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**THE DUTAR AS A MIRROR OF CULTURAL IDENTITY: PEDAGOGY,  
PERFORMANCE, AND PRESERVATION OF UZBEKISTAN'S  
NATIONAL MUSICAL HERITAGE**

Iskandarova Dilnoza Tolibjon qizi

Student of the Uzbek National Institute of Music Art named after Yunus Rajabi

**Abstract**

This article examines the techniques of playing the dutar, one of Uzbekistan's national string instruments, with a particular focus on teaching methods, preserving and developing the classical maqom tradition, and refining students' instrumental performance skills. It also discusses the transmission of this rich heritage to future generations.

**Keywords:** music, maqom, tradition, dutar, notation, rhythms, ornamentation.

A careful look at the practice and evolution of our classical music reveals that we are heirs to a profound cultural legacy. As representatives of the younger generation, if we study, cherish, perform, and internalize the artistic treasures of the past, we can cultivate ourselves into artists worthy of our era. The art of performing on Uzbek national instruments has developed through centuries of enduring tradition. This continuity is evidenced by material cultural monuments, visual artworks – including wall paintings and the intricate miniatures adorning classical manuscripts – as well as the heritage of Shashmaqom and our intangible cultural wealth.

One of our primary tasks today is to preserve this intangible and spiritual heritage and, building upon it, to lay the foundations for progress and innovation. The Uzbek people are not only heirs to a glorious history and a rich culture of enlightenment, but also custodians of a deeply rooted musical heritage. Our maqoms have survived through the centuries, and ensuring their transmission to future generations requires dedication, effort, and selfless devotion.

A distinctive feature of Uzbek traditional performance is its natural expressiveness and the use of national ornamentation in musical interpretation. Since gaining independence, the significance of our classical national art has been considerably



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elevated. In the realm of music, instrumental performance has always stood out for its diversity and expressive potential. The wide variety of instruments is largely due to the strong popular interest in this form of artistic expression.

Every nation, shaped by its own historical and cultural experience, has developed musical instruments that reflect its spirit and character. These instruments serve as mirrors of a people's spiritual identity and are rightfully considered symbols of national pride. In the tradition of Uzbek instrumental performance, the *dutar* holds a special place due to its deep cultural resonance, melodic expressiveness, and richness in national ornamentation. Despite its technical complexity, it remains one of the most cherished instruments among the people.

The *dutar* is not only prominent in Uzbek musical culture but is also widely used among other Central Asian communities, including Tajik, Uyghur, and other kindred nations. Its broad appeal and enduring presence testify to its cultural importance across the region.

The *dutar* stands as a genuine reflection of Uzbek national culture – its plaintive tones seem to echo the spiritual essence and timeless values of a civilization that has withstood the test of centuries. Particularly among women, the *dutar* has been cherished as a craft and tradition, passed down through generations from grandmothers to daughters. Its status as a cultural legacy is profound.

Throughout history, the development of any musical instrument has often been driven by the demands of skilled performers. As musicians have continually sought new expressive capacities, a natural form of artistic competition has spurred the evolution of instrumental techniques. In this context, it is fitting to honor virtuosos such as Yunus Rajabiy, Turgun Alimatov, Abdulaziz Khodjayev, Hamdam Murodov, Abdumutal Abdullayev, Toir Qoziyev, and other distinguished masters whose artistry shaped the course of Uzbek music.

The word *dutar* originates from Persian, meaning “two strings.” This plucked string instrument is widely played among Uzbek, Tajik, Uyghur, Turkmen, and Karakalpak communities. However, the Uzbek *dutar* is distinguished by its delicacy and gentle tonal quality. Its body (resonator) is typically carved from mulberry wood, while the neck is made from apricot wood. The instrument’s average length is about one meter, though its size may vary slightly depending on the specific type.



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Structurally, the dutar has a relatively large resonator and a long, slender neck. It is strung with two strings made from silk or hemp. These strings are typically tuned in fourths, fifths, or sometimes in unison. Frets on the neck are tied to define the tonal intervals. The instrument is played by plucking the strings with the fingers of the right hand while pressing the frets with the fingers of the left.

