

DOI:10.29013/EJA-26-3-58-60



ACOUSTIC AND MODERN PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KASHGAR RUBAB

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Cite: Fozilov D. T. (2026). *Acoustic and Modern Performance Characteristics of the Kashgar Rubab*. *European Journal of Arts* 2026, No 3. <https://doi.org/10.29013/EJA-26-3-58-60>

Abstract

This article examines the acoustic characteristics, historical development, structural features, and contemporary performance practices of the Kashgar rubab, one of the most significant plucked string instruments in the musical culture of Central Asia. The study analyzes the instrument's origin, its dissemination from Eastern Turkestan to Uzbekistan, and its evolution within the traditions of maqom performance and folk music. Particular attention is given to the reconstruction processes of the twentieth century, which expanded the instrument's technical and artistic capabilities and enabled its integration into professional music education and orchestral performance. The article also discusses the acoustic properties of the instrument, sound production techniques, right- and left-hand performance methods, articulation, tremolo, vibrato, and other expressive devices employed by modern performers.

Keywords: *kashgar rubab, acoustic characteristics, performance practice, maqom, string instruments, musical heritage, Uzbek music, performance techniques, music education, traditional instruments*

The Kashgar rubab is one of the oldest plucked string instruments of the peoples of Central Asia. It is distinguished by its rich timbre, broad performance capabilities, and its significant role in maqom and traditional folk music. Today, the Kashgar rubab constitutes an integral part of Uzbekistan's professional musical culture and is taught as one of the principal instruments in conservatories, institutes of arts, and specialized music schools. The name "Kashgar rubab" is associated with the ancient city of Kashgar, one of the major cultural centers of Eastern Turkestan. Researchers maintain that the instrument orig-

inated in this region and subsequently spread to the Fergana Valley, the Tashkent oasis, Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khorezm.

The rubab is a plucked string instrument and is considered one of the oldest musical instruments in the East. It is played with a plectrum (mediator) and is widely used among Uzbek, Tajik, Uyghur, Afghan, and other Eastern peoples (National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan (O'zME). 2006–2008, p. 231). The term *rubab* derives from the Arabic word *rubāb*, which historically served as a general designation for various stringed instruments throughout the East. Treatises

on music dating from the 9th-13th centuries contain references to instruments belonging to the rubab family. However, the modern Kashgar rubab is not identical to its medieval predecessor but rather represents an instrument that has undergone centuries of structural and artistic development.

The works of Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Safi al-Din al-Urmawi, and Abd al-Qadir Maraghi mention instruments belonging to the rubab family. Nevertheless, the modern Kashgar rubab is regarded as a distinct instrument with unique structural characteristics that emerged in Eastern Turkestan during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its introduction into Uzbekistan was closely connected with the cultural exchanges that took place along the Great Silk Road.

The principal factors contributing to its dissemination included commercial caravan routes, the artistic travels of *bakhshi* and *hafiz* performers, interactions among maqom schools, and the close relationship between Uyghur and Uzbek musical traditions. By the end of the nineteenth century, the rubab had become widespread throughout the Fergana Valley, particularly in Andijan, Namangan, and Kokand, and later entered the performance traditions of Samarkand and Bukhara.

Professor Abdurauf Fitrat provides the following historical account: in an anonymous work entitled A Brief History of Music, it is stated that the rubab originated in Khorezm during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Khorezmshah. Fitrat initially accepted this version; however, after bringing an instrument called Sorang from India in the 1920s, whose construction closely resembled that of the rubab, he reconsidered this view. Later, having studied Darvish Ali's Risolayi Musiqiy, he concluded that the instrument had originally been crafted in Balkh and subsequently flourished in Khorezm during the reign of Muhammad Khorezmshah. According to Darvish Ali, the body of the instrument consists of four principal parts – the resonating bowl, the upper body, the neck, and the head – with the bowl, upper body, and neck traditionally carved from a single piece of mulberry wood (Fitrat, A., 1993, p. 28).

The nineteenth century marked the period during which the Kashgar rubab became widely popular in Uzbekistan. During this

time, local craftsmen began improving the instrument by refining its construction, enhancing the fret system, expanding its tonal range, increasing its sound projection, and enriching its performance techniques. From this period onward, the rubab became an essential component of traditional folk instrument ensembles. The emergence of professional music education at the beginning of the twentieth century marked a new stage in the development of the Kashgar rubab.

