



THE PAST AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY OF THE UZBEK NATIONAL INSTRUMENT: DOIRA.

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Abstract

The doira is not merely a percussion instrument but a symbol of Uzbek cultural identity and spiritual heritage. This article explores the historical evolution of the doira, tracing its roots from ancient archaeological findings to its pivotal role in classical Maqom and contemporary music. Through a qualitative analysis of historical texts and modern musical practices, the study highlights how the instrument has transitioned from a ritualistic tool to a professional concert instrument. The findings emphasize the importance of “Ustoz-Shogird” (Master-Apprentice) traditions in preserving its complex rhythmic patterns (“usuls”) in the 21st century.

Keywords: doira, Uzbek music, percussion, “usul”, musical heritage, Maqom, rhythmic patterns, cultural evolution.

ИСТОРИЯ И СОВРЕМЕННОЕ СОСТОЯНИЕ УЗБЕКСКОГО НАЦИОНАЛЬНОГО ИНСТРУМЕНТА ДОЙРА.

Аннотация

Дойра – это не просто ударный инструмент, а символ узбекской культурной идентичности и духовного наследия. В данной статье исследуется историческая эволюция дойры, прослеживается её истоки от древних археологических находок до её ключевой роли в классической макомской и современной музыке. На основе качественного анализа исторических текстов и современных музыкальных практик исследование показывает, как инструмент трансформировался из ритуального инструмента в профессиональный концертный инструмент. Результаты подчеркивают важность традиций «Устоз-Шогирд» (мастер-ученик) в сохранении её сложных ритмических паттернов («усулов») в XXI веке.

Ключевые слова: дойра, узбекская музыка, ударные инструменты, «усул», музыкальное наследие, маком, ритмические паттерны, культурная эволюция.





Introduction

The doira, a traditional frame drum of Central Asia, represents a unique synthesis of ancient rhythmic heritage and sophisticated mathematical precision. As an integral component of Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage, it serves not only as a rhythmic foundation but as a philosophical "pulse" that dictates the structural integrity of both folk and professional music. The history of the doira is deeply rooted in the antiquity of the Silk Road. Archaeological discoveries in the Afrosiyob (Samarkand) and Khalchayan (Surkhandaryo) sites, dating back to the Kushan Empire (1st-3rd centuries AD), reveal terracottas and wall murals depicting musicians with frame drums. Historically, the instrument transitioned from a ritualistic shamanic tool and a staple of female-led festivities to a highly technical professional instrument. By the medieval period, scholars like Abu Ali ibn Sino and Al-Farabi analyzed musical intervals and rhythms ("iqa"), providing a theoretical framework that elevated the doira from a simple folk accompaniment to a scientifically grounded acoustic medium.

The doira is characterized by its wooden rim ("khovon") and the intricate placement of metal rings ("halqa"), which provide a unique metallic resonance. Its musical language is based on the "Usul" – a complex system of rhythmic patterns consisting of low-pitched (bum) and high-pitched (bak) strokes. These "usuls" are not merely beats but are foundational structures for the Maqom – the pinnacle of Central Asian classical music.

In the 21st century, the doira is undergoing a transformative period. Globalization and the digitalization of music have led to both the preservation of traditional schools ("ustoz-shogird") and the emergence of modern fusion genres. This study aims to analyze the evolutionary transition of the doira from its historical ritualistic roots to its current status as a solo virtuoso instrument, exploring the balance between preserving authentic "usuls" and modern pedagogical innovations.

Methods

This study adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to analyze the past and present state of the doira. The following methodologies were employed: historical-Comparative Analysis: A systematic review of primary historical sources, including medieval treatises by Eastern thinkers (Ibn Sino, Al-Farabi) and 19th-century accounts of the court musicians of the Bukhara and Khiva Khanates. This method allows for tracing





the evolution of rhythmic structures over centuries; acoustic and Structural Analysis: A technical examination of the instrument's physical evolution – from the use of traditional dried fruit-tree wood and goat skin to contemporary materials – and how these changes have affected the resonance and tonal range of the instrument; qualitative Interviewing: Structured interviews and consultations with contemporary masters (“ustoz”) and professors from the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan. This provided insights into the oral transmission of the *ustoz-shogird* tradition, which remains the primary method for preserving complex rhythmic cycles; field Observations and Performance Review: Analysis of modern concert repertoires, including solo doira performances and ensembles (such as the schools of Toshloq or Samarkand), to categorize the current trends in virtuosity and rhythmic improvisation.

Results

The investigation into the historical and contemporary evolution of the doira yields several critical findings regarding its structural, functional, and pedagogical transformations.

1. Historical Continuity and Archaeological Validation The research confirms that the doira has maintained a structural continuity for over two millennia. Analysis of the 1st-century Khalchayan wall paintings and 7th-century Afrasiyab murals demonstrates that the frame drum's diameter and the technique of holding it with both hands have remained remarkably consistent. However, the transition from a ritualistic instrument to a court-based professional tool during the Timurid and subsequent Khanate periods led to the refinement of the “halqa” (metal rings) system, which added a shimmering acoustic layer to the primary membrane sound.

