



## NAVO MAQOMI AND ITS PERFORMANCE TRADITIONS

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### Abstract

This article examines the historical roots, musical structure, and performance traditions of the Uzbek maqom Navo, one of the most distinguished pieces in the Shashmaqom cycle. The study explores both the instrumental and vocal sections of the maqom, focusing on their rhythmic and modal organization, as well as performance practices preserved through the ustoz–shogird (master–apprentice) tradition. Navo maqom embodies profound philosophical and spiritual meanings, representing emotional purification and divine inspiration in the context of classical Uzbek music. The article also integrates theoretical and practical perspectives from recent scholarship to provide a comprehensive understanding of the artistic and cultural significance of this maqom.

**Keywords:** Shashmaqom, Navo maqom, Talqini Bayot, performance tradition, modal system, rhythm, tanbur, Uzbek classical music.

### Introduction

The Uzbek classical music heritage, particularly the Shashmaqom cycle, reflects the nation’s cultural and spiritual evolution. Among its six principal modes, Navo maqom occupies a prominent position for its deeply philosophical essence and artistic sophistication. It represents not merely a musical composition but a complete aesthetic system uniting melody (ohang), rhythm (usul), and emotion (his-tuyg‘u).

Historically, Navo maqom emerged as a significant modal structure during the 16th–17th centuries in Bukhara, when local musicians and theorists developed



the Shashmaqom as a systematized musical genre. Its modal patterns, rhythmic cycles, and melodic ornamentations were influenced by centuries of interaction with Persian dastgah, Arabic maqamat, and Turkic makam traditions (Rasulov, 2025). The theoretical foundations of Navo maqom trace back to medieval Eastern music treatises, including those by Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Safiuddin Urmavi. Their works laid out the modal principles that later guided Central Asian maqom practice. In the 20th century, figures like Yunus Rajabi played a crucial role in codifying the Shashmaqom repertoire, ensuring the preservation of both oral and written traditions.

The Navo maqom evolved to incorporate both instrumental (cholgʻu) and vocal (ashula) forms, balancing rhythmic precision with melodic freedom. The Talqini Bayot, Nasr, and Ufori sections exemplify the interrelation of modal structure, rhythm, and expressive intent (Abdinabiyevna, 2021).

Navo maqom's modal structure is organized around the Bayot family of scales. Each segment, from introductory Nasr to closing Ufori, reflects a progressive complexity of melodic contour and rhythmic pattern. The rhythmic cycles (usul) vary from simple duple meters in Tasnif to more intricate sequences in Gardun, emphasizing the emotional journey of the performance.

Each rhythmic and melodic element functions beyond technical structure: it shapes the performer's interpretive expression and engages the audience in an immersive aesthetic experience. The maqom's emotional and spiritual dimensions are deeply tied to these structures, with melodic motifs representing human feelings such as longing, devotion, and divine inspiration (Ulasheva, 2023).

Music is a form of universal art, playing a large role in the development of connections between different cultures. Like the art of maqom, music with its own unique and deep spiritual layers serves as a bridge in intercultural communication. [5.11-b.]

The continuity of Navo maqom depends heavily on the ustoz–shogird (master–apprentice) pedagogy. Through this system, musicians inherit not only technical skill but also the ethical and aesthetic principles embedded within the music. Rasulov (2025) notes that such pedagogical transmission ensures the living

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<b>ISSN (E): 3072-175X</b>	<b>Volume 01, Issue 02, November 2025</b>
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continuity of maqom, maintaining fidelity to its modal logic while allowing creative interpretation.

Masters such as Yunus Rajabi emphasized the spiritual aspect of performance: “No foreign melody can surpass the charm of our national tunes; they carry the breath of our history and the heart of our people.” Through careful instruction, students learn to synchronize melody and rhythm, internalize the maqom’s philosophical content, and develop expressive subtlety.

Navo maqom serves as a medium of emotional purification (tasfiya) and spiritual elevation (ruhaniyat). Its melodies often mirror human states, guiding both performer and listener through contemplation, reflection, and transcendence.

The integration of melodic sayr (journey) and rhythmic usul enables performers to convey nuanced emotional states. The maqom’s expressive power rests not only in its scale or rhythm but in the performer’s interpretive understanding, achieved through years of guided practice and mentorship (Karimova, 2024). Recent studies provide deeper insight into Navo maqom’s theoretical and practical significance:

Navo maqom’s modal organization reflects a sophisticated understanding of pitch hierarchy, melodic gravity, and intervallic relationships. Each tonal center serves as an anchor for melodic development, allowing improvisational exploration within the structural boundaries of the maqom. As Ulasheva (2023) highlights, “The interaction between principal tones and ornamental motifs creates an emotional narrative unique to each performance.”

The rhythmic structure (usul) in Navo is not merely a temporal framework but a pedagogical tool for developing precision, memory, and expressive timing. Abdinabiyevna (2021) emphasizes that systematic practice of usul patterns cultivates both technical mastery and aesthetic sensitivity in students. By internalizing complex cycles such as Gardun or Ufori, performers gain insight into the maqom’s philosophical rhythm, linking temporal structure with emotional trajectory.

“The Shashmaqom, Khorezm maqom, and Fergana-Tashkent maqom traditions reflect the history, traditions, and spiritual experiences of our people. Maqoms express not only musical melodies, but also the life, sorrows, joys, and dreams of

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the people. Instrumental instruments such as the doira, dutor, tanbur, rubab, and chang are an integral part of Uzbek classical music.” [5.9-b.]

