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**САЛТТАН СЫРТ КОНТЕКСТТЕГИ САЛТТУУ МУЗЫКА:
КАЛИФОРНИЯДАГЫ ӨЗБЕК ДУТАРЫ**

**TRADITIONAL MUSIC IN NON-TRADITIONAL CONTEXTS:
THE UZBEK DUTAR IN CALIFORNIA**

**ТРАДИЦИОННАЯ МУЗЫКА В НЕТРАДИЦИОННОМ КОНТЕКСТЕ:
УЗБЕКСКИЙ ДУТАР В КАЛИФОРНИИ**

Abstract. Arguing the complicated nature of transnational engagements with traditional musical practices, the case study of the Uzbek dutar in California illustrates one way to engage with the past in non-traditional contexts. After introducing the instrument and definitions of tradition, the essay explores the dutar's musical traditions in Uzbekistan and its ensemblification in the 20th century. Then it turns to the author's dutar ensemble, the Central Asian Ensemble at the University of California Santa Cruz. By considering how the imposed structure of the American university system combines with pedagogical collaborations with the author's master teachers (ustozlar), Ruzibi Khodjayeva and Malikahon Ziyaeva, the paper concludes with the possibilities engagement with previously unfamiliar traditional practices provides for students across the university and for international understanding, more broadly.

Keywords: Traditional music, Uzbek music, dutar, pedagogy, master-apprentice system, world music ensembles

Аннотация. Салттуу музыкалык тажрыйбалар менен трансулуттук таасирдин татаал жагдайларын аргументтеп, Калифорниядагы өзбек дутары боюнча бул изилдөөдө салттуу эмес контексттеги салттуу маданият каралат. Аспапты сүрөттөгөн жана салтты аныктаган кириш сөздөн кийин бул эмгек Өзбекстандагы дутардын музыкалык салттарын жана 20-кылымдагы ансамблди түзүү процессин карайт. Андан кийин жазуучунун ансамблине, Калифорния Санта-Круз университетинин Борбордук Азия ансамблине кайрылат. Америкалык университет системасынын таңууланган структурасы автордун магистрлер Рузиби Ходжаева жана Маликахон Зияева менен болгон педагогикалык кызматташтыгы менен кандайча өз ара байланышта экенин карап, макала университеттин студенттери үчүн мурда бейтааныш салттуу тажрыйбалар менен иштөөнүн мүмкүнчүлүктөрүн жана эл аралык түшүнүү үчүн кеңири мүмкүнчүлүктөрдү карап чыгуу менен аяктайт.

Негизгисөздөр: салттуу музыка, дутар, педагогика, устат-шакирт системасы, дүйнөлүк музыка ансамблдери

Аннотация. Аргументируя сложную природу транснационального взаимодействия с традиционными музыкальными практиками, данный кейс об узбекском дутаре в Калифорнии иллюстрирует один из способов обращения к прошлому в нетрадиционном контексте. После введения, в котором описывается инструмент и даются определения традиции, это реферат исследует музыкальные традиции дутара в Узбекистане и процесс его ансамблефикации в XX веке. Потом превращается к ансамблю автора — Центральноазиатскому ансамблю при Университет Калифорния Санта Крузе. Рассматривая, как навязанная структура американской университетской системы сочетается с педагогическим сотрудничеством с мастерами [устозлар] автора — Рузиби Ходжаевой и Маликахон Зияевой, статья завершает рассуждение анализом возможностей, которые открывает взаимодействие с ранее неизвестными традиционными практиками для студентов университета и для международного взаимопонимания в более широком смысле.

Ключевые слова: традиционная музыка, дутар, педагогика, система «мастер-ученик», ансамбли мировой музыки.

Introduction

The discipline of Ethnomusicology has long been concerned with the transformations and transmission methods of traditional music. For ethnomusicologists and those who perform musics that bear its label, the meaning of tradition connects to notions of the past and relationships with those pasts that imply continuity and priority. The Uzbek *dutar* and its performance in the United States provides a useful case study for exploring how and why different people maintain practices strongly associated with tradition. Further, it highlights how the meanings and uses of those practices change as contexts change. To do so, this essay begins with an introduction to the *dutar* and a definition and contemplation of the meaning of the term “tradition.” It continues with a brief narration of *dutar* performance practice and ensemblification in Uzbekistan. Finally, it describes the project of launching a *dutar* ensemble at the University of California, Santa Cruz (henceforth UCSC), and the challenges involved and value in maintaining connections to traditional practices and transmission methods in the context of the 21st century American university.

