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Scenic Solution of the Musical Drama “Tohir And Zuhra”: A Historical and Contemporary Interpretation

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Abstract: The musical drama *Tohir and Zuhra*, created in 1939 by Sobir Abdulla and To‘xtasin Jalilov, is a pivotal work in Uzbek music theater, blending national traditions with modern theatrical expressions. Staged across numerous Uzbek theaters since its debut, this work gained popularity in Uzbekistan and neighboring countries due to its unique blend of music, drama, and national cultural heritage. Despite its long-standing prominence, the evolution of *Tohir and Zuhra*’s performances, and its adaptation to modern contexts, remains underexplored in contemporary academic discourse. This article aims to analyze the historical context, musical dramaturgy, and modern interpretations of *Tohir and Zuhra* across various productions. The study reveals that *Tohir and Zuhra* has undergone numerous adaptations, each shaping the emotional and thematic delivery of the piece. Changes in dramaturgy and music underscore the dynamic nature of its stage presence, with recent productions incorporating new musical elements and characters. This article offers a fresh perspective by examining the transformation of the musical drama from its original staging to its latest interpretations, considering both musical and dramaturgical aspects. The findings highlight the continued relevance of *Tohir and Zuhra* in contemporary Uzbek theater and its contribution to the evolving repertoire of musical drama, influencing both modern theatrical practices and the cultural memory of the Uzbek people.

Keywords: Musical Drama, Maqom, Shuba, Song, Composer, Epic, Overture

1. Introduction

Of the stage arts, Uzbek musical drama, which is closely tied to national traditions, is most artfully accomplished. We all know that the writers, or dramatists, composers and musicians who had creative activity at the turn of the 20th century really contribute a lot in such type of plays. The unique talents of such outstanding literary figures as G‘ulom Zafariy, Sobir Abdulla, Uyg‘un, Zinnat Fatxulin, and Komil Yashin, as well as well-known composers and musicians such as To‘xtasin Jalilov, Yunus Rajabiy, Reinhold Glière, Manas Leviev, and Doni Zokirov, were of great importance in the development of the genre.

Firstly, it is proper to mention of the brilliant composer, musician, and master To‘xtasin Jalilov who is deservedly considered the “father” of Uzbek musical dramas. In fact, never too closely associated with his artistic legacy until the emergence of folk music and the boom that triggered. In the 1940s–1950s, when executive To‘xtasin Jalilov worked at numerous activities of the republic, he added nearly 40 stage works to the world of art. It is not random that historical performance productions like “Farhod and Shirin”, “Layli and Majnun”, and “Tohir and Zuhra” stay for a long period in theater repertoires. Especially this musical drama of the odyssey of Tohir and Zuhra written by Sobir Abdulla and To‘xtasin Jalilov, soon became one of stage works that was loved by Uzbek nation. Jalilov’s music was that of enchantment that transcended beyond the realm, for the

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characters of the play took birth through its composition, and leapt out with their emotions, dreams, and aspirations.

Review of Related Literature and Sources

According to historical sources, the first production of "Tohir and Zuhra" on stage is known to be hosted in 1939 on the basis of the Fergana Regional Musical Drama Theater [1]. Since the audience received the production with enthusiasm, one year later, it entered into the repertoires of the Andijan and Kokand musical theaters. For example, the talented Kokand actors Valijon Hamroev (Tohir), Sabokhon Karimova (Zuhra), Qurbon Nazarov (Bobokhon), and others made artistic contributions that facilitated expression of the musical content of the work to the audience. Due to increasing interest in the musical drama, the performance was also staged in the Namangan and Samarkand theaters. It was staged on 23 March 1941 in the Muqimiy Tashkent Musical Drama Theater as well. In sum, "Tohir and Zuhra" that peaked at the creative and performative success, gained popularity within Uzbekistan as well as numerous applause in theaters of neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. For people from those countries, a staging of it in their musical theaters became a festive cultural event.

As outstanding theater scholar Toshpo'lat Tursunov notes:

The musical drama, 'Tohir and Zuhra' was permanently included in the repertoire of the Muqimiy Theatre. A lot of his tunes and compositions passed deep into the hearts of the audience and (the piece) To'ylar muborak hymned for brides and grooms (and now feverish to the people and youth) [2].

