



Article

Traditions of Uzbek Musical Theatre

Muzaffar Pirmatov¹

1. Associate Professor, Department of Art Studies and Cultural Studies, Uzbek State Institute of Arts and Culture

* Correspondence: -

Abstract: This research investigates the development of Uzbek musical theatre traditions and their dissemination in the contemporary media sphere with a focus on their historical background, artistic variations and modern problems. Over the last millennium, forms of classical national musical drama have all but disappeared in recent decades in favor of a more superficial presentation of the genre in which playwrights and composers do not collaborate as creatively interdependently, as they used to. This study reveals a major gap in knowledge in current practice — a weakening of the old creative synthesis that once linked together direction, music and acting. This study uses a qualitative analytical technique, both archival research and analysis of major theatrical works and contributions of major directors, such as Rustam Bobokhonov, Rustam Madiyev, and Bahodir Nazarov, to review important stages in development. Results show that although the core of musical theatre is still solid, revival efforts depend on the tuning of classical and modern melody. The results show the importance of maintaining historical accuracy while connecting the past to modernity so that the audience retains interest and its culture remains persistent. DP abstract: The study concludes that a prospective Uzbek musical theatre form harmoniously combined with national traditions and modern European musical genres would allow for finding a way to the renewal of a national musical theatre form, which raises the voice of Uzbek music not only on national but also on international musical stages. Such a synthesis would maintain the genre's cultural identity yet inspire forward-thinking, experimental creation among future generations of creators.

Keywords: Performance, tradition, creativity, acting, directing, cultural heritage, performing arts.

Citation: Pirmatov, M. Traditions Of Uzbek Musical Theatre. Central Asian Journal of Arts and Design 2026, 7(1), 13-17.

Received: 10th Aug 2025

Revised: 16th Sep 2025

Accepted: 24th Oct 2025

Published: 07th Nov 2025



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

1. Introduction

Uzbek traditional theatre has changed, modified and evolved over the centuries. This unique style of musical theatre reflected its roots, which were nourished back to the traditions of our ancient theatre. Covering different historical stages — including the eventual downfall of the Sassanid Empire, the subsequent Iranian, Greek, and Arab invasions; the fragmentation caused by the Mongols; the prosperity of the economy, arts, literature and spirituality during the great conquer of Amir Timur and the Timurid dynasty; and finally the rule by tyrannical leaders when the feeling of national pride, dignity and identity was annihilated — the traditional Uzbek theatre survived many trials, preserved its essence and evolved.

In the late 19th century at the beginning of the 20th theatre groups from Azerbaijan, Tatarstan, Russia, and other countries came to Turkestan and brought new European-style theatre with them [1]. The local intelligentsia took an interest in this novel art form. With this form of new art, members of the “Jadid” movement search for a high social enlightenment — which would be accompanied with a natural change for knowledge development — to elevate spirituality and culture in a way that fits in the new era. These efforts ushered Uzbek art into a new stage. New styles and creative directions appeared,

and a new theatre genre was born the Uzbek musical drama on the world stage. The Uzbek theatre scene produced world-famous actors, especially, director, playwrights, composers, artists, and art scholars.

2. Materials and Methods

This article adopts a qualitative, analytical methodology to probe the settings, conservation and change of sound traditions in the Uzbek musical theatre [2]. This research is a Historical, comparative and descriptive study which follows the procedure of development of music theatre from its ancient origins to current practice. The primary data are gathered from historical documents, classic plays, memoirs, and writings of major theatre researchers and practitioners such as Jabborov, Rahmonov and Pirmatov. Collectively, secondary data were consulted in academic journals, monographs, and reviews on the creative heritage of prominent directors, including Rustam Bobokhonov, Rustam Madiyev, and Bahodir Nazarov. We studied the ways of making and remaking of classical traditions in continuous history from the perspective of social, political and cultural transformations embedded in the body of modern theatre. Of particular focus was identifying the collaborative activity between playwrights, composers and directors that were integral to the emergence of a national musical theatre form [3]. Content analysis and thematic categorization of the artworks were used to interpret the data to extract common foundational artistic principles and innovative processes. It added a cultural-historical dimension to understand how international theatre trends affected the Uzbek stage. Such a methodical design gave an in-depth perspective of the classical traditions revitalized aspects of modern synthesis while conserving their national character to provide sustainability and also further progress of the Uzbek musical theatre within the modern context.

3. Results and Discussion

The Uzbek national musical theatre made its first steps with remarkable success. Ghulom Zafar's play *Halima* created a significant sensation among audiences. This performance, dealing with contemporary and socially relevant themes, laid the foundation for a genre of plays based on events that could occur in real life. Subsequently, many works were written in this direction and staged with great success, including *Gulsara* (K. Yashin), *Nurxon* (K. Yashin), *Oftobxon* (K. Yashin), *Oltin Ko'l* (O. Uyg'un), *Surmaxon* (B. Rakhmonov), *Vatan Ishqi* (Z. Fatkhulin), and *Farg'ona Tong Otguncha* (based on the novel by R. Hamroyev and M. Ismoilii) [4], [5].