The Dutar

The *dutar* is a two-stringed, long-necked, fretted, pear-shaped lute found throughout Central Asia, including Afghanistan, East Turkestan (Xinjiang), Iran, Karakalpakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. There are regional variations in material, size, construction and in the case of Afghanistan, even string number. For further organological detail, see Beliaev 1933 and 1962. The *dutar* this paper focuses on is shared between the Uzbek and Tajik people, though this study stems from research in Uzbekistan. This *dutar* has tied frets, silk strings, and is often constructed of mulberry or apricot wood. Further, the Uzbek *dutar* has multiple formats in present-day Uzbekistan as a result of modernization and reconstruction projects begun in the 1930s that resulted in a version of the *dutar* with nylon strings, fixed wooden frets in equal-temperament, in a consort of five sizes to allow for the performance of orchestral polyphony (see Odilov 1995). Practitioners often describe this variant of the *dutar* as “modernized” (*zamonaviylashtirgan* in Uzbek) or “reconstructed” (*реконструированный* in Russian), which further emphasizes the work that the term “tra-

ditional” (*an’anaviy* in Uzbek) does for the instrument without such modifications. Notably, the traditional *dutar* has seen some changes in the 20th century, specifically the use of nylon monofilament for the tied frets, rather than the gut frets of *dustars* in the past. *Dutarists* note that the fret material has a minimal effect on the instrument’s timbre and thus doesn’t impact its traditionality. With these multiple versions and their engagement with discourses of tradition and modernity, the *dutar* is a helpful organological example of the complex rhetoric of tradition.

Contemplating Tradition

The Oxford English Dictionary defines tradition as “1.1.a. A belief, statement, custom, etc., handed down by non-written means (esp. word of mouth, or practice) from generation to generation,” and notes that it came to English via Latin and French borrowing in the 14th century [Oxford English Dictionary 2025]. The term tradition points to practices that have meaningful and tangible links to those of the past, and it can emphasize how a musical practice is more focused on preservation and continuity with that past than with future-oriented innovation and change. Complications arise, however, when we acknowledge that all musics come from a tradition and have relationships to past practices, whether or not they are labeled as such. Scholars and musicians alike often present tradition as a foil to modernity, yet all musics engage pastness and futurity to some extent. As such, traditions are modern constructions (or Hobsbawmian “inventions”) to such an extent that these labels lose tangible meaning, except as they remind us what musicians and their practices seek to emphasize and connect with [Hobsbawm 1983]. Explicit emphasis on tradition does specific work for musicians and audience members. It reminds us to pay attention to the past, to emphasize less tangible transmission methods, and to be purposeful with how we innovate. To that end, it is worthwhile to examine current *dutar* practices and their engagements with the past in Uzbekistan before continuing on to their manifestations in California.

The Ustoz-Shog’ird/Master-Apprentice system and Dutar Ensembles in Tashkent

The *ustoz-shog’ird* or master-apprentice system for musical transmission is an important heritage transmission practice across fine arts in Uzbekistan and is mentioned repeatedly in en-

tries in Uzbekistan's Intangible Cultural Heritage registry and in the entries included on UNESCO's registry of Intangible Cultural Heritage, as well as in the ethnomusicological literature [see UNESCO and Uzbekistan's Intangible Cultural Heritage, Djumaev 2005, and Sultanova 2014]. The oral history surrounding the ustoz-shog'ird system of musical transmission emphasizes the enmeshed quality of the musical relationship, with the student becoming part of the master's household and dedicating years, indeed a lifetime, to study of the master's school of playing often by mere contact rather than direct instruction. Musical transmission practices have changed significantly through the institutionalization of music education in the 20th century, resulting in the creation of music schools, colleges, and conservatories, with their curricular emphasis on literacy, written notation, and solfeggio. Still, the framework of having a singular ustoz (master teacher) remains common and powerful for developing professional musicians. In the Uzbek State Conservatory and the Yunus Rajabiy Uzbek National Music Arts Institute, students refer to their instrument instructors as ustoz and treat them with deep respect and deference. While students no longer become members of the masters' households in order to gain access to musical knowledge, the framework of the master-apprentice relationship still holds sway. Indeed, in private lessons, dutarists spend much of their time engaged in music learning that is not dependent on written notation. Though the continued reliance on traditional learning methods may exist alongside written ones (at least in classroom learning), the depth of relationship between teacher and student and the intimacy of oral-imitative transmission hearkens back to its historical precedent. This persistence of this framework within modern music education institutions and indeed within modern performance structures, like the dutar ensemble, emphasizes that tradition in this case is malleable, but constant.

