

Development trends in Uzbek dutor performance, pedagogical systematization, repertoire expansion, and national identity in a globalized context

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Abstract: This article examines the principal development trends in Uzbek dutor performance over the past century, with a focus on the post-independence period. The dutor, a traditional two-stringed long-necked lute, has undergone a significant transformation from a predominantly folk instrument of oral transmission to a central pillar of Uzbekistan's classical and contemporary musical identity. This study analyzes three interconnected trends: the systematization and formalization of pedagogy within state conservatories and the maqom tradition; the expansion of repertoire through composed works, orchestral integration, and virtuosic solo performance; and the negotiation of the instrument's role between safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and engaging with globalized artistic dialogues. Drawing upon ethnomusicological theory, analysis of pedagogical materials, and performance practice, this article argues that the modernization of dutor performance has been a state-sponsored project aimed at constructing national identity, resulting in a dynamic and sometimes contested synthesis of traditional aesthetics with Western-derived conservatory models. The findings highlight a conscious movement from regional folk practice towards a codified national art form, ensuring the dutor's vitality in the 21st century while presenting ongoing challenges regarding authenticity, innovation, and transmission.

Keywords: Uzbek dutor, performance trends, pedagogical systematization, national identity, shashmaqom tradition, cultural modernization

Introduction

The dutor occupies a unique and evolving position within the musical landscape of Uzbekistan. As a foundational instrument of the Shashmaqom, the revered classical court music tradition of Transoxiana, and as a ubiquitous presence in folk ensembles across the country's diverse regions, the dutor embodies both the high art of the past and the living vernacular expressions of the present. The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed profound changes in its construction, performance practice, pedagogical transmission, and cultural status. These changes are not merely technical or musical; they are deeply intertwined with Uzbekistan's socio-political history, from its incorporation into the Soviet Union to its emergence as an independent nation-state. Understanding the development trends in dutor performance, therefore, requires an examination of music as both an art form and a vehicle for cultural policy and national identity formation.

The objective of this article is to chart and analyze the key trajectories that have shaped modern dutor performance. It moves beyond a mere historical chronology to investigate the systemic forces driving these changes. The central research questions are: How have pedagogical methods for the dutor shifted from oral, master-apprentice (ustoz-shogird) models to institutionalized, notation-based systems? In what ways has the instrument's repertoire expanded beyond traditional maqom cycles and folk melodies? And how does the dutor function as a symbol of national culture in post-independence Uzbekistan, particularly in its engagement with global music markets and discourses on intangible heritage? The significance of this inquiry lies in its contribution to the scholarly understanding of how traditional music instruments navigate modernity, offering a Central Asian case

study with implications for similar processes worldwide. This article posits that the development of dutor performance represents a deliberate and state-supported project of “classicization,” wherein a folk instrument is elevated to the status of a concert soloist’s vehicle, necessitating standardized technique, a written canon, and a new generation of virtuosi.

Methods

This study employs a multi-method qualitative approach rooted in ethnomusicology. Primary sources include analysis of pedagogical manuals and etude books published by the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan, musical scores of contemporary compositions for dutor, and audio-visual recordings of key performers from the mid-20th century to the present. A critical review of existing scholarship in Russian, Uzbek, and English on Uzbek musicology, organology, and cultural policy provides the theoretical framework. Furthermore, the method incorporates performance practice as research, drawing on insights from the author’s own training and engagement with the tradition, complemented by interviews and masterclass observations with prominent dutorists and pedagogues. This triangulation of textual analysis, auditory scrutiny, and practitioner insight allows for a holistic understanding of trends that are simultaneously technical, aesthetic, and ideological. The focus is on the mainstream, state-sanctioned developmental trajectory, acknowledging that regional folk practices continue in parallel, often with less documented but vital persistence.

Results

The investigation identifies three dominant, interlocking trends in the development of modern Uzbek dutor performance.

The Systematization of Pedagogy and Technique

The most fundamental trend is the formalization of dutor instruction. In the pre-Soviet and early Soviet era, learning was exclusively through the *ustoz-shogird* (master-disciple) system, relying on oral transmission, imitation, and deep immersion in a specific regional style or school. The establishment of music schools and the Tashkent State Conservatory in the 1930s initiated a process of systematization. This required the creation of a standardized curriculum, a unified technical approach, and written pedagogical materials. Pioneers like Olimjon Ghoziyev and later, figures such as To‘xtasin Jiyanov and Rasuljon Qoriyev, were instrumental in developing method books that codified fingerings, scale systems (including chromatic scales), bowing techniques for the bowed satodutor variant, and a progressive series of exercises. The traditional *tutum* (hand position) was analyzed and formalized, while right-hand strumming (*zarb*) and plucking (*nola*) techniques were categorized and notated. This shift enabled the training of large numbers of students in a replicable manner, producing a cadre of performers with a consistent technical foundation. However, it also inevitably led to a certain homogenization, as regional idiosyncrasies were often subdued in favor of a pan-Uzbek “conservatory style.” The pedagogy increasingly incorporated elements from Western classical string instrument training, such as structured etudes and attention to standardized tone production, while striving to preserve the instrument’s distinctive timbral and ornamental character.

