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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF VOICE PLACEMENT METHODS IN UZBEK TRADITIONAL SINGING AND THE EUROPEAN CLASSICAL VOCAL SCHOOL

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Abstract

This article presents a comparative analysis of voice placement methods in Uzbek traditional singing (particularly katta ashula and maqom paths) and the European classical vocal school (bel canto). The study was conducted based on a literature review and semi-structured interviews with leading traditional singers and academic vocal pedagogues. The results reveal similarities and differences between the two systems in breath management, resonance areas, articulation, register transitions, vibrato, and ornamental techniques. At the same time, the principles of breath support, laryngeal freedom, and “gathering” the sound were found to be common aspects of both schools. The article concludes with perspectives on integrating traditional and academic approaches in Uzbek vocal pedagogy.

Keywords: *Uzbek traditional singing, European vocal school, bel canto, voice placement, resonance, breathing technique, comparative analysis*

Introduction

The rich musical heritage of the Uzbek people, particularly the art of ashula (traditional singing), boasts centuries-old traditions, and distinctive vocal techniques have taken shape in genres such as maqom paths, katta ashula, yalla, and lapar. “This traditional school has accumulated unique knowledge, transmitted from generation to generation through the oral master–apprentice method. On the other hand, the European classical vocal school (bel canto), which was formed in Italy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and spread throughout the world, is distinguished by its

physiologically grounded principles of breathing, resonance, and diction” (Vlasova, L.I.). With the development of conservatory education in Uzbekistan, these two schools have met, and many singers today strive to perform in both style. However, the relationship and differences between the traditional concept of “voice placement” and the academic concept of *posa della voce* (voice placement) have not yet been sufficiently studied scientifically.

Main Part

Today, the art of singing makes high demands in terms of its uniqueness, richness,

artistic and expressive means, vocal-technical mastery, its place and significance in the modern world, and its influence on universal and national culture. Folk songs, along with medieval church and court music, served as the foundation for the vocal-technical and artistic formation of Western academic singing. “Developing by building upon the musical-performance traditions of its time and assimilating the finest achievements of Europe’s leading music schools, singing acquired new dimensions; this quickly gained popularity and led to its enrichment with new musical and musical-stage genres” (Kulikovskaya, E. V., 2021).

The singing traditions of Eastern peoples developed in the Middle Ages on the basis of local, national conditions and new geographical and historical circumstances. At a certain historical stage, Eastern culture was enriched by religious songs – Christian liturgy, psalms, hymns, and Gregorian chants – under the influence of Christianity.

In the performance of Katta ashula, the improvisational style (*badiha*) is widely employed. This ensures a perfect and organic connection between its speech-like and melodic structures, enriches the ashula with diverse musical ornaments, and leads to the use of various culminations (*avj*). “A Katta ashula performer must have undergone the traditional “master–apprentice” school, be grounded in the laws of poetry and performance traditions, and possess a wide range, a powerful voice, and supreme mastery” (National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan). *Hofiz* singers usually perform each of the opening lines of a verse alternately, and the final lines together, in unison. In the second half of the 20th century, new instrumental-ashula paths of Katta ashula and types intended for a solo *hofiz* emerged. In such modern examples, the instrumental ensemble takes on the role of an accompanying *hofiz*, while the free style in performance has been preserved.

Discussion

In the performance of Uzbek musical art, singing has taken shape and developed on the basis of the master–apprentice tradition and has reached us adapted to various conditions. “Singing occupies a central place in folk recitations, in the professional music of the oral tradition – the *maqoms* – as well

as in vocal and modern music performance” (Ashurov B.). The musicologist A. Fitrat has substantiated in his research that each of the aforementioned directions possesses its own distinctive form, performance style, rules, and overall character. “Among them, the Traditional Singing direction, formed on the basis of historical experience and embodying the most perfected traditions, is of particular importance owing to its performance style, form, and folk character. Since ancient times, this direction has brought to light the most beautiful customs, traditions, values, and national spirit of the Uzbek people, demonstrating the authenticity and uniqueness of our people’s rich spirituality before the peoples of the world”. For this reason, the singing tradition, together with its recitation directions and styles, is continuously taking shape and developing. The art of traditional ashula performance has become widely popular among the population. Its broad genre coverage, the diversity of performance styles, and the manifestation of local traditions in distinctive local styles are of particular importance. Indeed, as a result, performance styles characterized by individual and local elements, and subsequently entire performance schools, came into being.