Dutar performance requires a nuanced mastery of both solo and ensemble techniques. Among the core strumming methods are:

- *Single stroke* (yakka zarb) – a fundamental technique introduced in early stages of learning, involving upward and downward finger movements (excluding the thumb);
- *Tremolo stroke* (terma or tanovar zarb) – one of the most widespread methods, typically played using the thumb and index finger. When the hand moves downward, the index finger strikes first, followed by the thumb; the order is reversed on the upward motion.

In traditional dutar performance, alongside strumming techniques, a wide range of ornamental articulations – known as *qochirimlar* – are used to enrich the musical texture. These embellishments, with names like *nolish* (moan), *miyang* (shake), *kashish* (slide), and *to 'lqinlatish* (wave), add expressive depth and stylistic identity to each piece, indicating the school or tradition to which a performer belongs.

Today, dutar performance has attained the status of a recognized professional discipline. Instruction begins in children's music and art schools, continues at specialized art colleges, and reaches advanced levels at institutions such as the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan and the Yunus Rajabiy Institute of Uzbek National Music. In addition, numerous cultural centers across cities and districts, as well as the *Barkamol Avlod* youth centers, offer amateur clubs dedicated to dutar performance.

Significantly, under the leadership of the President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the development of culture and arts has become a national priority. Presidential Decree No. PQ-112, dated February 2, 2022, titled “*Additional Measures for the Further Development of Culture and the Arts*”, states:

“In general secondary education institutions, students shall be taught to perform melodies on at least one national musical instrument listed in Annex 1 to this



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resolution. A corresponding note shall be included in their educational documentation (certificate) confirming this competency.”<sup>1</sup>

This reflects a visionary approach to preserving and propagating national musical heritage, ensuring that instruments like the dutar remain a living symbol of Uzbek identity for generations to come.

The spiritual richness of the Uzbek people is truly boundless, reflected not only in their values and traditions, but also in their remarkable variety of national musical instruments. Each instrument embodies its own world – its own philosophy, its own history. And this history is, in essence, the history of the people themselves. When words fall short, instruments begin to speak, and through their plaintive tones, the voice of history resonates. It is perhaps for this reason that musical instruments have been revered by the people since time immemorial.

In shaping the education and moral upbringing of the younger generation in accordance with national traditions, the teaching of musical instruments assumes particular importance. Indeed, the enchanting sounds of these instruments penetrate deep into the soul of a child, transforming nascent emotions into feelings of kindness and beauty. In this light, engaging more actively with cultural and artistic domains that instill values and nurture aesthetic perception is both necessary and strategic in addressing the responsibility of raising a virtuous generation.

Unfortunately, however, some youth today, while pursuing knowledge and vocational training, are simultaneously exposed to the harmful influences of unfiltered digital content on social media. Many become overly absorbed in time-wasting virtual games and distractions. As a result, such trends obstruct the coherent development of education and moral upbringing. Among certain youth, one increasingly observes signs of disrespect toward parents and elders, apathy toward society, disregard for national traditions, and a growing tendency to prioritize personal gain over collective good – attitudes that are fundamentally at odds with the core of human decency.

Yet it must be remembered: human dignity lies in one’s character. No matter how educated or talented a person may be, even the slightest display of poor manners

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<sup>1</sup> <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/-5849580?ONDATE=04.12.2024>



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undermines their integrity. Music, in this regard, plays a profound role in moral development. Learning to play national musical instruments, especially, fosters not only technical skill but also ethical refinement and noble behavior.

Teaching young people to play the dutar and other traditional instruments holds transformative meaning. It strengthens their willpower, elevates their spiritual awareness, nurtures their sense of beauty, and deepens their appreciation of universal human values and patriotism. It broadens their worldview and refines their sensibilities. Regardless of the profession they ultimately pursue, those who acquire the skills and discipline of musical performance invariably exhibit the qualities of a cultured and conscientious individual.

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