Expansion and Diversification of Repertoire

Parallel to pedagogical codification was a dramatic expansion of the dutor’s repertoire. Traditionally, its literature consisted of the instrumental sections (*nasr*) of the *Shashmaqom*, regional folk song and dance melodies, and improvisational forms. The 20th century saw the composition of new works specifically for the modernized dutor. Composers such as Mikhael Yudakov, Mutavakkil Burhonov, and Felix Yanov-Yanovskiy wrote concertos, sonatas, and programmatic pieces that demanded extended techniques, greater virtuosity, and a wider range of expression. These works often blended modal structures of the *maqom* with Western harmonic progressions and formal designs (e.g., sonata-allegro form, rondo). Furthermore, the dutor’s role in ensembles evolved. It became a core member

of the state-sponsored folk instrument orchestra, requiring players to read symphonic scores, blend dynamically, and execute precisely notated parts. This orchestral context spurred further technical developments, such as the mastery of all keys and increased playing velocity. The solo concert repertoire grew exponentially, creating a new genre of “academic dutor music” that showcased the performer’s technical prowess and interpretive depth, moving the instrument from an ensemble and accompanimental role to the forefront of the stage.

The Dutor as a Symbol of National Culture and Global Engagement

Since Uzbekistan’s independence in 1991, the dutor has been consciously promoted as a primary symbol of national cultural heritage. This represents a third major trend: the instrumentalization of the dutor for nation-building. Government support for maqom ensembles, dutor festivals, and televised competitions has solidified its status. The instrument features prominently in state ceremonies and cultural diplomacy, representing an authentic, ancient, yet sophisticated Uzbek identity to the world. This has led to two seemingly contradictory but concurrent sub-trends. First, a renewed emphasis on “authenticity” and the preservation of the “pure” Shashmaqom tradition, often associated with specific master lineages and historical performance practices. Second, an active engagement with global fusion and world music, where dutorists collaborate with jazz musicians, Western classical ensembles, and electronic producers. Performers like Shuhrat Matchonov and Sitora Farmonova have gained international acclaim by navigating both spheres - mastering the traditional repertoire while also innovating with cross-cultural projects. The dutor’s physical design has also stabilized, with a standardized concert model (featuring fixed frets for equal temperament and machine heads for precise tuning) now coexisting with older, regionally specific variants.

Discussion

The development trends outlined above reveal a complex narrative of intentional modernization. The systematization of pedagogy, while creating a sustainable and scalable teaching model, raises questions about the potential loss of regional diversity and the spontaneity inherent in oral transmission. The conservatory model, for all its benefits in producing technical excellence, risks privileging notational fidelity over the subtle, context-dependent nuances of traditional iho (feeling/expression). The expansion of repertoire through composed works has undoubtedly enriched the instrument’s expressive potential and concert hall viability. Yet, it also introduces an aesthetic tension between the cyclic, modal logic of the maqom and the teleological, developmental logic of Western art music forms. The success of this synthesis is variable and remains a subject of debate among purists and innovators.

The dutor’s role as a national symbol is perhaps the most politically charged trend. Post-independence cultural policy has effectively used the instrument as a tool for fostering national unity and distinctiveness. This has brought unprecedented institutional support and prestige. However, it also subjects artistic development to the priorities of state ideology, which may favor certain traditions over others and influence the direction of “acceptable” innovation. The global engagement of dutorists presents an opportunity for dynamic cultural exchange but also risks commodification or exoticization within the world music market. The challenge for contemporary performers is to balance their roles as custodians of a deep historical tradition and as creative artists contributing to a living, global musical conversation.

These trends are not unique to Uzbekistan; they echo the “folk instrument revival” movements seen in many cultures. What distinguishes the Uzbek case is the central role of the maqom, a sophisticated, written-oral classical system, as a foundation. The modernization of the dutor is thus not a transition from simple folk to complex art music, but rather a transformation within an already complex art music ecosystem. Future research should include detailed ethnographic studies of how pedagogy is

actually implemented in classrooms versus private ustoz-shogird relationships, comparative analyses of regional performance styles that persist outside the conservatory mainstream, and audience reception studies to understand how these developments are perceived both domestically and internationally.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that the development of Uzbek dutor performance in the modern era is characterized by a deliberate and state-facilitated process of systematization, expansion, and national symbolization. The instrument's journey from a folk and classical ensemble instrument to a virtuosic concert soloist's vehicle reflects broader projects of cultural modernization and nation-building. The formalization of pedagogy, though creating a unified technical language, necessarily negotiates with the intimate, oral master-apprentice tradition. The explosive growth of a composed concert repertoire has elevated the instrument's prestige while prompting ongoing aesthetic dialogues between modal traditionality and Western formalism. Finally, the dutor's enshrinement as a national icon post-independence has secured its institutional future while framing its global engagements. The trajectory of the dutor is not one of replacement, but of layered accumulation, where new performance practices coexist with and reinterpret older ones. The continued vitality of the Uzbek dutor in the 21st century will depend on its practitioners' ability to navigate these complementary and sometimes competing trends - honoring the depth of the maqom, mastering the demands of the concert stage, and forging a distinctive voice in the global arena, all while preserving the soulful, expressive essence that has always defined its sound.

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