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GENDER CHARACTERISTICS IN MAQOM PERFORMANCE: THE PHENOMENON OF THE FEMALE VOICE

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Abstract

The art of maqom represents one of the most delicate and philosophical layers of Eastern musical thought. For centuries, this genre has been associated primarily with male performers; however, the emergence of female singers and the reflection of their vocal nature within the maqom system has become an important issue for contemporary musicology. In this context, the gender aspect should be analyzed not only from a social or cultural perspective, but also from the standpoint of sound, expression, and aesthetic perception. The unique qualities of the female voice its timbre, range, and tonal color introduce new meanings and emotional dimensions into the melodic layers of maqom.

Keywords: *Maqom art, female voice, gender aspects, vocal timbre, Eastern musical aesthetics, traditional performance, maqom interpretation, vocal technique, Uzbek music, sound expression*

Introduction

Throughout the centuries, Uzbek maqom performance has developed as a supreme expression of the national musical mentality. The art of maqom is not merely a musical system, but also a socio-spiritual phenomenon that embodies human psychology, aesthetic values, and worldview. Since the adoption of Islam, artistic practices in Eastern culture have been divided into male and female performance spheres. This division was closely tied to social norms, religious beliefs, and traditional moral values. As a result, female performance evolved for a long time within closed environments in households or women's gatherings while men performed public-

ly, on open stages and in communal spaces. In various regions, distinct forms of women's artistic expression emerged. Although these traditions reflected the inner (spiritual) world of women's artistic expression, historical written sources rarely mention the types of female voices or the stylistic features of their vocal performance.

Research method

From the second half of the 20th century, female maqom performance entered a new stage of development. Artists such as Berta Davydova, Zaynab Polvonova, Saodat Qobulova, Nazira Yusupova, Sultanposha Rahimova, Matluba Dadaboeva, Zamira

Suyunova, Maryam Sattorova, Nasiba Sattorova practically demonstrated the compatibility of the female voice with the maqom system. In their performances, pure intonation, breath control, the unity of word and sound, and emotional expressiveness complemented one another harmoniously. Among female performers, the soprano voice type is the most common, characterized by a wide range, bright resonance, and clear timbre. Mezzo-sopranos such as Mehri Abdullaeva, Kommuna Ismoilova, Munojot Yo'lbchieva, and Nodira Pirmatova became known for their performances in a medium range, distinguished by depth and softness of tone. The proper choice of pitch register determines the quality of performance. Otherwise, the natural timbre of the voice may distort, leading to hoarseness, tension, or vocal fatigue.

The female voice is not merely a biological or physiological category – it is also a social, aesthetic, and cultural phenomenon. Through the female voice, the lyricism, subtle emotions, and spiritual states of maqom are vividly expressed. In this sense, the woman's voice represents the emotional layer of maqom, revealing its psychological depth and inner strength. Particularly, themes of love and affection in maqom compositions are often felt more deeply through female interpretation. Contemporary female performers not only master the interpretative standards historically established by men but also create new interpretations that correspond to their own vocal nature and emotional range. This contributes to the gender enrichment of maqom art and fosters its integration with modern aesthetic tendencies.

The phenomenon of the female voice in maqom performance marks an important stage in the evolution of national musical thought. It symbolizes not only the recognition of women's artistic presence on stage but also serves as a means of expressing their inner world, aesthetic taste, and cultural identity. Today, the academic study of female maqom performance including acoustic and physiological classification of voice types, and the development of individual approaches to repertoire selection remains one of the most relevant directions in Uzbek musicology.

Results analysis

In the history of Uzbek maqom art, the name Berta Davydova is remembered not only as a symbol of the captivating female voice, but also as a key figure in the process of adapting professional vocal technique to national music. Her performance united the traditional maqom philosophy with the academic culture of singing and it would not be an exaggeration to say that she laid the foundation for a new school of female maqom performance. Berta Davydova (1927–2020) synthesized the Tashkent and Fergana maqom traditions in her performance, worked in the ensemble led by Yunus Rajabi and became one of the first female singers to bring maqom to the public through stage and radio. As a result of her work, the long-standing notion in society that “maqom suits only male voices” lost its significance both scientifically and practically. Through her voice, Berta Davydova revealed that a woman could also deeply express the spirit of maqom – its divine emotion and lyrical drama.

