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**MAQOM, MUGHAM, MAQAM:  
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES OF PRESERVATION  
AND TRANSMISSION**

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**Introduction**

Translated from the Arabic, this widespread term “Maqam” describes the most popular genre of music performance in its various styles in Middle East and Central Asia. First mentioned in the manuscripts of Qutbiddin Shirazi (died 1311), Maqam has several semantic meanings, including mode, rhythm, melodic development, combining both a canonical and improvisational foundation of cycles and suits [Muzykal’nyi enziklopedicheskyi slovar’, 1990: 320].

The Maqam music tradition popular in the Middle East and Central Asia is represented in different countries and hence it can vary in emotional content and in forms of cyclical vocal and instrumental compositions. Originating from court tradition in the past, today Maqam music traditions are present in nearly every Islamic culture. They are addressed to a wide audience, being associated with the finest, most developed and richest genre of music covering dimensions of both religious and daily life.

In my presentation, using my original fieldwork recordings and interviews in Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, focusing on

three different Maqam traditions (Uzbek-Tajik Shashmaqom, Azerbaijani Mugham, and North Afghanistan's Maqam as performed by Afghani Uzbeks), I am going to raise key issues related to the contemporary process of oral transmission and training of Maqam performance.

The main questions I am going to explore in this paper are:

- a) How should Maqam performance be taught?
- b) What kind of training is the most effective?
- c) If there is any gender related restrictions to perform Maqam?
- d) When is the right age to start Maqam performance training?
- e) In what social conditions should Maqam training be realised?
- f) Where is the right place to teach Maqam: at home, at school or in a special institution?

### **1. Uzbek-Tajik Shashmaqom**

Shashmaqom tradition in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan has been developed for centuries, in two different languages represented in different schools of performance. Among the most famous performers are a few females who have not yet received the scholarly attention they deserve. For years I worked with Berta Davydova (1922 -2007), who in her recollection on how to learn Shashmaqom, gave remarkable evidence of the joint effort of different schools and training systems.

- She was one of the leading performers of Shashmaqom. Born to a rich Bukharian Jewish family in Ferghana Valley, she loved to sing from her early childhood. In 1938 her family moved to Tashkent. After finishing school she graduated from medical college and worked as a nurse in a health center. Berta liked to sing, and sometimes performed at evening concerts for the local hospital. Once, on a big occasion, famous Uzbek artists came to perform in front of all the wounded soldiers, and one of the young soldiers on crutches suddenly shouted in the middle of the concert, "We also have a singer here!" People called Berta Davydova and she had to go onto the stage and, feeling embarrassed as she was in her nurse's white medical gown, she sang a few songs.

"After the concert the Uzbek People's artist Imamjon Ikramov came to the Hospital's director and said that I had a special voice

and he would like to invite me to work for the Radio. The head of the health center said that very soon, on reaching eighteen years of age, I would have to go to the front line to fight the Germans in World War 2. To avoid that, it would be better if they took me to sing.



- “My mother didn’t want me to become a singer. So, I asked my colleagues to help me and Imamjon Ikramov went to talk to my mother to explain to her that it was the only way to avoid me being sent to war. After that my mother didn’t mind me singing for live broadcasts. I remember I sang at that time ‘Munojat’, which was the

first classical song I learned with Imamjon Ikramov. With this song I became Berta Davydova. I was just 17 when I started.

- “After Imamjon Ikramov retired Yunus Rajabi (1897–1976) became the head of our Shashmaqom ensemble. I learned all the Uzbek Maqoms with him during the five years I was working for his Maqom group. In the past only men sang Maqom. I was the first woman who sang Maqom, and I learned it from Imamjon Ikramov who said my voice was appropriate for Maqom-style singing and taught me how to do it. I sang ‘Bayet 2’, ‘Bayet 5’, ‘Talkini Bayet’, ‘Taronai Bayet’. Then I went to Tajikistan to their Maqom ensemble there and learned ‘Nasry Bayet’, ‘Taronai Bayet’, ‘Talkinnin Bayet’, ‘Ufori Bayet’, ‘Ufar oromijon’, ‘Orazi Navo’, ‘Sarahbori Oromijon’, ‘Kashkarchi Savty’, ‘Usshok’, altogether about ten Maqoms from Shahnozar Sohibov (People’s Artist of Uzbekistan) and Zirkiev, who was a Maqom singer himself from the Bukhara school. I sang Navoiy, Zebunissa, Uvaysiy poetry in Maqom.

- “As head of a Shashmaqom ensemble Yunus Rajabi had set Uzbek poetry to the Shashmaqam and published six volumes of Shashmaqom with only Uzbek poetry in it, leaving the Tajik poetry behind. Six Maqoms were transcribed as six wonders! God bless his soul!”[Sultanova, 2011: 80]

Another outstanding female Shashmaqom performer in Uzbekistan was Kommuna Ismailova. During the interview, she told me her story – how she sang for historical moment of Shashmaqom LP recordings initiated and completed by Yunus Rajabi.