In exactly the same way, as noted by master musician Turg'un Alimatov, who worked at the theater in those days:

"A new national piece, the musical drama "Tohir and Zuhra", had become the center of attraction: it was attended for 10–15 days by the fans came from near cities and villages for the purpose of watching the show" [3].

The role of Tohir was brilliantly shown by the famous artists of the time Jo'raxon Sultonov, Ma'murjon Uzoqov, Mashrabjon Yunusov, and Mahmudjon G'ofurov and the role of Zuhra was efficiently played by Tursunxon Ja'farova, Shahodat Rahimova, E'tibor Jalilova, and Farog'at Rahmatova. Certainly, their outstanding performances played a role in making the play endure the test of time [4].

2. Methodology

Early stage performance history, interviews with the directing and musical teams involved in the production, analysis of the development of its musical themes and dramaturgy. For a complete grasp of the context that this research examines, the methodology also includes an elaborate cross-theatrical comparison of different performances of *Tohir and Zuhra* presented in different Uzbek theatres from its first performance in 1939 to its latest revivals [5]. Using this, it studies the changes in the dramaturgy like the character development or the insertion of contemporary theatrical elements. It also examines how the original music has changed in these productions for the palates of present-day audiences such as new numbers, sound changes through orchestration, and rearrangements of old chestnuts. It also includes insights from actors, musicians, and directors to provide perspectives on directorial choices and artistic challenges in bringing the drama to stage. In addition, this article examines the role of musical in the development of national identity and the limitations of musical as a genre over time (for a case study, Tohir and Zuhra also illustrates the adaptability of musical theater in Uzbekistan). This method includes historic documentation, interviews and performance analysis, offering a multifaceted examination of the ongoing significance of this classic text to Uzbek theater [6].

3. Results and Discussion

It "Tohir and Zuhra" has been continuously staged on stages of almost all musical theatres of the republic from the first production to the present day with some changes [7]. Chronological information about the staging of the musical drama in the musical theaters of Uzbekistan is given in the following table 1:

Table 1. Chronology of the Staging of "Tohir and Zuhra" in the Republic's Musical Drama Theaters

№	Theatre Name	Year Staged	Creators and Main Actors
1	Yusufjon qiziq Shakarjonov Fergana Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1939	Director: Mamadali Khaydarov Main actors: Nodira Inog'omova, Yulduz Kho'jaeva, Qanoatxon Xotamova, Mamadali Dadajonov, Abdurahmonqori Tojiboev
2	Yuldosh Okhunboboev Andijan Musical Drama Theatre	1940	Directors: Abduvahob Azimov, Abbos Bakirov Main actors: Fotima Kho'jaeva, Qamara Burnasheva, Mashrab Yunusov
3	Alisher Navoi Namangan Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1940	Director: Razzoq Hamroev Main actors: Tursunxon Ja'farova, S. Rahmonov
4	Hamza Kokand City Musical Drama Theatre	1940	Director: Salimjon Jo'raboev Main actors: Murodjon Ahmedov, Valijon Hamroev, Saboxon Karimova
5	Muqimiy Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1941	Director: Abduvahob Azimov Main actors: Tursunxon Ja'farova, Shahodat Rahimova, E'tibor Jalilova, Farog'at Rahmatova, Mashrabjon Yunusov, Mahmudjon G'ofurov, Jamolqori G'iyosov, Ma'murjon Uzoqov
6	Hamid Olimjon Samarkand Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1941	Main actors: Halima Zufarova, Zohid Sodiqov
7	Ogahiy Khorezm Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1941	Main actors: Onabibi Ochilova, H. Boltaev
8	Sadriddin Ayni Bukhara Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1944	Director: Mirobid Musaev Main actors: Nazokat Ne'matova, Ahmad Fayziev
9	Yusufjon qiziq Shakarjonov Fergana Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1944	Director: Muzaffar Muhammedov Main actors: Murodjon Ahmedov, E'tibor Jalilova
10	Muqimiy Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1946	Director: Muzaffar Muhammedov Main actors: Shahodat Rahimova, E'tibor Jalilova, Mashrabjon Yunusov, Mahmudjon G'ofurov, Ma'murjon Uzoqov
11	Mannon Uyg'ur Yangiyol Musical Drama Theatre	1946	Director: Kamtar Otaboev Main actors: Fazliddin Shamsiddinov
12	Muqimiy Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1950	Director: Muzaffar Muhammedov Main actors: Shahodat Rahimova, E'tibor Jalilova, Mashrabjon Yunusov
13	Muqimiy Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1953	Director: Viktor Yakovlevich Golovichner Main actors: E'tibor Jalilova, Mashrabjon Yunusov