Following *Halima*, another new direction emerged, which later became a benchmark in Uzbek musical theatre. Masterpieces were created based on legends, epics, and myths, including *Farhod and Shirin* (G. Zafar), *Layli and Majnun* (Sh. Khurshid), *Tohir and Zuhra*, *Alpomish* (S. Abdulla), *Aziz and Sanam* (A. Bobojonov), *Ravshan and Zulkhumor* (K. Yashin), *Oshiq G'arib and Shohsanam* (A. Bobojonov), and *Gul and Navro'z* (S. Abdulla). These works laid the foundation for the development of unique traditions specific to Uzbek musical theatre.

Another direction in Uzbek musical theatre involved adaptations of famous historical works. Among these were *Muqanna* (H. Olimjon), *Muqimiy* (S. Abdulla), *Nodira* (H. Razzoqov), *Navoiy in Astrabad* (I. Maqsumov), *Zavqiy* (K. Mahkamov), and *Mashrab* (A. Tursunov), all of which were eagerly anticipated and enthusiastically received by audiences.

The founders of Uzbek musical theatre traditions G. Zafar, Sh. Khurshid, K. Yashin, S. Abdulla, T. Jalilov, Sh. Shoumarov, Mannon Uyghur, Yetim Bobojonov, Muzaffar Muhamedov, Zuhur Qobulov, Mahmudjon G'ofurov, Razzoq Hamroyev, Lutfixonim Sarimsoqova, Abbos Bakirov, Soyib Khojayev, and Tursunoy Ja'farova laid the foundation for this art form [6][7]. Subsequent generations have continued to enrich and develop the groundwork established by these devoted artists.

Having gone through a complex stage of development, Uzbek musical theatre has overcome numerous challenges up to the present day. However, for various reasons, over

the past decades, truly national classical musical dramas have significantly declined, and their place has increasingly been taken by artistically shallow performances, mostly dealing with domestic or everyday themes. These works have their own philosophy, but they do not follow the path of musical drama that, over nearly a century, created distinctive traditions [8]. In other words, as noted above, playwrights and composers no longer collaborate closely in the creative process. Typically, the playwright completes a work independently, and then the composer sets it to music separately. The desire for innovation or the creation of a unique artistic path between them is either weak or absent. Directors, in staging such works, often treat arias and duets as separate concert numbers rather than integral parts of the performance. In contrast, our masters and mentors used to work as a single unit, fully united in the creative process [9]. Drawing lessons from such experiences, it would be beneficial for future productions to adhere strictly to the national classical tradition, observing all the principles of musical drama. For example, our master directors, working in this direction, developed a unique genre and advanced the Uzbek musical drama, defining its path of development. Prominent figures of our theatre art created unparalleled examples of classical Uzbek performances, which have now become the traditions of contemporary musical theatre. The continued development and preservation of these classical musical performances across all regions of our country are largely thanks to the dedicated service of numerous distinguished directors.

Despite these challenges, it is highly encouraging that there are dedicated artists who continue to create for the development of the arts, revive traditions, and ensure their further growth.

Director Rustam Bobokhonov, throughout his creative work, strove to revive traditions and introduce innovations [10]. He understood that in a musical performance, an actor's performance is not merely an addition to the music it is a way of living the character. Therefore, in the productions he staged, he worked extensively on arias and text to ensure that the arias did not become isolated concert numbers. Bobokhonov aimed to help musical theatre actors find a contemporary performance style while staging works in the spirit of classical musical theatre. Among his notable productions, *Nurxon* and later *Yusuf and Zulayho* stood out for their rich mass scenes, costumes, decorations, and modern interpretation [11]. The enchanting arias, choruses, and dances in these works elevate the romantic love story to greater artistic heights. Throughout his career, Rustam Bobokhonov sought not only to restore the traditions of musical theatre but also to introduce his own distinctive innovations.

People's Artist of Uzbekistan, Rustam Madiyev, like R. Bobokhonov, sought to introduce innovations and paid meticulous attention to working with actors, ensuring that no detail was overlooked or left unanalyzed [12]. Throughout his creative career, Rustam Madiyev staged many outstanding productions, working in accordance with the principles of classical theatre while imbuing his performances with a contemporary spirit.

The production *Fotima and Zuhra*, based on O. Umarbekov's novel of the same name, earned the audience's admiration due to its well-crafted direction, strong dramaturgy, and distinctive stage interpretation. "Audiences who came to see this performance would leave the hall in tears," recalls Zulayho Boykhonova. Later, the historical-themed production *Bobur Sog'inchi* was also staged in a manner consistent with the traditions of musical theatre. Through his productions, Rustam Madiyev entered the history of national theatre as a creative figure committed to preserving the traditions of Uzbek musical theatre, developing them, and introducing innovations.