“I sang Shashmaqom with Berta Davydova and that was great opportunity for us. Together with Berta, I sang all six Maqoms! From 1960 I sang Maqoms together with Berta Davydova and with the other most outstanding male singers like Arif Alimaksumov, Karim Mumin, Ortykhoja Imamhojaev, Shokirjon Ergashev, Siroj Aminov. Six of us sang Shashmaqom and also the legendary Jurahon Sultanov from Ferghana and Tolmasov from Samarkand were invited to perform several Awjes (high culminations) for our recordings. By 1965 the Shashmaqom recordings were finished. For recordings we used to stay in the studio till midnight and even till 6 o’clock in the morning, before the trams started to run. Then we

would go home. We used to “cook” the part of Shashmaqom for ten to fifteen days and then we would record them. Yunus Rajabiy used to listen to our singing and change the notes for the next session, constantly improving it. Our singing was transcribed into notes and put in six volumes books and LP recordings. Yunus Rajabi used to say, “I will leave this world but my Shashmaqam transcriptions and LP recordings will remain.”[Sultanova, 2011: 82]

## **2. Azerbaijani Mugham**

As we already know, Mugham, bringing together classical poetry with musical improvisation, has become a symbol of both continuity and adaptability in response to the social, political and gender dynamics of Azerbaijan [Naroditskaya, 2003: 5]. Today Azerbaijan is the only place in the Muslim world where children are taught to perform Mugham, or traditional court music, from an early age. Azerbaijani Mugham is one of the most difficult genres in the world of music: the long beautiful melodies develop with colourful ornamentation and embellishments, bursting with emotional explosions expressing passionate love. The form is still widely popular in the country today, accompanying all social events from family life to state celebrations.

Performance of Mugham takes long devoted years of study, but in Azerbaijan Mugham is a part of the state system of music education: many music schools in the country (both specialist and comprehensive) have classes to teach young boys and girls this very sophisticated art. TV competitions in which children sing Mugham are routine programmes in that part of the world. It is a common place that Azerbaijani children of 10–14 years old sing professionally Mugham pieces. Certainly, these are just normal children who like to play football or to sing Michael Jackson songs. However, growing up in Azerbaijan, a country with an extreme love of music and a well-established music education, they contribute from an early age to the highest form of the native genre of music, the art of Mugham. According to Gara Garaev:

“Mugham combines elements of a suite and a rhapsody, is symphonic in nature, and has its own set of rhythmic, melodic and structural rules.”



Lets take a just one example – the young Mugham singer Urfan Djafarov Asif ogly (Photo: Razia Sultanova). Born in 1996 he has been singing since he was three years old, started to sing Mugham with Ferus Sahavet. He has been singing since he was three years old. Today he performs three full Mughams and at least fifty folk songs. Urfan regularly takes part in state festivals and competitions of young Mugham performers. As the first prize winner in such competitions in 2008 and 2009, he appears at the state celebrations, TV and radio shows.

According to documentation from the Institute of Manuscripts named after Fizuli in the Academy of Sciences, Baku, Azerbaijan, music schools for child Mugham performers based on the Hanende-Ustad (Master-apprentice) tradition were established:

– in 1922 in Baku [E.Abasova, D.Danilov, L.Karagiceva, K.Safaraliev, 1972];

– in 1923 in Gyndje and in 1924 in Aqdame, both initiated by the prominent statesman and military commander Aliquseyn Daqli Qamidov [A.Dagli, 1973];

– in 1932 in Shusha , initiated and established by Bulbul (born Murtuza Rza oglu Mammadov) a famous Azerbaijani and Soviet opera tenor, one of the founders of the vocal arts and national musical theatre in Azerbaijan [Mirkamil Aqamirov , 2003];

– in 1937 in Naxchevan [Nazim Quliev, 1999];  
– in 1941 in Sheki by Uzeyir bey Abdul Hussein oglu Hajibeyov (1885–1948), an Azerbaijani and Soviet composer, a statesman and the father of Azerbaijani classical music and opera.

All these schools were state schools and therefore were financially supported by the government of Azerbaijan.

As we can see, a turning point for music education in Azerbaijan was the recognized need for a children's department in every single music school to provide early education in Mugham performance. This brought mass youth involvement, securing the future of Mugham performance and tradition, and the preservation of the national music heritage [Sultanova, 2012: 11].

### **3. Maqam in Afghanistan**

In today's world Afghanistan is a hotspot, where for the last thirty years the on-going war has thrown the country into a deep economic, social and cultural crisis. Since the 1970s the country has lived through a number of invasions and conflicts with various opponents – the Soviets, Mujahedin, Taliban and the Western Alliance, all of which have brought chaos and turmoil into the daily life of its people. The Afghan society is multi-ethnic in its nature but the Uzbek ethnic community is one of the biggest in the country. My interviews and recordings in Afghanistan helped to identify the authenticity as well as the historical development of the phenomenon of music within the Uzbek communities. Lets take, for example, several excerpts from the interview with outstanding local musician Usto Gafar Kamoliddin (1930–2008) which I recorded in October 2006, in North of Afghanistan in Shobergan.