Breath technique and support (*appoggio* /*dam*).

In the academic school, emphasis is placed on deep diaphragmatic breathing and on creating “support” (*appoggio*) with the aid of the intercostal muscles during slow exhalation. In interviews, the pedagogue repeatedly used the phrases “keep your ribs open,” and “breath column.” Among traditional performers, too, the rule of “breathing with the belly” and “drawing the breath in and releasing it little by little” exists. However, the traditional singer focuses attention on “releasing the breath from the chest, softly, without striking it against the throat.” The main difference lies in the fact that the academic school strives to maintain the “breath column” uniformly even at a loud volume, whereas in the traditional style the breath pressure varies momentarily during the fine ornaments of the *maqom*.

Resonance areas. The European school identifies the *maschera* (facial mask – nasal cavity, forehead) and the oral–pharyngeal

cavity as the main resonators. The pedagogical instruction is: “Direct the sound toward the front teeth, toward the skull.” Traditional performers, on the other hand, place the sound “in the upper part of the mouth – the palate, the head, and sometimes the lower part of the throat.” One traditional master says: “The sound should rise to the head, but it should remain free in the larynx, not squeezed. In addition, traditional performance relies more heavily on the chest resonator (the lower register), which is linked to the expression “singing from the heart” (Rajabov I., 2006).

Register transitions (chest–head voice). While the academic school trains a smooth transition (*passaggio*) from chest voice to head voice, the traditional school employs registers as distinct colors. In particular, in the performance of Katta ashula, abrupt leaps from the low register to the high register (the “wave” effect) serve an artistic purpose.

Vibrato and ornaments. In the European classical tradition, vibrato – the natural oscillation of the voice – is a sign of a well-placed voice, with a speed of around 5–7 Hz. In traditional Uzbek ashula, however, a wide vibrato (“tebratma”) is used as an ornament, especially in nola (lamenting passages), but it is not constant. In traditional performance, melismatic ornaments (*qochirim*, subtle oscillations) are shaped by movements of the larynx and tongue, and their speed is somewhat freer compared to European ornaments. Spectral analysis revealed that in traditional performance, asymmetrical oscillations around the fundamental frequency – that is, micro-ornaments – occur more frequently.

The difference in pedagogical metaphors is also significant. In the traditional approach, emotion and imagery are strong, which serves to cultivate the national spirit in the student’s performance. Academic metaphors, on the other hand, are aimed at creating an internationally intelligible “standard” of the voice. This divergence gives rise to a dual problem in traditional ashula per-

formance classes at the Uzbek conservatory: the student must master, on the one hand, academic technique and, on the other, national style. The results demonstrate that the most successful singers have consciously combined elements of both systems.

Conclusion

The obtained results confirm the existence of both close interrelations and clear differences between the two vocal schools. First and foremost, the principles of “belly” breathing, “support,” and “free larynx” in breath management were noted as fundamental conditions in both systems. This is explained by the commonality of the human vocal apparatus and the laws of optimal physiological action. In this sense, the centuries-old empirical knowledge of traditional masters aligns with the findings of modern physiological research.

The distinctive aspects arise primarily from aesthetic criteria and performance conditions. While European opera requires the voice to be heard over an orchestra in large halls, Uzbek traditional performance has mainly taken place in a small circle, in direct spiritual contact with the listener. For this reason, the academic school developed a powerful, high-formant, “projective” voice, whereas the traditional school preserved the primacy of melodiousness, fine ornaments, and timbral expression. Despite the fact that the voice placement methods in Uzbek traditional performance and the European classical vocal school share a common physiological foundation, they differ in their aesthetic orientation, resonance strategies, use of registers, and ornamental technique. These differences enrich both schools and ensure the uniqueness of national vocal art. When properly harmonized, academic technique can serve to make the traditional voice healthier and audible on the international stage, while the traditional style can lend a lively national color to academic performance.

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