direction of the People's Artist of Uzbekistan, Bahodir Yoldoshev, from 1997 to 2019. These productions were created on the basis of our rich spiritual history, priceless musical heritage, and traditional dance styles, and have been highly acclaimed by the international community.

Bahodir Yoldoshev's creative force and inspiration were like an inexhaustible spring. His pursuit of understanding the traditions of folk theater and open-air performances introduced new forms and meanings to the national outdoor performance arts, opening new chapters in the history of theatrical staging.

Such major theatrical productions as "*Shashmaqom*," "*The Great Silk Road*," the theatrical show dedicated to the 600th anniversary of Mirzo Ulugbek in Registan Square of Samarkand, as well as the celebrations of Independence Day, Navruz festivities, the "*Sharq Taronalari*" *International Music Festival*, and similar large-scale open-air performances revealed new facets of Bahodir Yoldoshev's talent [4].

During complex and transformative periods of life, he always sought the truth he envisioned solely through creativity. Timeless qualities such as the breadth of intellectual vision, independent thinking, self-confidence, intellectual capability, and profound spiritual strength elevated Bahodir Yoldoshev to the status of a prominent personality. In every era, true art has been created only by gifted individuals. Yet no true artist has ever claimed, "I have reached the pinnacle of creativity."

There remain many aspirations Bahodir Yoldoshev has yet to fulfill — such as creating a new era of theater, nurturing talents who will work in this theater, building an open-air theater, and staging a performance of *Hamlet* that resonates deeply with his soul. The director's creative plans in the mature phase of his career include bringing Eastern and Western cultural and spiritual traditions closer together, discovering new qualities and directions in theatrical art, enriching the spiritual world of humanity, and enabling people to be inspired by beauty and great ideas [4].

It has become a tradition that at the opening ceremony of this biennial musical celebration, a grand theatrical performance is staged in the majestic Registan Square, and its production is consistently entrusted to Bahodir Yoldoshev. These ceremonies are not merely performances. Each staging is a magnificent spectacle, unique in its artistic concept and never repeating the previous ones. Among these productions, two stand out in particular: the performance "*The Great Silk Road*," staged in 2001, and the artistic choreographic composition conditionally titled "*Shashmaqom*," presented in 2003 [4].

This international forum, which has been regularly held in the city of Samarkand, not only serves to establish creative connections between artists and scholars from various countries but also facilitates the integration of musical developments occurring across different continents.

By promoting the unique musical heritage and traditions of the peoples of the world and instilling a love for art and music in the hearts of the younger generation, this festival contributes to strengthening creative cooperation among nations and expanding the scope of cultural relations worldwide.

The *Sharq Taronalari* International Music Festival provides a broad platform not only for promoting the musical art of various countries but also for showcasing their cultural uniqueness, national traditions, and folklore. It has created extensive opportunities for improving and

fundamentally reforming the activities of cultural and artistic institutions, developing amateur art, preserving folk heritage, and ensuring its wide dissemination.

Conclusion

It should be emphasized that addressing the integration of national identity and artistic expression in mass festivities and performances from a professional perspective contributes to the enhancement of the spiritual and aesthetic awareness of society. Furthermore, it ensures the continuity of the nation's unique customs, rituals, and traditions.

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