



THE EMERGENCE OF VARIETY (ESTRADA) PERFORMANCES WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL UZBEK THEATRE SYSTEM

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Annotatsiya

An'anaviy o'zbek tomosha teatri tushunchasiga xalq turmushi va madaniy hayotida tomosha va taqlid qilishga oid unsurlardan tortib, asrlar davomida shakllanib, yashab kelgan masxaraboz, qiziqchilar san'ati va qo'g'irchoqbozlik kiradi. Mazkur maqolada an'anaviy o'zbek tomosha teatri ijodkorlarining ijro uslublari xususida so'z boradi.

Annotation

The concept of traditional Uzbek theater of spectacle includes everything from elements related to spectacle and imitation in folk marriage and cultural life, to the art and puppetry of clowns, curiosities, which have been formed and lived for centuries. This article will talk about the performance styles of the creators of the traditional Uzbek theater of performance.

Kalit so'zlar: Masxaraboz, qiziqchi, qo'g'irchoqboz, raqqos, mualloqchi, xofiz, sozanda, dorboz, chavandoz, pantomima.

Keywords: Clown, entertainer, puppeteer, dancer, mule player, hoffiz, musician, dorboz, rider, pantomime.

According to historical sources and the testimonies of art scholars, the art of jesters and entertainers has existed in the territory of Turkestan since ancient times and, as one of the forms of folk cultural life, has been preserved throughout the centuries. Jesters and performers usually staged their shows based on oral folk scenarios. The number of these scenarios was immense and practically innumerable, as they were created by the performers themselves. These oral scripts were transmitted from one performance to another, from one troupe to another, constantly being modified,



expanded, or shortened in the process. Due to their oral nature, many of them were forgotten or lost over time as generations of performers changed.

Only from the beginning of the twentieth century did researchers begin to study and document oral folk scenarios and dramas, as well as the lives and artistic practices of their performers. From the 1920s and 1930s onward, attention to this work increased, and since the late 1950s, it has been carried out on a regular basis.

The tradition of folk oral scripts and dramas served as the literary foundation of traditional Uzbek theatrical performances. Jesters and entertainers created their troupe repertoires based on the most popular and audience-approved oral plays, performing them as staged shows. In terms of structure, these performances were closer not to modern theatrical productions (spectacles), but rather resembled today's concert-style shows. The performers—jesters, comedians, dancers, acrobats, and often singers and instrumentalists—worked in groups, each presenting stage acts corresponding to a particular theme or genre for the audience.

During the performance, pre-prepared scenes, or numbers, agreed upon beforehand, were staged; however, new and unexpected elements also emerged spontaneously throughout the show. With each successive performance, these numbers evolved and were gradually refined.

The art of jesting and entertainment existed throughout all regions of Uzbekistan—both in cities and rural areas. Jesters and entertainers typically united within a single guild (an association of individuals of the same profession). The korfarmon (master and leader of the guild) was responsible for managing all performers within the guild as well as overseeing the entire creative process.

Typically, korfarmons (guild leaders) were individuals of great talent who, along with demonstrating exemplary mastery in their own art form, also possessed deep knowledge of related disciplines, were capable of managing creative processes, and held high respect among the community and the public. Among such korfarmons of the 19th century, one may mention Muhammadsolikh and Bidiyorshum, Zokir Eshon, his disciple and later korfarmon Yusuf Qiziq Shakarjon o'g'li in the Kokand Khanate, as well as the jesters and entertainers Boboyor Masxaraboz, Mizrob Masxara, Berdiyoy Diyoyorov and others in the Bukhara Emirate.



In the theatrical performances of jesters and entertainers, there were mainly two genres: tanqid (satire/criticism) and muqallid (imitation or parody). One of the essential conditions of staging performances in the jester-entertainer theater was the use of costume and makeup (grim). The first symbol distinguishing a jester or entertainer was a tall, pointed hat. Upon entering the performance, the jester would wear costumes and makeup appropriate to the plot and characters, often using artificial beards and mustaches.

Jesters and entertainers in the traditional Uzbek theater also effectively used performance masks, which had been preserved as a part of theatrical practice over centuries.

Since women's roles in traditional Uzbek theater were performed by men, special importance was given to imitation of female characters—specifically their movements, voice, clothing, and makeup. For this purpose, special wigs, footwear, and accessories were used. The setting, environment, and time of the events were conveyed through highly symbolic and conventional means.

The repertoire of traditional Uzbek theater differs from that of many other nations' oral theaters in terms of its thematic diversity, the number of plays, and in some cases, the large size of the troupe (guild) members. In particular, its repertoire reflects a wide range of aspects of everyday public life: the activities of judicial institutions, qozis (judges) and their courts, markets, trade relations, corruption in the distribution of water for land between the rich and the poor, theft, usury, shortcomings in education and upbringing in madrasahs and schools, deceit among certain religious figures, the exploitation of common people, as well as the communication between the khan's court and the people. These subjects are clearly reflected in the activities and repertoire of the troupes.

The stage performances enacted by these troupes were presented in small episodic scenes, resembling what would today be considered intermedias or sketches.

From the early 20th century onward, the emergence of the new circus and modern theater in Turkestan brought changes to the artistic activities of these troupes. This transformation first manifested in the collaboration between the new Uzbek circus and the traditional theater, which together laid the foundation for the creation of a new form of circus entertainment — the Uzbek circus klotsiadasi.



