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The Role of Polyphony in Folk Instruments and its Educational Significance

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A B S T R A C T
This article examines the significance of polyphony in Uzbek national musical instruments and provides an overview of recent scholarly literature in this field. It analyzes the development of performance skills on these instruments, the ongoing initiatives and projects aimed at improving national instrumental practice, as well as the key challenges that remain unresolved and possible ways to address them. Special attention is given to the educational value of national instruments in fostering musical culture, aesthetic taste, and artistic thinking among the younger generation.

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Introduction

Music has accompanied humanity for millennia, reflecting labor, lifestyle, emotions, aspirations, and the spiritual essence of different generations. In Uzbek culture, music has always held a uniquely significant place. From early childhood, love for melody, art, and musical heritage is nurtured within the family environment. Traditionally, almost every Uzbek household preserved and performed at least one type of national musical instrument—an enduring artistic lineage passed down from generation to generation.

Today, these traditions continue to serve as a powerful cultural force in shaping the worldview of young people, instilling in them deep thinking, emotional sensitivity, and self-confidence. Uzbekistan's musical heritage—particularly national instruments and their repertoire—plays an irreplaceable role in the spiritual cultivation of the youth.

Uzbek folk instruments embody centuries of craftsmanship, expressive artistry, and cultural symbolism. They represent not only musical creativity but also the evolution of intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual thought in the region. These instruments have been shaped by master artisans and performers who enriched, perfected, and disseminated the musical art throughout Central Asia.

This article examines the historical foundations, pedagogical significance, and polyphonic development of Uzbek folk instrumental performance, providing a comprehensive scholarly analysis grounded in existing literature and historical sources.

Literature Review

The role of polyphony in folk instruments and its educational value has been explored by numerous Uzbek and Central Asian scholars. Foundational works include:

- T.E. Solomonova – *History of Uzbek Music*
- F. Abdurahimova – *Orchestra Class*
- A. Tashmatova – *History of Performance Art*

- A. Tashmatova – *Museum of Musical Instruments*
- Zohid Haqnazarov – *On Conducting*
- A. Tashmatova & X. Beknazarov – *Cholgu-shunoslik (Instrumentology)*
- R.F. Qodirov – *Music Psychology*
- S. Begmatov & M. Matyoqubova – *Traditional Uzbek Musical Instruments*

These sources collectively illuminate the cultural, technical, and methodological aspects of Uzbek musical performance and serve as a scholarly basis for the present expanded study.

Methodology

The study adopts a multidisciplinary and integrative research design, employing:

- Complex approach - synthesizing historical, cultural, pedagogical, and musical perspectives;
- Systemic analysis - examining musical instruments within broader socio-cultural evolution;
- Generalization - deriving conceptual insights from historical episodes;
- Analogy - comparing Uzbek musical traditions with global trends;
- Synergetics - analyzing dynamic interactions between musical heritage, performance practice, and modernization processes.

Both qualitative and historical-interpretive methods were used to construct a comprehensive narrative of polyphony and its educational significance.

Results and Analysis

Historical Development of Uzbek Folk Instrument Performance. Musical instruments in Central Asia have long served as an artistic medium expressing human spirituality and collective memory. They evolved through centuries of craftsmanship by expert luthiers (soz ustalari), becoming refined tools capable of rich expressiveness.

Historical manuscripts, literary works, and visual art attest to a vibrant musical tradition extending from antiquity to the present. Uzbek folk instruments thus form a continuous cultural chain whose broken links scholar strive to restore.

In the 18th–19th centuries, Uzbek folk and professional music witnessed remarkable growth. Several legendary performers shaped the trajectory of instrumental artistry, including:

- To‘ychi Xofiz
- Shorahim Shoumarov
- Shobarot Tanburchi
- Abdusoat Dutorchi
- Usta Usmon Zufarov (Tashkent)
- Rustambek (Andijan)
- Abduqodir Naychi
- Ahmadjon Qoshnaychi (Qo‘qon)
- Ro‘zimatxon Changchi (Namangan)
- Usta Masaid Doyrachi
- Usta Olim Komilov, and others.

Their contributions included preserving musical treasures, mentoring emerging talents, improving instrument construction, and introducing new artistic concepts. By the late 19th century, instruments such as rubob, dutor, tanbur, nay, and chang had undergone structural and acoustic modernization.

Classification and Evolution of Uzbek Instruments. Uzbek instrumental performance is classified into two main groups:

1. Traditional instruments, preserved in their historical forms;
2. Modernized (reconstructed) instruments, adapted to meet orchestral and polyphonic requirements.

Furthermore, Uzbek instrumental performance today comprises three artistic directions:

1. Folk (traditional) music – characterized by improvisation, flexibility, and performance conditions requiring rapid adaptation;
2. Classical (maqom) music – chamber-oriented, refined, and structured;
3. Composer-based professional music – integrating modern styles, orchestration, and harmonization.

