

CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF SHASHMAQOM AND ITS CHALLENGES

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Abstract: *This article examines the contemporary interpretation of Shashmaqom within the context of globalization, modernization, and changing performance practices. The study analyzes how traditional structures of Shashmaqom are adapted for modern audiences through stage performance, orchestration, and digital dissemination. It also explores the challenges related to authenticity, preservation, and stylistic integrity. Special attention is given to the legacy of Yunus Rajabiy, whose work provides a methodological foundation for balancing tradition and innovation. The findings suggest that while contemporary interpretations expand accessibility and global recognition, they also require careful consideration to maintain the original artistic and philosophical essence of Shashmaqom.*

Keywords: *Shashmaqom, modernization, interpretation, Yunus Rajabiy, Uzbek music, cultural heritage, performance practice.*

Shashmaqom stands as one of the most significant classical musical traditions of Central Asia, representing a refined synthesis of modal systems, poetic expression, and performance practice. Historically transmitted through oral tradition, Shashmaqom has undergone significant transformations in the modern era due to social, cultural, and technological changes.

The increasing influence of globalization has expanded the reach of Shashmaqom beyond its traditional boundaries, introducing it to new audiences and contexts. However, this expansion has also raised important questions regarding authenticity, adaptation, and preservation. The role of Yunus Rajabiy is particularly important in this context, as his work established a foundation for the scientific study and preservation of Shashmaqom. This article aims to analyze contemporary interpretations of Shashmaqom and identify the key challenges associated with its transformation.

Literature Review

The study of Shashmaqom has been addressed by various scholars who emphasize its historical and theoretical significance. Fayzulla Karomatov explored its structural foundations, while Theodore Levin examined its cultural context within Central Asian traditions.

Recent studies have increasingly focused on the impact of modernization and globalization on traditional music systems. Researchers highlight the tension between preserving authenticity and adapting to contemporary audiences. However, a comprehensive analysis of contemporary performance practices and their implications for Shashmaqom remains limited.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach combining musicological analysis, performance studies, and cultural interpretation. Contemporary performances of Shashmaqom are compared with traditional forms to identify key differences and transformations.

Primary sources include recorded performances and transcriptions, particularly those associated with Yunus Rajabiy. Secondary sources consist of academic literature on ethnomusicology and cultural studies.

The contemporary interpretation of Shashmaqom reflects a complex interaction between tradition and modernity, shaped by evolving cultural contexts, performance environments, and audience expectations. Historically, Shashmaqom was performed within intimate settings, where the *устоз-шогирд* (master-apprentice) system ensured the preservation of stylistic nuances, improvisational depth, and philosophical meaning. In contrast, modern performances often take place on concert stages, requiring adaptation in form, duration, and presentation.

One of the most significant transformations is the process of stage adaptation. Traditional Shashmaqom performances are characterized by their extended duration and gradual development, allowing for deep immersion into the musical and emotional narrative. However, contemporary performances frequently involve *сокращение* (shortening) of these cycles to suit the time constraints of modern audiences. While this makes Shashmaqom more accessible, it can disrupt its internal dramaturgy and reduce its expressive depth.

Another important aspect of modernization is orchestration. Traditionally performed by small ensembles with specific instruments, Shashmaqom is increasingly arranged for larger ensembles and orchestras. This process often involves the incorporation of Western harmonic elements and standardized tuning systems, which can alter the original modal and microtonal characteristics of the music. Although orchestration expands the sonic possibilities and appeal of Shashmaqom, it also raises concerns about the preservation of its authentic sound and structure.

The role of digital technology in shaping contemporary interpretations of Shashmaqom cannot be overlooked. Audio and video recordings, online platforms,

and digital archives have made Shashmaqom widely accessible, allowing it to reach global audiences. This increased accessibility has contributed to its recognition as an important element of world cultural heritage. However, digital dissemination also introduces challenges related to standardization, where certain interpretations become dominant while others are marginalized, potentially reducing the diversity of performance traditions.

The question of authenticity remains central to the discussion of contemporary Shashmaqom. Authenticity in this context does not imply a rigid adherence to a fixed form, but rather a commitment to preserving the core principles and aesthetic values of the tradition. The work of Yunus Rajabiy provides a crucial reference point in this regard. His systematic documentation and analysis of Shashmaqom established a framework that allows for both preservation and adaptation, ensuring that the tradition can evolve without losing its identity.

Another important dimension of contemporary interpretation is the role of the performer. In traditional settings, performers were deeply embedded within the cultural context of maqom, possessing not only technical skill but also a profound understanding of its philosophical and aesthetic foundations. In modern contexts, performers often operate within institutional frameworks, where formal education replaces traditional apprenticeship. While this shift increases accessibility, it may also affect the depth of interpretative understanding.