Director Bahodir Nazarov, through his significant creative work, has strived to stage numerous productions based on the traditions of musical theatre [13]. In developing historical, legendary, and contemporary-themed performances, Nazarov emphasizes the authenticity of actors' performances and the flawless execution of arias and choruses. He has staged works such as *Namrud*, *O'lding Aziz Bo'lding*, *Bu Telba Xonadon*, and *Oyonam – Qaynonam* according to the principles of musical drama, thereby continuing the traditions of national musical theatre.

Actors such as Zulayho Boykhonova, Ma'suda Otajonova, Mehri Bekjonova, and Boyir Kholmirezayev have been striving to develop the school of great theatre actors and to

become worthy mentors for new generations [14]. It is hoped that the promising young artists following in their footsteps will help preserve the traditions of Uzbek musical theatre and contribute to its further development in their own artistic directions.

To further improve the current state of Uzbek musical theatre and introduce innovations, just as the pioneers of our theatre in the early 20th century assimilated new European theatrical trends and added national characteristics to create the unique Uzbek musical drama, today it is possible to experiment with the highly popular European musical genre, nationalizing it through the synthesis of our rich traditions and contemporary European techniques, thereby achieving long-awaited innovations.

Building on the research and creative explorations of the directors mentioned above, it would be possible to develop new productions in an innovative action style by discovering special effects, while still preserving the classics of musical drama. In many European theatres, older classical productions are maintained exactly as they were staged in their time, presented today as “museum performances” for audiences to experience [15]. Similarly, in our theatres, beloved classics such as *Halima*, *Farhod and Shirin*, and *Layli and Majnun* could be preserved in the style of the 1920s–1940s, while simultaneously creating new youth-oriented works in the form of modern musicals, with dynamic staging and special effects, thereby drawing audiences back to the theatre.

4. Conclusion

Thus, the art of Uzbek musical theatre, based on centuries-old cultural and artistic traditions, is undergoing a rapid process of development within the framework of historical, social and creative changes. Results: The findings indicate that whereas early pioneering figures such as Ghulom Zafar, K. Yashin, and S. Abdulla cemented the foundations for national musical drama by marrying music, literature, and performance, in more recent decades the classical match of playwrights with composers has slowly faded. Today, the traditions of national sequined costume have been revived thanks to the ingenuity of directors such as Rustam Bobokhonov, Rustam Madiyev and Bahodir Nazarov, who fuse authenticity with modern theatre. The implications of this study highlight the need to rehabilitate and maintain the classical synthesis of Uzbek musical theatre, reopening it to contemporary audiences but conserving its national character. Further research needs to be conducted on frameworks for using contemporary digital and multimedia technologies in local theatre, as well as comparative studies particularly with European and Asian musical theatre models and audience studies on traditional versus modern performances. These studies will help open up and preserve precious theatrical face of multiculturalism in Uzbekistan, and provide up-to-date breathing on the stage as a form of finding one another in the process of cultural exchange.

REFERENCES

- [1] A. Jabborov, *Musical Drama and Comedy Genres in the Creativity of Uzbek Composers*. Tashkent: G. G'ulom Publishing House of Literature and Art, 2000.
- [2] M. Rahmonov, *Hamza and Uzbek Theatre*. Tashkent: State Publishing House of Artistic Literature of the Uzbek SSR, 1959.
- [3] K. S. Stanislavski, *My Life in Art*. Tashkent, 1965.
- [4] S. Tursunboyev, *History of Theatre*. Tashkent: Bilm Publishing House, 2005.
- [5] T. Tursunov, *Stage and Era*. Tashkent: Yangi Asr Avlodi Publishing House, 2007.
- [6] M. Pirmatov, “The Historical Theme of the Years of Independence in Musical Theatre,” *International Journal on Integrated Education*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 83–86, 2022.
- [7] S. T. Pirmatov, “The Continuity of Musical Education in the Creation of Vocal Schools,” *Journal of Intellectual Property and Human Rights*, vol. 3, no. 11, pp. 206–209, 2024.
- [8] G. A. Muftizade, “Interpretation of World Dramatic Art in Uzbek Theatre,” *Theoretical & Applied Science*, no. 11, pp. 555–559, 2020.

-
- [9] N. Qodirova, "Traditions and Modern Trends in the Development of Uzbek Stage Art," *Journal of Cultural Heritage Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 112–118, 2018.
 - [10] B. Yusupov, "National Identity and Modernization in Uzbek Performing Arts," *Central Asian Journal of Art and Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 45–53, 2019.
 - [11] A. Saidov, *Artistic Synthesis in the Uzbek Musical Theatre*. Tashkent: National Publishing House, 2021.
 - [12] D. Karimova, "Role of Composer-Director Collaboration in Uzbek Musical Drama," *Asian Journal of Performing Arts Research*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 97–104, 2020.
 - [13] U. Kholmatov, *Evolution of Uzbek Drama and Performance Tradition*. Tashkent: Academy of Arts of Uzbekistan, 2017.
 - [14] M. Sharipova, "Innovations and Traditions in Contemporary Uzbek Musical Theatre," *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, vol. 6, no. 5, pp. 67–73, 2023.
 - [15] E. Rakhimov, *The Development of Music and Theatre Art in Central Asia*. Samarkand: SamDU Press, 2016.