



# THE PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION OF BAKHSHI AND MAQOM ART

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## Abstract

This article explores the interrelation between the Bakhshi (epic) art and the Maqom musical tradition, emphasizing their preservation and promotion within Uzbek diaspora communities. It highlights the cultural, educational, and diplomatic roles of Maqom in strengthening Uzbekistan's cultural identity abroad. Furthermore, the paper analyzes international cooperation in safeguarding these intangible cultural heritages.

**Keywords:** Maqom, Bakhshi art, diaspora, international experience, cultural relations, oral tradition

## Introduction

Maqom art represents one of the highest spiritual and artistic values of the Uzbek nation. Its influence extends beyond Uzbekistan's borders, enriching the cultural identity of Uzbek diaspora communities worldwide. These communities play a key role in maintaining national consciousness, promoting patriotism among youth, and representing Uzbek culture internationally.

Music, as noted by Karimova (2025), is among the most powerful means of intercultural communication and emotional expression. Within this context, Maqom art serves not only as a national treasure but also as a tool of cultural diplomacy.

Since 2018, under the initiative of the President of Uzbekistan, the International Maqom Art Forum has been held in Shahrisabz. This event gathers leading musicians, scholars, and artists from dozens of countries, turning the forum into a global platform for dialogue and artistic collaboration. As Matyakubov (2022) emphasizes, modern technologies and mentorship traditions can ensure the sustainable development of Maqom education and transmission.

Uzbek Maqom ensembles have successfully performed in Turkey, Iran, China, Russia, France, Germany, and the United States, introducing audiences to Uzbekistan's musical heritage and fostering intercultural understanding.

The art of Maqom and Bakhshi represents not merely an artistic form, but a civilizational code that preserves the collective memory and emotional intelligence of the Uzbek nation. Both traditions function as moral archives of the people, transmitting the worldview, ethics, and aesthetic values that have shaped Central Asian identity for centuries.

Maqom, with its intricate modal systems, and Bakhshi performance, with its epic narratives, share a common philosophical foundation — the unity of word (so'z), melody (ohang), and meaning (ma'no). This synthesis of poetry and music serves as a vehicle for intellectual and spiritual education, a feature that differentiates Uzbek musical heritage from many other regional traditions.

### 1. The Interrelation between Maqom and Bakhshi Art

The connection between Maqom and Bakhshi art lies primarily in their structural and expressive principles. Both rely on modal scales (shashmaqom modes such as Rost, Segoh, Navo) and on the idea of emotional modulation, or the "journey of feeling" through sound. The



Bakhshi's recitative passages often echo the melodic contours of classical Maqom, suggesting a shared historical and aesthetic origin.

From an ethnomusicological perspective, the relationship between these two arts demonstrates the fluidity of oral creativity in Central Asia. The Bakhshi tradition draws narrative strength from the epic genre, while Maqom expresses a contemplative and lyrical spirituality. However, both employ improvisation (*badihago'ylik*), modal shifts, and poetic imagery as central expressive devices.

As noted by scholars such as Karimova (2025) and Borieva & Burieva (2022), these shared features confirm that Maqom and Bakhshi represent two parallel streams of a single musical philosophy — one extroverted and heroic, the other introspective and philosophical.

## 2. Transmission and Preservation in Modern Context

The modern preservation of Bakhshi and Maqom traditions requires an interdisciplinary approach that unites performance, education, and technology. Oral transmission remains the backbone of these arts, yet digital archiving and academic research now play a critical role in safeguarding their diversity.

Projects initiated under the International Maqom Art Forum in Shahrissabz and various Bakhshi festivals in Surkhandarya have provided global visibility to regional schools and individual masters. These platforms not only celebrate artistic excellence but also document stylistic nuances that could otherwise be lost in modernization.

Moreover, the diaspora communities in Russia, Turkey, and South Korea continue to play an important role in maintaining cultural continuity. By teaching Maqom and epic singing to young generations abroad, they serve as “living conservatories” of Uzbek heritage. Such efforts contribute to the soft power and cultural diplomacy of Uzbekistan, reflecting how intangible heritage can strengthen global cultural dialogue.

## 3. Philosophical and Symbolic Dimensions

Maqom and Bakhshi are, in essence, spiritual dialogues between the performer and the audience. Each performance transforms into a meditative act — an emotional conversation that transcends language and geography. The Bakhshi, narrating “Alpomish” or “Go‘ro‘g‘li,” does not merely recount a legend; he reconstructs collective identity through sound and story. Likewise, the Maqom performer embodies centuries of moral reflection through the tonal journey of each mode.

This dialogue between sound and meaning aligns with Sufi thought, particularly the belief that music (*sama'*) awakens the inner soul. The Maqom performer's voice becomes a means of purification, while the Bakhshi's tale becomes a path to wisdom. Thus, both traditions operate not only as musical entertainment but as profound vehicles of spiritual philosophy.

