



THE ART OF MAQOM SINGING: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT, STYLISTIC CHARACTERISTICS AND PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution of the art of maqom singing in Uzbekistan, focusing on its historical continuity, stylistic features, and pedagogical foundations. The maqom genre represents one of the most refined forms of traditional music, encapsulating centuries of spiritual and artistic development. The article explores how the ustoz-shogird (master-apprentice) tradition shaped the transmission of maqom performance techniques, the formation of regional schools such as Bukhara, Khorezm, and Fergana-Tashkent, and the synthesis of oral traditions with academic methods in modern institutions. Through comparative and analytical methods, this study highlights the significance of maqom singing in preserving cultural identity and its integration into modern pedagogical frameworks.

Keywords: Maqom singing, ustoz-shogird tradition, Uzbek classical music, pedagogical foundations, performance practice, Khorezm maqom, musical heritage.

Introduction

The art of maqom singing (maqom xonandaligi) occupies a central place in the musical heritage of the Uzbek people. Rooted in the spiritual and artistic consciousness of the nation, maqom singing reflects the synthesis of poetry, melody, and philosophy. Throughout centuries, this art has functioned not only as a musical expression but also as a means of moral and aesthetic education. The maqom singer (xonanda) is regarded as both a performer and a spiritual interpreter, tasked with transmitting emotional depth and ethical values embedded in the repertoire.

The tradition of maqom has evolved through different regional schools — primarily the Bukhara Shashmaqom, the Khorezm maqom system, and the Fergana-Tashkent style — each contributing distinct vocal techniques, modal interpretations, and poetic nuances. The role of the ustoz-shogird relationship has been fundamental in maintaining continuity across generations. In modern times, institutions like the Yunus Rajabiy State Institute of Uzbek National Music Art have integrated maqom training into structured academic programs, combining oral transmission with modern pedagogical strategies.

The objective of this research is to analyze maqom singing from three perspectives: its historical development, stylistic features, and pedagogical foundations. It aims to show how traditional methods coexist with contemporary academic frameworks, ensuring the vitality of maqom art in the 21st century.

The term maqom originates from Arabic, meaning “station” or “mode,” referring both to a system of melodic organization and a philosophical concept of ascension. In Central Asia, maqom art began developing as early as the 10th century, reaching maturity in the Bukhara

court during the 16th–18th centuries. The Shashmaqom (Six Maqoms) — Buzruk, Rost, Navo, Dugoh, Segoh, and Iroq — became the canonical structure of classical Uzbek-Tajik music.

Maqom singing was initially cultivated within royal courts and madrasas, where musicians and poets collaborated to refine the aesthetic and moral dimensions of performance. According to Rasulov (2025), “the maqom repertoire formed a complete philosophical system reflecting the spiritual worldview of the people, uniting the sacred and the artistic” (p. 10).

The Khorezm maqom school is distinguished by its rich ornamentation, powerful vocal delivery, and extended melismatic lines. Scholars such as Matyakubov and Yuldasheva (2020) note that Khorezm xonandaligi preserves ancient vocal traditions that emphasize expressive articulation and rhythmic flexibility. The Fergana-Tashkent school, by contrast, is characterized by lyrical smoothness, moderate ornamentation, and poetic expressiveness. The Bukhara Shashmaqom remains the classical foundation, emphasizing strict modal discipline and refined diction.

Komiljon Otaniyozov (1917–1975) played a pivotal role in reviving Khorezm maqoms, adapting ancient melodies to concert settings while preserving their essence. His interpretation of Segoh, Rost, and Feruz maqoms remains a model of emotional intensity and technical mastery. Similarly, artists like Jurahon Sultanov and Munojat Yo‘lchiyeva further expanded the expressive range of maqom singing, bridging traditional and contemporary performance aesthetics.

The ustoz-shogird (master-apprentice) relationship forms the backbone of maqom education. Through close observation, repetition, and imitation, the shogird internalizes not only vocal techniques but also the ethical and emotional dimensions of performance. Karimova (2025) emphasizes that “the ustoz does not merely teach melody; he transfers a worldview — an understanding of beauty, discipline, and respect for art” (p. 1004). This model ensured continuity even in periods of political and cultural transition.