Furthermore, contemporary interpretations of Shashmaqom are influenced by global cultural exchange. Collaborations with musicians from different traditions, fusion with other musical genres, and participation in international festivals have introduced new perspectives and possibilities. These interactions can enrich the tradition, but they also require careful consideration to avoid superficial or inappropriate adaptations that may compromise its integrity.

Ultimately, the transformation of Shashmaqom in the modern era should be understood as an ongoing process of negotiation between continuity and change. Its survival and relevance depend on the ability to maintain a balance between preserving its essential characteristics and embracing new forms of expression.

Results and discussion: The results of this study demonstrate that the contemporary interpretation of Shashmaqom is characterized by a complex interplay between preservation and transformation, shaped by cultural, institutional, and technological factors. The analysis reveals that while Shashmaqom retains its core structural and aesthetic principles, its performance practice has undergone significant modifications in response to modern contexts. These modifications reflect broader processes of cultural adaptation, where traditional forms are reinterpreted to remain relevant in changing social environments.

From a structural perspective, one of the most evident transformations is the alteration of temporal organization. Traditional Shashmaqom performances are

characterized by their extended duration and gradual, process-oriented development, allowing for deep immersion into the musical narrative. However, contemporary performances often involve condensation and restructuring, resulting in shorter and more segmented forms. This shift affects not only the temporal experience of the music but also its internal coherence, as the gradual progression that defines Shashmaqom is sometimes replaced by more immediate and simplified expressions.

The findings also indicate significant changes in instrumentation and sonic texture. The transition from small, traditional ensembles to larger orchestrated formats has introduced new timbral possibilities, but it has also altered the balance and interaction between musical elements. In many contemporary interpretations, the inclusion of Western harmonic frameworks and standardized tuning systems leads to a partial loss of microtonal nuances that are essential to the identity of Shashmaqom. This transformation highlights a tension between expanding the expressive range of the music and preserving its original sonic characteristics.

Another key result concerns the role of improvisation. In traditional contexts, improvisation is a central component of Shashmaqom performance, guided by established modal structures and stylistic conventions. It allows performers to express individuality while maintaining continuity within the tradition. However, the study shows that in contemporary settings, improvisation is often reduced or standardized, particularly in institutional and staged performances. This reduction can limit the creative dimension of the tradition and contribute to its formalization.

The cultural implications of these transformations are particularly significant. Shashmaqom functions as a repository of cultural memory and identity, and changes in its performance practice inevitably affect its symbolic meaning. The findings suggest that while modernization increases accessibility and global visibility, it may also lead to a shift in how Shashmaqom is perceived and understood. In some cases, it becomes a performative representation of tradition rather than a lived cultural practice, raising questions about the authenticity of contemporary interpretations.

In this context, the legacy of Yunus Rajabiy emerges as a crucial point of reference. His work in documenting and systematizing Shashmaqom provides a benchmark against which contemporary transformations can be evaluated. The study indicates that his methodological approach—combining preservation with analytical understanding—remains highly relevant for addressing current challenges. By offering a structured representation of Shashmaqom, he created a framework that supports both continuity and informed adaptation.

The influence of digital technology constitutes another important dimension of the findings. Digital recordings, online platforms, and media dissemination have significantly expanded the reach of Shashmaqom, making it accessible to global audiences. However, this increased visibility is accompanied by processes of selection and standardization, where certain interpretations gain prominence while

others are overlooked. This dynamic may lead to a narrowing of stylistic diversity and a homogenization of performance practices.

Furthermore, the study highlights the evolving role of performers and educators in shaping contemporary Shashmaqom. The shift from the ustoz–shogird system to institutional education has transformed the modes of knowledge transmission. While formal education provides structure and accessibility, it may not fully replicate the depth of experiential learning found in traditional systems. The results suggest that an effective approach to preserving Shashmaqom requires integrating these two models, combining theoretical knowledge with practical immersion.

Overall, the discussion underscores that the contemporary state of Shashmaqom cannot be understood in terms of simple decline or progress. Instead, it represents a dynamic process of negotiation between competing demands: authenticity and accessibility, tradition and innovation, local identity and global presence. The sustainability of Shashmaqom depends on the ability to manage these tensions in a way that preserves its essential characteristics while allowing for meaningful development.

Conclusion: The contemporary interpretation of Shashmaqom reflects a dynamic process shaped by cultural, technological, and artistic factors. While modernization offers new opportunities for dissemination and development, it also requires careful management to preserve the essential characteristics of the tradition. The legacy of Yunus Rajabiy provides a valuable framework for navigating this balance, ensuring that Shashmaqom remains both relevant and authentic in the modern world.

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