#### **1) “Nothing could have be done without Usto’s teaching in Uzbek culture!**

My Usto was Sadreddin, pupil of legendary musician Sadyrhon from the court of last Emir of Bukhara. According to our traditional music custom I received my Nohun (a Tanbur ‘s plectrum made of silver and iron) from my Teacher, who received in his turn his Nohun from Usto Sadyrhon. I was so happy to get it! And guess what?

Today I have no one to pass it on to!”

## **2) “If there is no music there is no nation!”**

The Uzbek nation has great music and great poetry with names like Navoiy, Fuzuli, Babur, Ogahi, Uvaysiy and others. It’s such a rich culture! My father taught me the Uzbek literature of Karim Zakirov, brothers Shodjalilovs and others. Today this kind of “father-son relationship” has gone as young people do not wish to learn the skills of previous generations. My son Said plays Dutar and Tanbur but very reluctantly. He likes to play Accordion and keyboard: those instruments which do not have nations!

## **3) “You swear you are Uzbeks but you don’t play Dutar!”**

I learned Dutar from my father and then began to learn singing. At that time I lived in Andhoi. When the political situation became difficult and my friend and writer Arif Bobojojev was killed, I ran away to Shobergan. Later I had to run away again from Shobergan because there were too many people beaten and killed for playing music. Because my best pupil Saidjabar Quyesh regularly performed music he was stabbed with a knife by the Mujahedins.

He was killed on the central square of Shobergan city and no one could take his body from there as people were afraid of being punished. I cried and cried because of this tragedy and no one could stop me. I understood I didn’t have students anymore!

I ran away to Pakistan but after four years of living there I came back. Today we have General Najibulla Dostum (an independent warlord and leader of Afghanistan’s Uzbek community). We are safe. But at that time we had difficulties to survive. “

## **4) “Dutar is the right way to learn Uzbek music but for Maqam performance just Dutar is not enough.”**

“In Uzbek music classical Maqam could not be performed just on DUTAR (long necked plucked lute). So Tanbur or Setar were being used. Setar/Tanbur have 54 modes whereas Dutar due to its fixed frets can have only 18 modes.

For example, let me sing Ushshoq, poem by Alisher Navoiy “ (sings).



**5) “To teach music you should first have TIME!”**

“Shashmaqom for example, is a genre of music in which the main parts of the cycle must be developed over a long period of time one after the other. For example, main parts Shoube take a long time to teach to a student. In the past four-five musicians would sit s in a row to sing one Maqam. When a singer got tired his colleague would pick up the plot and carry on singing. One cannot learn it without a teacher!

(Sings folk song Muishta...)

**6) “I am ready to teach but nobody here in Afghanistan is ready to take it in.**

**To study music one should have to have a full stomach. And you should be far from trouble!”** (Sings Bayet 2).

“Recently I was invited by our General Najibulla Dostum to run a TV program as a live music school for young performers. I spent nine months doing this but, first, I was not even paid for that, second, no pupils turned up. They could not find me any students! I went to the TV station every day for 270 days and they could not find me a student. Young people told me: “Thanks! We don’t need it!”



7) **“In Uzbekistan there are schools, colleges, and conservatories: here in Afghanistan we Uzbeks don’t have anything similar.”**

“Also I was once invited to Kabul Radio to run my programs to perform Uzbek music. But it didn’t help in finding pupils anyway.

In Uzbekistan there are groups where fifty women perform Dutar playing together.

I would dance for joy if here in Afghanistan we had the same tradition!

When in 1990 I went to Boisun area in Surhandarya, Uzbekistan, I was so generously welcomed there. I had a lovely time with my compatriots playing Uzbek music, reciting Uzbek poetry. Nothing is happening like that here in Afghanistan!”

(Sings a song from Sadyrhon’s repertoire) [Sultanova, 2015: 58].

So, the interview with Afghani musician Usto Gafar Kamoliddin shows that this war-torn country has little to do with the responsibilities of cultural preservation, particularly regarding that of a national minority like Uzbeks. Shashmaqam is a low priority in a country where people are trying to survive. However, Usto Kamoliddin has raised many interesting points. From all this above it follows that music tradition could be continued only with the presence of Usto (Master) training or, even better, in an institutionalised form of education.

### **Conclusions**

As we can see from my presentation above, different examples of Maqam tradition show various forms of learning and performance, and the three different forms of Maqam performance have developed different methods of oral transmission.

However, there is a common thread here: everything, from family education to institutionalized forms of Maqam performance, is important in continuing its cultural safeguarding. Family education and institutionalized forms of professional training are not equal attempts to preserve cultural values. But in our time of globalisation and loss of national identity, every single step is valuable in helping this unique music genre, – Maqom, Mugham, or Maqam, – to survive in the future.

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