Dutar ensembles use a traditional instrument in a non-traditional formation – a medium-sized ensemble of multiples of a single instrument. This configuration of dutarists into a musical ensemble began after World War II in the Ferghana Valley and soon spread to Tashkent and throughout Uzbekistan [see Toshmatov 2022 and Rahimjonov 2002]. Dutar ensembles

(often women's ensembles) have performed prominently in concerts, radio, television, and have toured internationally. Two dutar masters that I have studied with founded prominent ensembles that continue in Tashkent today: Ruzibi Khodjayeva's Nozanin Ensemble and Malikahon Ziyaeva's Shukrona Ensemble that is now directed by her daughter, Farangiz Ziyaeva. These ensembles feature many students of these teachers who completed conservatory and institute degrees with Khodjayeva and Ziyaeva and have gone on to successful careers with the dutar of which the ensembles are an important part. The ensembles themselves are manifestations of current ustoz-shog'ird practices and demonstrate the malleable nature of living traditions. Indeed, the dutar ensemble is an important way that traditional Central Asian music achieves legibility abroad. Ensemble creation connects traditions, practices, and institutional values between Uzbekistan and the United States.

"World Music Ensembles" and American Ethnomusicology

A dutar ensemble may seem out of place in the American academy, yet the configuration and the staged performance context renders it congruent with the curricular priorities and values of university systems in the United States. Indeed, the creation of "world music" ensembles in North American universities somewhat parallels the rise of dutar ensembles in Uzbekistan, as both gained prominence in their respective institutions throughout the mid- to late-20th century. In California, the dutar confronts different systems and specific curricula with relative ease, as it is understood within a university educational framework in which the "world music ensemble" has existed since the 1960. The creation of these ensembles corresponded with the founding of Ethnomusicology as a separate discipline from its predecessor Comparative Musicology and its sister discipline Historical Musicology. They continue to be deeply entwined with the discipline and its place in university music departments.

Mantle Hood spearheaded the then new scholarly emphasis on the unique kinds of knowledge resulting from making the music one studies. He coined the theory of "bimusicality" in 1960 to explain the method by which non-heritage scholars become fluent in other musical practices as part of their scholarly work [Hood 1960]. The methodology of bimusicity neces-

sitated serious applied music learning within ethnomusicological programs, the bulk of which would come to happen through ensembles. Also in 1960, Hood founded the Institute of Ethnomusicology at the University of California Los Angeles (henceforth UCLA) to allow scholars to embody this practice and founded a number of corresponding ensembles at UCLA, some of which continue to this day (for example, the Indonesian gamelans). These ensembles and their popularity spread throughout North American higher education in the 20th century and became known as “world music ensembles,” to highlight their contrast with the then standard complement of ensembles performing European classical music.

The emphasis on ensembles in higher education in North America created some important opportunities for students to learn music outside the European canon, but also presented specific limitations. Ted Solís addresses the challenges facing “world music” ensembles that teaching musical traditions outside of their cultural contexts brings by asking, “How do we represent the rich culture we revere while we acknowledge and deal with the cultural distance between us and our students, and between both of us and these cultures?” [Solís 2004, 2]. This is a challenge for all non-heritage ensemble directors, especially those far from communities that practice the music traditions they teach. In this sense, “world music ensembles” in American universities are trying to replicate master-apprentice systems without masters. Further, representing the distance Solís refers to without exoticization or over-generalization, while still emphasizing the value of traditional music learning strategies presents a unique challenge.

First, individual instruction is not usually provided alongside “world music” ensembles as individual lessons often correspond with instruments in symphony orchestras or concert bands. Thus, “world music” ensembles depend on a group-learning structure (or on knowledgeable community members to raise the level of the group, when available), whether that is inherent to the musical tradition or not. The focus on ensemble-based learning also severely limits the musical practices that have been eligible for inclusion in this bimusical endeavor. Solo traditions and those otherwise ill-suited to ensemblification (such as epic singing or solo in-

strumental works) are absent from the “world” of applied music taught via American university ensemble structure. It results in a collection of musical practices that hardly lives up to its “world” moniker. While students benefit from collective forms of music learning, without the support of corresponding individual lessons or other in-depth transmission practices, ensemble learning cannot sufficiently replicate the teaching of most traditional musical practices. In this sense, the “world music” ensemble is a genre of its own that struggles to replicate many music traditions’ typical acculturation practices and cannot assist students with aspirations to professional-level musical skill. It can start students on that path, but they have to seek out more depth. The dutar ensemble is a clear example of this – its 20th century ensemble fits within the structure that North American universities have for learning non-Western music, but it suffers from the lack of resources and time for individual instruction. The amelioration of this comes only through connections with master musicians like Khodjayeva and Ziyaeva who have engaged students both through residencies and digital content.