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The new circus, which operated inside a large enclosed tent structure, had already been established in Europe. After spreading to Russia, it entered Turkestan following the Russian conquest. European and Russian traveling circus troupes frequently visited Turkestan on artistic tours, becoming a source of inspiration for circus enthusiasts.

Based on its own conditions, the new circus incorporated and adapted numerous elements of folk art and sports into a single discipline — the circus. These included comedy, equestrian performances, horseback acrobatics, tightrope walking, aerial gymnastics, ring acrobatics, wrestling, powerlifting, animal training and performances, as well as clowning and slapstick. All these art forms and genres were successfully integrated into the circus structure.

In 1902, the first Uzbek circus was established in Tashkent under the direction of Mullaboy Mansurov, where the renowned performer Yusuf qiziq was invited along with his troupe to present performances. Under the conditions of the Soviet regime, Yusufjon qiziq actively participated in the creation of modern performing arts through the assimilation of the elements of Uzbek traditional heritage, including dance, music, and theatrical forms.

During 1921–1927, he contributed significantly to the Uzbek State Theatre under the leadership of Mannon Uyg‘ur, where the integration of national theatrical elements was systematically carried out. Between 1926–1929, within the Uzbek Concert Ethnographic Ensemble led by M. Qoriyoqubov, Yusufjon qiziq, in collaboration with maestro Usta Olim Komilov, played a crucial role in teaching performers traditional Uzbek dance forms such as “Katta o‘yin”, women’s dances, and lapar vocal art. He personally mentored the legendary dancer Tamaraxonim, helping her master Uzbek folk songs, lapar art, and traditional choreographic practices.

Thus, from the end of the 19th century until the end of his life, Yusufjon qiziq remained not only a celebrated comic actor and an unparalleled stage master, but also a living repository of Uzbek intangible cultural heritage. He made invaluable contributions to the integration of national traditions into the emerging forms of theatre, circus, and dance arts, thereby securing a prominent place in the history of theatre and the performing arts of Uzbekistan.



It is known from various historical sources that the traditional folk theatre was widely spread not only in the central regions of Uzbekistan but also in the cities and villages of the Bukhara Emirate and the Khiva Khanate. However, in these sources, the names of the performers, the titles of their plays, and detailed records of their performances have largely not been preserved. Only from the 19th century onward do we find specific information about the maskharaboz (comic actors), their lives, their artistic legacy, and their repertoires.

The performances of maskharaboz troupes were categorized mainly as "Muqallid" (pantomime)—a genre performed by a single actor without music, using only words, facial expressions, and physical gestures. Another type was the rope-walking performances, which included multi-part shows known as "xotarli (sequential or continuous) plays."

In the Muqallid pantomimes, birds, animals, sometimes humans, and even inanimate objects served as symbolic subjects. These performances aimed to convey human traits through allegorical representation, rather than through mere imitation. Thus, the performer's task was not simply to imitate, but to create a meaningful artistic image that expressed moral or philosophical ideas. Such pantomimes demanded a high level of mastery from the performer—requiring precision in mimicry, controlled expression, and the ability to embody metaphorical characters convincingly.

Single-actor performances were enacted by maskharaboz artists who played multiple characters within one show. By modulating their voice and adapting their movements, a single performer could represent two or more distinct characters in the same act.

Starting from the 1950s, concert-style stage performances known as estrada began to be organized in Uzbekistan in connection with various cultural and ideological objectives. These events were held in theaters and cultural palaces to celebrate national holidays, anniversaries, and significant public occasions. Performers such as vocalists, film and theater actors, solo dancers and dance ensembles, circus artists, and musicians presented their acts on a single stage.

With each passing year, these types of performances grew in popularity, resulting in the emergence of estrada as a new stage art genre. Unlike the earlier open-air public



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performances that often lasted 5–6 hours and featured both professional and amateur artists, estrada concerts were more compact in format and capable of encompassing diverse aspects of cultural life within a single event.

A significant characteristic of these performances was that audiences could enjoy various genres of art—such as theater, cinema, circus, music, dance, literature, and spoken word—within just a few hours. The rapid development of this genre was also attributed to the increasing popularity of solo performers beloved by the public. Spectators attended concerts specifically to see and enjoy the artistry of their favorite singers, musicians, actors, circus performers, and dancers.

The history of performing arts in Uzbekistan shows that the 1950s and 1960s were marked by the rise and popularization of the estrada genre. During this period, audiences flocked to concert halls to witness the performances of renowned artists such as Tamarakhonim and Mukarrama Turgunbaeva in traditional dance, Komiljon Otaniyozov, Ma'murjon Uzoqov, and Tavakkal Qodirov in folk singing, as well as the humorous performances and askiya of Yusufjon Qiziq Shakarjonov.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the popularity of estrada continued to grow with performers and ensembles such as Botir Zokirov, the “Yalla” group, actors of the Television Miniatures Theatre (including Ergash Karimov and Roza Karimova), Qahramon Dadayev, and the “Bahor” dance ensemble, all of whom were able to fill concert halls with enthusiastic audiences. Later, celebrated artists such as Fakhriddin Umarov, Orif Alimaxsumov, and Ortiq Otajonov further contributed to the spread and acclaim of the estrada genre.

Today, many contemporary singers, musicians, comedians, actors, and dancers, who are considered the disciples and spiritual heirs of the aforementioned masters, continue to perform estrada numbers that are deeply loved by the public.

Thus, estrada in Uzbekistan did not enter merely as a new artistic direction adopted from Europe; rather, it evolved naturally from the nation's own historical roots — from traditional theater, folk music, dance, and comedic heritage that had been preserved and developed over centuries.



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