During the 1920s and 1930s, systematic scientific research on folk musical instruments was initiated. Traditional instruments were standardized, a new system of musical notation was introduced, and versions adapted for conservatory education were developed. The reconstruction of Uzbek national musical instruments played a crucial role in this process.

In the 1930s and 1940s, extensive reconstruction projects of folk musical instruments were carried out in Uzbekistan. As a result, the number of strings was optimized, the instrument's range was expanded, its design was adapted for orchestral performance, and a new version suitable for the academic concert stage was created. Consequently, the Kashgar rubab came to be widely used as a solo, ensemble, and orchestral instrument.

The Kashgar rubab consists of the following principal components: the resonating bowl, soundboard (covered with animal skin), neck, tuning pegs, frets, strings, bridge, and tailpiece. The bowl is traditionally carved from mulberry wood and covered with goat or sheep skin. The neck is relatively long and fitted with 19–24 metal frets. The strings are made of metal and synthetic materials, and the instrument is played using a plectrum (mediator).

The left hand controls pitch and intonation. The use of higher positions extends the instrument's range and enhances its virtuosic potential. Articulation constitutes one of the principal means of musical expression in Kashgar rubab performance.

The performance tradition of the Kashgar rubab constitutes an important component of the professional instrumental heritage that has evolved throughout Central Asia. Its performance style has gradually developed through the interpretation of folk melodies, maqom repertoire, and contemporary compositions. Until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centu-

ries, the performance tradition of the rubab was transmitted primarily through the master-apprentice (*ustoz-shogird*) system. Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, with the instrument's inclusion in conservatories and higher music education institutions, scientifically and methodologically grounded performance schools were established.

Several distinctive performance schools of the Kashgar rubab have developed in Uzbekistan. The **Fergana School** is characterized by a soft and delicate tone, refined ornamentation, rapid passages, and a performance style closely associated with traditional folk music. The **Tashkent School** emphasizes an academic approach, advanced technical complexity, an extended range, and orchestral performance. The **Samarkand–Bukhara School** is distinguished by its close association with maqom performance, profound lyricism, sophisticated ornamentation, and rhythmic precision.

The Kashgar rubab occupies a particularly significant position in the performance of the maqom repertoire.

Today, the Kashgar rubab is taught systematically at the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan, institutes of arts, specialized music schools, and children's music and art schools. Contemporary composers continue to create solo, ensemble, and orchestral works for the instrument. Kashgar rubab performers also participate actively in international festivals and competitions.

Among the distinguished masters who have made significant contributions to the development of Kashgar rubab performance are Abbos Bahromov, Sulaymon Taxalov, Ari Bobokhonov, Adham Khudoyqulov, Qobul Usmonov, Qobul Oripov, Tohir Rajabiy, Hu-

san Nabiyeu, Shavkat Mirzayev, Rifatilla Qosimov, and Shomahmud Shorahmetov (Begmatov, S., & Matyoqubov, M., 2008, p. 17).

Since the second half of the twentieth century, new trends have emerged in Kashgar rubab performance. These include the development of an academic performance style characterized by strict adherence to the musical score, professional control of dynamics, and the interpretation of complex musical forms.

In conclusion, the performance tradition of the Kashgar rubab continues to evolve through the synthesis of traditional Eastern musical practices and the principles of modern academic performance. Plectrum technique, left-hand fingering, tremolo, vibrato, and ornamentation characteristic of maqom music define the instrument's distinctive performance style. In recent years, the incorporation of harmonics (*flageolets*), percussive techniques, glissando, and crossover repertoire has further enriched both the technical and artistic capabilities of the Kashgar rubab.

The Kashgar rubab originated in Eastern Turkestan and was introduced into Uzbekistan through the musical and cultural exchanges of Central Asia, where it subsequently developed independently under the influence of local performance traditions. During the nineteenth century, its position within folk music performance became firmly established, while in the twentieth century it evolved into an academic concert instrument through reconstruction efforts and the development of professional music education. Today, the Kashgar rubab represents an important component of Uzbekistan's national musical heritage and is widely employed in maqom performance, folk instrument orchestras, and the works of contemporary composers.

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submitted 14.07.2026;

accepted for publication 28.07.2026;

published 30.07.2026

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