According to the European vocal classification, Berta Davydova's voice belonged to the mezzo-soprano range. She was distinguished not only by the breadth of her range but also by her vocal agility, breath control, and precise articulation. In her singing, the sound process functions not merely as a vocal mechanism but as a means of expressing emotion and meaning. As the voice “resonates in the throat” and takes shape through its resonance points, Berta Davydova maintains intonational stability in every turn of the tone. This technique gives her performance refinement and clarity, while at the same time endowing it with inner strength. In maqom performance, Berta Davydova treated breath not only as a physiological control but as an aesthetic structure. Each of her phrases is built on a complete breath, which ensures the natural integrity of the sound. The melismatic ornaments, microtonal movements, and high-register embellishments of maqom are freely executed precisely due to her masterful breath control. In this sense, Berta Davydova's performance is valued as the first model of professional vocal technique in female maqom singing.

In the history of Uzbek maqom art, the vocal abilities, stylistic individuality and spiri-

tual impact of female singers occupy a special place. One of the brightest representatives of this tradition is Kommunna Ismoilova, who left her mark in history as an artist that ushered in a new stage in the development of the Shashmaqom tradition through her unique voice, wide vocal range, and masterful performance style. Kommunna Ismoilova was an artist who opened a new chapter for the female voice in contemporary maqom performance. Her singing combines meaningful interpretation, inner dramatism, and rich melismatic ornamentation. While preserving feminine lyricism, Kommunna Ismoilova's voice conveys the spiritual philosophy of maqom through psychological expression. Her characteristic technique of "speaking through breath" serves to reveal the spiritual and volitional foundation of the maqom genre.

Kommunna Ismoilova's voice is described as rich, full, resonant, and soulful. These qualities are not limited to external sound perception but are rooted in her perfect internal resonance system, mastery of vocal control and deep musical sensitivity. The "richness" of her voice reflects the strength of the chest resonance; the "resonance" reveals the active functioning of higher harmonics; and the "soulfulness" represents her art of expressing emotion through microtonal movements. For this reason, every listener of Ismoilova's performance feels human sorrow, existential anguish, and spiritual depth in her voice. Specialists estimate her vocal range at two and a half to three octaves an exceptionally broad range for a female voice, allowing her to perform the complex modulations of maqom freely, from low to high registers. For instance, in compositions such as "Qashqarchai Ushshoq" or "Chapandozi Navo" the wide intervals, modulations, and micro-interval transitions demand great precision. Ismoilova executes these intricate

passages with natural grace and without any strain, demonstrating her flawless vocal technique and her ability to smoothly transition through complex modulations. Even in the passages that move from the lowest tones to the highest registers, her voice never loses its form; on the contrary, its emotional intensity increases. In this respect, Ismoilova's performance stands among the finest examples of maqom vocal aesthetics.

Conclusion

Studying gender characteristics in maqom performance, particularly the phenomenon of the female voice, provides deeper insight into the aesthetic and social dimensions of Uzbek musical thought. Although historically women's performance was limited to private gatherings, in the 20th century singers such as Berta Davydova, Kommunna Ismoilova, Mehri Abdullaeva, and Munojot Yo'lchiyeva brought the female voice to the maqom stage, forming a distinctive artistic and aesthetic school. The unique timbre, range, and emotional sensitivity of the female voice introduced new interpretations of maqom works. As a result, maqom moved beyond the traditional association with "male voices" and acquired broader spiritual depth through the lyricism, delicacy, and emotional richness of the female voice. The phenomenon of the female voice is not merely a biological difference, but an expression of artistic thinking, aesthetic perception, and cultural identity. In conclusion, the female voice phenomenon in Uzbek maqom art appears as a creative force that both continues and renews tradition. For this reason, future research into the physiological, acoustic, and aesthetic features of the female voice in maqom will contribute to a more comprehensive scientific understanding of the national vocal art.

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