The UCSC Central Asian Ensemble

I first discussed the idea of founding a dutar ensemble as a “world music ensemble” in an American university with Khodjayeva and Ziyaeva while studying dutar with them in 2004 and 2005. At that point, a university professorship was an aspiration and nothing was guaranteed to come of the project. They generously collaborated with me to plan how to present Uzbek traditional music to unfamiliar students. During this planning period, we discussed repertoire learned from each of them that might be appropriate, and I attended rehearsals for their dutar ensembles to better understand local pedagogy and rehearsal practices. Examples of some of the repertoire they shared with my nascent ensemble can be found in Khodjayeva’s and Ziyaeva’s publications, [1999] and [2011 (2008)], respectively. This work bore productive results, as I secured a professorship at UCSC in 2007 and set to establishing the dutar ensemble there. In it, students are allowed to bring their own instrument to learn melodies, but are also expected to learn the basics of musical performance on dutar and doyra (frame drum). Musical learning is accomplished solely by oral-imitative method and in-

cludes basic melodies and strumming patterns, as well as the ability to accompany those melodies on the doyra. Thus far, all students have succeeded in acquiring these basic skills, with some students continuing on to learn more complex repertoire and ornamentation techniques. In terms of providing students with aspects of traditional musical practices, my focus on oral/aural teaching and learning, as well as the significant connection we maintain with Khodjayeveva and Ziyaeva links students to the values of the ustoz-shog'ird system. These aspects of music learning and performance practice are especially important in an educational system that otherwise focuses on written musical literacy.

UCSC's location, institutional structure, and student body mean that the ensemble struggles to meet either the ideal of many "world music" ensembles or the values of the ustoz-shog'ird system, since Santa Cruz is very far from significant Uzbek diaspora communities in the US (the largest of which is in New York). This necessitates connecting with heritage practitioners in other ways, such as online methods on Zoom or WhatsApp. Another major challenge is the academic quarter system, which has students take new courses every 11 weeks (though students have the option to repeat ensemble courses). These short academic quarters leave little time for deep and rigorous approaches to technical development and repertoire acquisition. On the other hand, the more numerous quarters in the academic year allow more students the opportunity to enroll and gain some understanding of the dutar, its traditional learning methods, and Uzbek music in general. Furthermore, UCSC's institutional structure supports the ensemble by offering it regularly and assigning it credit within the "Creative Practice" or PR-C general education requirement. This means that students from across the university can enroll in the ensemble and make progress toward their degree, regardless of their declared undergraduate major. The result is that the ensemble attracts a range of beginners from across campus, including many dedicated members from STEM fields. It also fulfills an ensemble requirement for the Global Mu-

sics track of UCSC's music major, and graduate students in our Cross-cultural Musicology PhD and Composition DMA programs are also welcome to participate for credit though it doesn't fulfill degree requirements. The result is a significant turnover and a class that often features 10-14 complete beginners with little or no musical experience, and a smaller number of music majors or music graduate students with significant musical training, but zero experience with Central Asian music. Unlike some ensembles with significant community engagement, the Central Asian Ensemble is made up entirely of students. It has a broad reach, but less depth. Nonetheless, it provides an opportunity for American university students to engage with tradition as a process of understanding connection to heritage practices, even if those traditional practices stem from a heritage that most students do not share. The UCSC Central Asian Ensemble is explicit in its project to incorporate traditional learning practices on traditional instruments and to provide important perspective on and practice in making music with a relationship to the past.

Conclusion

In summation, issues of transmission and transformation become further complex when examining the transnational and transcultural movements of the dutar, its repertoire, and performance practices, as illustrated by the case study of the Central Asian Ensemble at UCSC. The dutar in Uzbekistan plays an important role in illustrating an instrument's power to engage traditional musical practices in innovative ways of meaning through music. The non-traditional context of an American university with its own institutional priorities adds complications to this with its own ethical and representational challenges. The result is an ensemble and a university course that invites students from any specialization to make music in unfamiliar ways and to learn from musicians and ustozlar from twelve time zones away. While traditional music as a concept may be constructed and complicated, engagement with tradition bearers forges meaningful connections across continents and with our shared sense of the past.

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