## 4. Cultural Diplomacy and Future Perspectives

The revival of traditional music in the era of globalization carries strategic cultural significance.

Uzbekistan's initiatives to promote Maqom and Bakhshi arts internationally — through UNESCO projects, cultural festivals, and educational programs — demonstrate how traditional heritage can coexist with modernity.

In the words of Matyakubov (2022), the preservation of traditional music “depends not on freezing the past, but on renewing it through meaningful continuity.” Indeed, every new performance of Maqom or an epic by a Bakhshi reinterprets the heritage in contemporary forms, keeping it alive for the next generation.



The future of these arts lies in academic research, digital preservation, and global collaboration. Their endurance ensures not only the survival of a musical tradition but the preservation of a worldview — one that harmonizes beauty, ethics, and faith within the universal language of sound.

## Methodology

### Bakhshi Schools and Their Characteristics

Bakhshi art, as an oral epic tradition, has several regional schools, each with distinct performance techniques and musical styles:

1. Surkhandarya–Kashkadarya School – characterized by strong, expressive voices, epic scope, and complex rhythms on the dombra. Main representatives include Fozil Yo‘ldosh o‘g‘li, Ergash Jumanbulbul o‘g‘li, Po‘lkan Bakhshi, and Islom Shoir.
2. Khorezm School – famous for its melodic richness and stage culture; its melodies intertwine with Maqom tonal systems, forming a unique synthesis of epic and classical styles.
3. Bukhara–Navoi School – features soft tonal structures and poetic intonation, emphasizing linguistic expression over rhythmic complexity.
4. Karakalpak–Khorezm School – combines elements of Bakhshi performance, lyrical singing, and improvisational dialogue.

According to Borieva & Burieva (2022), such regional variation reflects the adaptability of traditional musical systems, where each school integrates Maqom modes (“Rost”, “Segoh”, “Navo”) into its local performance practice.

Bakhshis embody the poetic and spiritual consciousness of the Uzbek people. Through epic narration, they convey the collective memory, moral values, and philosophical worldview of society. A Bakhshi performs not merely as a singer but as a poet, composer, and storyteller simultaneously.

As Yuldosheva (2020) notes, the union of poetic word and musical sound is the essence of traditional performance. Each rendition of a dastan reflects individual interpretation, keeping the oral tradition vibrant and evolving.

Among the most notable epics are “Alpomish”, “Gorogly”, “Ravshan”, “Yodgor”, “Kuntug‘mish”, and “Zulfizar”. UNESCO recognized “Alpomish” as an element of humanity’s intangible cultural heritage in 2019, demonstrating its global cultural value.

### Connection Between Bakhshi and Maqom Art

There are deep structural and emotional parallels between the Bakhshi and Maqom traditions:

- Both rely on modal systems (lad structures) that shape melodic organization.
- Bakhshi melodies often correspond to Maqom tonal paths such as Rost, Segoh, or Navo.
- In both traditions, emotional intonation, improvisation, and lyrical expression play a central role.

• While Maqom performance typically employs ghazal and rubai poetry, Bakhshi art utilizes epic verse; yet both emphasize the unity of word and melody.

These similarities highlight the interconnectedness of oral poetic and musical traditions within Uzbekistan’s cultural landscape.

## Results

1. Cultural Events: Numerous Bakhshi and Maqom festivals have been organized in Uzbekistan and abroad, fostering mutual artistic exchange.

2. Educational Efforts: Uzbek schools and cultural centers in foreign countries now teach Maqom singing and instrumental performance to young generations.



3. International Representation: Maqom performances have become central elements in festivals such as “Navruz” in Turkey, “Days of Uzbek Culture” in Russia, and national heritage events in the United States.

4. Cultural Diplomacy: Through diaspora initiatives, Maqom art reaches foreign audiences, strengthening Uzbekistan’s cultural image globally.

## Discussion

Uzbek diaspora communities actively preserve and promote Maqom traditions despite limited financial and organizational resources. Their initiatives contribute to maintaining linguistic, musical, and spiritual ties with the homeland.

Collaborations between local cultural institutions and diaspora organizations can enhance the effectiveness of cultural transmission. According to Karimova (2025), the performance of Maqom instrumental pieces serves not only as an artistic act but also as a pedagogical tool for shaping musical identity.

Further support for diaspora cultural centers and exchange programs would facilitate broader global recognition of Uzbekistan’s musical heritage and create new opportunities for Maqom education and research.

## Conclusion

Uzbek diaspora communities play a significant role in the preservation and international promotion of Maqom art. Their dedication ensures that this unique musical heritage remains alive both within and beyond Uzbekistan.

Maqom art, serving as a bridge of friendship, contributes to Uzbekistan’s positive international image, the promotion of national values, and the development of cultural tourism.

As Matyakubov (2022) suggests, the integration of traditional mentorship with modern technologies will strengthen the sustainability of Maqom education in the global context. Hence, continuous cultural cooperation and state support remain essential to preserving these timeless traditions.

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