Maqom singing is characterized by an extended vocal range (diapazon), controlled breathing, and subtle vibrato. The singer’s voice must resonate naturally, maintaining purity of tone (sado). In Khorezm style, the singer often employs open throat resonance, projecting intensity and emotional strength. In contrast, Bukhara singers emphasize restrained elegance and microtonal precision.

Distinctive vocal techniques include:

- Melizmatika (ornamentation of syllables),
- Avj (climactic ascent),
- Bozgo‘y (repetition with variation),
- Radif (refrain structure tied to poetic text).

These stylistic elements allow singers to balance discipline with improvisation, reflecting both technical mastery and spiritual expression.

Maqom lyrics are predominantly derived from classical Persian and Chagatai poetry — works of Navoi, Jami, and Bedil — emphasizing divine love and moral reflection. The articulation of each word must be precise; diction (talaffuz) plays a critical role in preserving meaning. According to Abdinabiyevna (2025), “the articulation of maqom text functions as an aesthetic bridge between poetry and sound, where linguistic clarity enhances emotional impact” (p. 45).

The modal structure (parda tizimi) of maqom is based on intricate scalar progressions and rhythmic cycles (usul). In the Shashmaqom, each cycle — Nasr, Tasnif, Ufori — has its own melodic and rhythmic logic. The Khorezm Urfiy maqoms expand these cycles through



additional modulations and freer rhythmic patterns, creating dynamic contrasts and emotional depth.

The ustoz-shogird tradition represents a holistic pedagogical framework that integrates technical, spiritual, and ethical instruction. The learning process unfolds gradually: observation, imitation, memorization, and interpretation. The ustoz evaluates not only the singer's technical skill but also their moral maturity (*odob*). As Ulasheva (2025) observes, "true mastery in maqom singing is inseparable from personal refinement and spiritual awareness" (p. 312).

In traditional settings, instruction was oral. The shogird accompanied the ustoz in performances, absorbing nuances of timing, gesture, and phrasing. Today, this method is complemented by modern notational systems and audio-visual analysis.

Since the establishment of the Yunus Rajabiy State Institute of Uzbek National Music Art, maqom singing has been incorporated into structured curricula. Students study theory, vocal training, ensemble performance, and stage aesthetics. Collaboration with the Khorezm Maqom Center and Urgench State University has strengthened regional traditions.

According to institutional reports (2021–2024), over 200 maqom recordings, including Rok, Feruz, and Suvora cycles, were preserved in digital archives.

Digital platforms and interactive learning technologies now assist students in analyzing maqom intonation patterns and rhythmic formulas. Nevertheless, the oral dimension remains irreplaceable, ensuring emotional authenticity.

Globalization and digitalization have brought new challenges. Many young singers tend to prioritize vocal display over interpretive depth. Hence, educators emphasize re-centering maqom pedagogy around its ethical and philosophical roots. As Rasulov (2025) notes, "modern maqom education must cultivate not only professional singers but custodians of cultural identity" (p. 12).

Workshops, master classes, and festivals serve as platforms for intergenerational exchange. The revival of maqom competitions (*maqom tanlovlari*) has inspired a new wave of professional interest among youth, strengthening both technical and spiritual dimensions of the art.

The analysis reveals that maqom singing embodies a synthesis of art, philosophy, and education. Historically, it has survived through adaptation — from courtly rituals to academic institutions. Pedagogically, it integrates emotional intelligence with aesthetic discipline. The ustoz-shogird model, though ancient, continues to offer valuable strategies for holistic education.

From a comparative perspective, maqom pedagogy contrasts with Western conservatory models, which emphasize notation and technicality. In maqom, however, emotional authenticity and moral cultivation take precedence. This duality — structure and spirituality — defines the uniqueness of Uzbek musical pedagogy.

Conclusion

The art of maqom singing is a living heritage that bridges the past and the present. Its historical evolution reflects the resilience of Uzbek culture, while its pedagogical system offers insights into holistic human development. Integrating traditional ustoz-shogird methods with modern academic tools ensures the sustainability of maqom art in global contexts.

Future directions in maqom pedagogy should emphasize interdisciplinary research — combining musicology, linguistics, and cultural studies — and international collaboration to



preserve and promote this invaluable art form. Ultimately, maqom singing remains not merely an artistic skill but a form of spiritual education and cultural continuity.

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