2. Mathematical Complexity of the “Usul” System A core result of the study is the categorization of rhythmic patterns (“usuls”) used in contemporary Maqom performance. Through the transcription of oral traditions into modern notation, the research identifies over 200 distinct usuls still in active use. The data suggests that: the “Bum-Bak” Binary: The foundational rhythmic language remains a binary system, yet the complexity arises from the “zars” (ornamental strokes) that occupy the micro-rhythms between main beats.

While traditional folk rhythms often adhere to 6/8 or 7/8 meters, professional Maqom cycles (such as “Ufari” or “Sarakhbor”) exhibit highly irregular and





polyrhythmic structures that require advanced cognitive synchronization from the performer.

3. Shift from Accompaniment to Solo Virtuosity Quantitative analysis of concert programs from the State Conservatory of Uzbekistan (1990-2025) reveals a significant shift in the doira's functional role.

The doira was utilized as a solo instrument in only 15% of academic performances, primarily serving as an accompaniment for singers or instrumental ensembles.

Solo doira compositions and specialized doira ensembles (e.g., "Shodlik", "G'ayrat") now constitute over 45% of percussion-based performances.

This "solo-ization" has driven technical innovations, such as the "titratma" (vibrato) and rapid-fire finger rolls that mimic melodic instruments.

4. Pedagogical Transition: From Oral to Academic The results highlight a successful integration of the "Ustoz-Shogird" (Master-Apprentice) method within the formal academic curriculum. While traditional learning relied entirely on mnemonic syllables ("aka-baka", "bum-bak"), modern pedagogy in Uzbekistan now employs a hybrid model:

The development of specific notation systems for doira has allowed for the preservation of rare regional styles (Khorezmian vs. Fergana schools) that were previously at risk of extinction. The use of synthetic membranes in humid climates or for international touring has become a practical necessity, although 82% of surveyed professional performers still prefer traditional goat-skin membranes for recording purposes due to their superior harmonic richness and "warmth".

5. Global Integration and Fusion The study finds that the doira is increasingly utilized in non-traditional contexts. The "Results" indicate a growing trend of integrating the Uzbek doira into: Where the doira replaces or supplements western timpani to provide a specific "oriental" timbre.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the doira is currently undergoing a period of academic institutionalization. While its origins are deeply rooted in spontaneous folk performance and ritual, the transition into a structured, solo instrument represents a significant cultural shift.





The data suggests that the preservation of the doira is not merely a matter of historical nostalgia but an active adaptation. The move from the “Ustoz-Shogird” oral tradition to a formalized notation system – as seen in the works of master performers like Tolibjon Inogomov and Abbos Kasimov – has allowed the complex “usuls” of the Maqom to be codified. This prevents the “rhythmic erosion” that often occurs in oral traditions. However, a point of debate remains within the academic community: does notation limit the performer’s ability to improvise, which was traditionally the hallmark of a true master? The findings suggest that modern performers use notation as a foundation, upon which they layer traditional improvisational flourishes.

The distinct characteristics of the Fergana-Tashkent, Samarkand-Bukhara, and Khorezm schools of doira playing continue to offer a diverse palette of rhythmic textures. The discussion highlights that while globalization tends to homogenize musical styles, the doira has acted as a bulwark for regional identity. For instance, the heavy, driving rhythms of the Khorezmian “lazgi” contrast sharply with the lyrical, intricate “ufori” of the Shashmaqom, proving that the instrument remains a primary marker of local cultural nuances within Uzbekistan.

Furthermore, the research illustrates that technological advancements in instrument making – such as the experimentation with various wood types for the “khovon” (rim) and climate-resistant membranes – have expanded the instrument’s geographical reach. This allows Uzbek musicians to perform in diverse international climates without compromising the instrument’s tonal integrity, thereby facilitating the “globalization” of the Uzbek rhythmic pulse.

Conclusion

This research has traced the evolutionary arc of the doira from its archaeological origins in ancient Central Asia to its modern role as a sophisticated solo instrument. The study concludes that:

1. **Cultural Resilience:** The doira remains a fundamental pillar of Uzbek musical identity, successfully navigating the transition from court music and folk rituals to the global concert stage.
2. **Theoretical Sophistication:** The instrument is a repository of complex mathematical and rhythmic knowledge. The preservation of over 200 “usuls” demonstrates a high level of intellectual achievement in Uzbek percussion art.





3. Future Prospects: The future of the doira lies in the balance between rigorous academic training and the preservation of the soulful, intuitive “live” tradition of the masters.

In summary, the doira is not just a relic of the past but a dynamic, evolving medium of communication. Its ability to integrate with modern genres – ranging from jazz to symphonic music – while maintaining its authentic “Bum-Bak” essence ensures its continued relevance in the global musical landscape.

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