Instrument groups are divided into stringed, wind, and percussive instruments. Their technical capabilities allow Uzbek performers to interpret global classical works with precision—a testament to their expressive range.

Emergence of Polyphony in Central Asia. Historically, Uzbek music—both vocal and instrumental—was monodic (single-voiced). Polyphony entered Central Asia only in the early 20th century, prompted by:

- Rapid modernization;
- Western influence in music education;
- Introduction of notation-based performance;
- Growth of professional composition.

The adoption of polyphony stimulated the formation of folk instrument orchestras, a major cultural innovation.

During the 1930s, many Eurasian countries experienced similar transitions. Enthusiastic musicians and instrument-makers developed new orchestral traditions. Early orchestras were experimental yet attracted significant public interest and contributed to cultural exchange.

Formation of Uzbek Folk Instrument Orchestras. Two major collectives emerged in Uzbekistan:

- T. Jalilov's ethnographic orchestra;
- N. Mironov and A. Petrosyans's notated folk orchestra.

The shift from unison to polyphony created several challenges, primarily the need for families of instruments with multiple registers (bass, tenor, alto, soprano).

Between 1929 and 1935, master instrument-makers such as:

- S. Shoumarov
- M. Xarratov
- U. Zufarov
- R. Isaboyev

began modernizing instruments. Simultaneously, Ashot Petrosyans, A. Kevkhoyans, S. Didenko, and V. Romanchenko designed fully tempered, twelve-step instrument families suitable for orchestration.

In 1938, the first official Uzbek notated folk instrument orchestra was established, led by:

- Ashot Ivanovich Petrosyans (founder)
- Said Aliyev (from 1957)
- Foruq Sodiqov (from 1976)

These orchestras won awards in festivals and transformed Uzbek musical culture.

Educational Value of Polyphony and Orchestral Performance. For young performers, polyphonic playing within ensemble or orchestra settings provides:

- Development of musical hearing and harmonic awareness;
- Mastery of notation;
- Ensemble discipline and cooperation;
- Broader artistic thinking and interpretive skills.

Uzbekistan has invested heavily in training instrumentalists through:

- Music schools;
- Specialized lyceums and colleges;
- Conservatories;
- Preschool institutions introducing basic performance skills.

To strengthen orchestral education, it is recommended to begin with small ensemble orchestras such as:

- String-based (dutor, rubob) ensembles;
- Percussion ensembles;
- Single-family orchestras (e.g., chang orchestra).

Such practices, widely implemented in the 1970–1980s, remain highly effective today.

Cultural Platforms and Festivals. A major contribution to the promotion of polyphony is the annual:

"Navro'z Sadalari" Republican Festival of Folk Instrument Orchestras

Founded in 1997 and now international in scale, it gathers ensembles from:

- Preschools
- Music schools
- Specialized lyceums/colleges
- Higher education institutions
- Professional orchestras

This festival:

- Identifies talented young musicians;
- Encourages artistic exchange;
- Strengthens national musical identity;
- Preserves and innovates traditional performance.

Professional ensembles such as the Uzbek State Academic Folk Orchestra and the "Sug'diyona" Chamber Orchestra exemplify excellence in multi-voiced performance and serve as role models for youth.

Discussion

Polyphonic development in Uzbekistan is both a cultural necessity and an artistic evolution shaped by modernization, globalization, and pedagogical needs. While monodic heritage must be preserved, polyphony expands expressive possibilities, facilitates orchestration, and aligns Uzbek music with international standards.

Several issues still require attention:

- Expanding the instrument family to fully meet orchestral needs;
- Updating educational curricula;

- Training specialists in orchestration and instrument reconstruction;
- Supporting research on traditional tuning systems and polyphonic adaptation.

Nonetheless, Uzbek folk instruments have demonstrated exceptional adaptability, proving that national heritage can thrive within contemporary artistic frameworks.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The development of polyphonic orchestral performance in Uzbekistan is a complex, ongoing cultural project. Current instruments and performance traditions did not emerge spontaneously; they are the result of decades of innovation, dedication, and artistic experimentation.

To strengthen this field, it is necessary to:

1. Enhance the quality and design of folk instruments through continued modernization;
2. Improve performer training, emphasizing harmony, ensemble skills, and interpretive mastery;
3. Expand repertoire by encouraging composers to write for folk orchestras;
4. Support young musicians through festivals, competitions, and international collaborations;
5. Preserve monodic traditions while enriching them with modern polyphonic techniques.

Ultimately, the future of Uzbek orchestral performance depends on the creativity, diligence, and passion of young musicians who continue to advance this rich cultural legacy.

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