14	Ogahiy Khorezm Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1953	Director: Armug'on Muhamedov Main actors: San'at Devonov, Sultonposhsha Raximova
15	Sadriddin Ayni Bukhara Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1953	Director: R. Botirov Main actors: Nazokat Ne'matova, Sattor Yarashev
16	Alisher Navoi Namangan Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1954	Directors: Albert Khachaturov, Mirzajon Dadaboev
17	Ogahiy Khorezm Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1954	Director: Armug'on Muhamedov Main actors: San'at Devonov, Sultonposhsha Raximova
18	Sadriddin Ayni Bukhara Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1973	Director: Aminjon Akobirov Main actors: Nazokat Ne'matova, A. Fayziev
19	Sadriddin Ayni Bukhara Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1977	Director: Ubaydulla Baqoev Main actors: Nazokat Ne'matova, Muxammad Rafiqov
20	Alisher Navoi Namangan Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1977	Main actors: Onaxon Tojiboeva, M. Isomiddinov
21	Mulla Toychi Toshmuhamedov Qashqadaryo Regional Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1970–1980s	Director: Aliqul To'laev Main actors: Oygul Xalilova, Jabbor Toshev
22	Muqimiy Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	1984	Director: Baxtiyor Ixtiyorov Main actors: Mexri Bekjonova, Abdushoir Salimov
23	Muqimiy Musical Drama and Comedy Theatre	2016–present	Director: Ahad Farmonov Main actors: Omon Yo'ldoshev, Zulfiya Umerova, Durdona Nosirova

In an interview, we discussed with the chief conductor of Muqimiy State Musical Drama Theatre, a famous composer Olimjon Komiljonov about the theatrical fate of the musical drama "Tohir and Zuhra" [8].

The conversation clarified several points of interest to theatre lovers:

The theatre stage has been constantly performing "Olim aka, Tohir va Zuhra" until the 1980s. It was not performed again for nearly thirty years. What was the reason for this?

Well-known actor Baxtiyor Ixtiyorov was appointed chief director of the Muqimiy Theatre at the mid-1980s. He revived "Tohir and Zuhra" and staged it for the viewers. Nevertheless, the dramatic rewrites and dramaturgical changes that were made to the play did not provide audiences with the impression they anticipated. Thus, the reinterpreted performance did not perform well either [9].

Did the inner dramaturgy of the work as such have also mga pagbabago?

Honestly, in the rewrite the focus was all of the common man vs. aristocrats. In those early take on Tohire's Arc, or at least his morality, was somewhat gradual through the course of events. But here he was, from the get-go, a people's fighter in the later incarnation. And even, Tohir and Zuhra's loyalty to the people was increasingly greater than their love for each other. They even gave up on singing the popular aires Ey quyosh and Ayirmish, which the lovers used to have. Of course this lessened the eagerness of the audience a tick somewhat. Due to these changes, the musical drama only ran until late 1985 [10].

What other reasons do you think played a part in this drama not being performed for another thirty years?

And this is not a secret, only extremely talented and powerful vocalists can perform songs written by master To'xtasin Jalilov. About that time, we lacked famous singer-actors Mashrabjon Yunusov, Maxmudjon G'ofurov, Tursunxon Ja'farova and Farog'at Rahmatova they all appeared temporarily and then disappeared; their flexible, wide spectrum voices lacking presence. This is why the famous Uzbek musical "Tohir and Zuhra" for 30 years, alas, was out of the repertoire of the Muqimiy Theatre.