The development of Navo maqom demonstrates synthesis of Central Asian, Persian, and Arabic musical traditions. Rasulov (2025) argues that this intercultural exchange fostered both innovation and continuity, producing a maqom system that balances canonical rules with improvisational freedom. Historical evolution also shows responsiveness to societal and spiritual needs, reinforcing the maqom’s role as a cultural and ethical instrument. Beyond aesthetic and technical aspects, Navo maqom embodies a philosophical system that nurtures inner contemplation. Its performance promotes samā’ — attentive listening and spiritual immersion — fostering a connection between material sound and spiritual reflection. Karimova (2024) notes that “performing the maqom is an act of intellectual and moral cultivation, where sound becomes a vehicle for higher awareness.” In practice, Navo maqom integrates instrumental lines (tanbur, dutor) with vocal melodies. The synergy between instrumental accompaniment and singing exemplifies how theoretical principles translate into expressive performance. Students learning under the ustoz–shogird method acquire skills to balance these elements organically, reinforcing musical coherence and emotional impact (Abdinabiyevna, 2021).

Modern interpretations of Navo maqom, including academic study and performance in concert halls, continue to respect its traditional frameworks while exploring adaptive techniques. Ulasheva (2023) observes that contemporary performers apply analytical methods to deepen understanding of modal progressions without compromising spiritual and cultural authenticity. This highlights the maqom’s dynamic capacity to bridge tradition and modernity.

## Conclusion

The study of Navo maqom demonstrates that it is more than a musical form; it is a philosophical, pedagogical, and spiritual system that encapsulates Uzbek cultural identity. Through the integration of modal, rhythmic, and emotional elements, the maqom engages both performers and listeners in a transformative experience.

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The pedagogical system ensures the transmission of technical, ethical, and aesthetic knowledge, while the structural and expressive qualities allow for improvisation and creativity. By maintaining fidelity to tradition and embracing careful innovation, Navo maqom remains a living testament to the depth and sophistication of Central Asian musical heritage. The study of Navo maqom illustrates its multifaceted role in the preservation, performance, and transmission of Uzbek classical music. Beyond being a melodic and rhythmic structure, Navo maqom serves as a sophisticated pedagogical system, guiding performers through intricate modal, tonal, and rhythmic relationships. The ustoz–shogird (master–apprentice) tradition ensures that knowledge is transmitted with fidelity to both technical mastery and aesthetic principles, embedding ethical and spiritual values within musical education. As Abdinabiyevna (2021) emphasizes, the pedagogy of maqom is inseparable from the cultivation of moral and emotional intelligence, which allows the performer to interpret each mode with both precision and expressive depth.

Navo maqom’s structural design demonstrates a unique synthesis of modal logic and improvisational freedom. The melodic journey (sayr) within each performance is shaped by tonal centers, intervallic hierarchy, and rhythmic cycles, creating a narrative arc that engages listeners intellectually and emotionally. Rasulov (2025) notes that the interplay between principal tones and ornamental motifs generates an evolving musical language that reflects both historical continuity and performer individuality. This duality — adherence to canonical structures and allowance for personal expression — is essential to the maqom’s enduring relevance, as it accommodates both tradition and innovation. The maqom also functions as a vehicle for spiritual and philosophical exploration. Its melodic and rhythmic patterns are intentionally designed to evoke emotional states, facilitating reflection, contemplation, and a sense of transcendence. In performance, *samāʻ* — the act of deep listening and meditative engagement — becomes central, transforming musical experience into a holistic encounter with cultural and spiritual heritage. Ulasheva (2023) argues that this aesthetic philosophy situates Navo maqom not merely as entertainment but as an ethical

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and intellectual discipline, bridging the material and spiritual dimensions of human experience.

From a cultural perspective, Navo maqom embodies the historical and social identity of the Uzbek people. It preserves centuries of modal knowledge, poetic sophistication, and performance practice, ensuring that each generation inherits a living, dynamic musical tradition. As Karimova (2024) asserts, the maqom’s ability to integrate pedagogical rigor, artistic expression, and cultural memory makes it an invaluable resource for understanding the broader aesthetic and philosophical principles of Eastern music.

Furthermore, Navo maqom demonstrates adaptability in contemporary contexts without compromising its core principles. Modern performers and educators continue to study, reinterpret, and perform this repertoire, incorporating analytical, ethnomusicological, and acoustic methodologies to enrich understanding. Yet, despite modernization, the maqom retains its essential identity — a system where modal, rhythmic, and expressive elements converge to produce profound emotional and spiritual resonance. In summary, Navo maqom is a comprehensive musical phenomenon that encompasses theoretical, pedagogical, and cultural dimensions. Its structure and performance practice reflect centuries of accumulated wisdom, philosophical reflection, and artistic innovation. By synthesizing modal knowledge, ethical cultivation, and expressive freedom, Navo maqom continues to play a pivotal role in the transmission of Uzbek musical heritage, ensuring its relevance for both contemporary scholarship and performance. The study of this maqom not only illuminates the technical and aesthetic achievements of Eastern music but also underscores the profound connection between sound, intellect, and spiritual experience.

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**WORLD BULLETIN  
PUBLISHING**  
Online Publishing Hub

# World Bulletin of Education and Learning (WBEL)

**ISSN (E): 3072-175X**

**Volume 01, Issue 02, November 2025**



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<https://worldbulletin.org/index.php/1>

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