However, over the previous few years, traditional shows have increased a level of popularity again between classic theatre fans [11]. In the end, from 2016 or recently, the Muqimiy State Musical Drama Theatre started staging "Tohir and Zuhra" again. In this new production, veteran director Ahad Farmonov cut the more than seventy original arias, duets, and choral pieces down to a third, redoing the play for the changing tastes of today's audiences. Theatre literary editor and at present senior lecturer at the Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts and Culture, Oltinoy Tojiboeva also made a number of changes to the script. We refined the internal dramaturgy, and added further scenes, such as the Vizier plotting evil deeds and Qorabotir entering the palace and scheming. New music for the overture, choral, and final sections were created by composer O. Komiljonov [12].

And, as usual, it starts with an overture, if a musical drama has ever started without one? The gloomy, minor-toned balladry of the tune feels like it tells the tragic love story of the main characters. While the dancers gracefully sway on stage head and shoulders painted like angels above the stage the overture has a sustained chordal texture where the choreography fits perfectly. The soft lines that cellos introduce at first sound like someone is just whispering the word attention to us. And familiar piano motifs start to unfold. The overture features the primary musical theme from To'xtasin Jalilov's renowned duet "Otmagay tong."

The mood-lightening folk-ish songs Jarchilar, or Qutlug' bo'lsin are among these follow-up musical scenes. The song "Duchava," the dance melody, is an equally cheerful atmosphere. Sounds by the percussion ensemble emulate the authentic Uzbekic cradle ceremony, thus adding to the festivity on stage.

Zuhra sings her aria, a highlighted part of the musical drama, Digging through describing your pens are always in demand... This aria draws upon the famous maqom piece of Fergana-Tashkent named "Qalandar chapandozi." This beautiful aria illustrates Zuhra's anticipation of Tohir's imminent arrival in the garden scene. The beats of the doira and vibrant sounds of bowed and stringed instruments resonate with the inner feelings of the heroine [13].

The maids' catchy number "Xush kelibsiz" (Welcome) and Tohir's humorous aria "Har qachon" (Whenever) make up some of the more animated musical scenes. The episode ends on a high note with the song "To'ylar muborak" by To'xtasin Jalilov, which Tohir performs to win over the audience once again. No one can deny that the most entertaining number of the whole production is indeed [14].

Now they do the work with a little less literal interpretation. The contemporary artists come and perform inspired fully at all times their best arias, duets & choral pieces which the hearts of those listening are touched deeply. And, of course, the work of the orchestra is substantial. The Small Symphonic, conducted by Akmal To'raev, features bowed string, string, keyboard, wind, and percussion instruments, as well as national Uzbek instruments, including qashqar rubob, nay, and doira. Together the sound of European and traditional sounds enhances the creation of the performance and uplifts the atmosphere [15].

The talented actors and youthful ensemble also help lend to the realistic feeling of such events on stage. These include:

Omon Yuldashev (as Tohir)
 Durdona Nosirova (as Zuhra)
 Iqbol Oshiqov (as Bobokhon)
 Qobil Umirov (as Bohir)
 Umid Shodmonov (as Qorabotir)
 Mehmonali Salimov (as Poet Nozim)
 Aleksandr Bekjonov (as Grand Vizier)
 Turg'un Beknazarov (as Khorezm Khan)
 Feruza Mustafоеva (as Mohim)
 Gulnoza Saidova (as Yulduz).

4. Conclusion

I believe that the current staging of "Tohir and Zuhra" has a lot to brag about but is lacking in several areas, too. In the second act, for example, the swordfight between Tohir and Qorabotir is set against the thunderous booming of the timpani. The timpani hits don't fit the scene and feel extraneous to the action on stage. One of the biggest issues is the lack of familiar characters. In previous versions (such as productions from the 1970s), important characters like Sardor (the leader of the people) and Qamar (Zuhra's close friend and maidservant) were included. A singer called Saodat Qobulova famously sang Qamar (a song about midnight) a name still familiar to music buffs from the older generations. To be fair, in future productions these shortcomings can be navigated with some taste by a director.

The magnum opus "Tohir and Zuhra" certainly will not only be the primary source of artistic pleasure and happiness to the audience, for many decades to come, but will also replenish the art treasure of contemporary Indonesian performers with enchanting melodies, lyrics, and musical vignettes.

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