



A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY SINGING STYLES IN UZBEKISTAN: THE CASE OF MAQOM AND ESTRADA

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Abstract:

This article examines the artistic, cultural, and pedagogical relationship between traditional and contemporary singing styles in Uzbekistan, focusing on maqom — the classical vocal heritage — and estrada, the popular modern genre. Drawing upon ethnomusicological and sociocultural perspectives, the study explores how globalization, media technologies, and education systems have reshaped vocal performance and artistic identity. Ulmasovich, R. U. (2025). The research argues that while maqom embodies spiritual depth, modal complexity, and collective memory, estrada represents modernization, individuality, and digital innovation. Yuldashev, M. U. (2025). The coexistence of both forms reveals the dynamic balance between tradition and modernity in Uzbekistan's musical culture.

Keywords: Maqom, Estrada, traditional singing, contemporary vocal art, Uzbek music, cultural identity, globalization, vocal pedagogy.

Introduction

Music in Uzbekistan embodies centuries of cultural dialogue between East and West, tradition and innovation. Among its most prominent forms are *maqom*, the classical vocal art rooted in Central Asian spiritual and philosophical thought, and *estrada*, a modern, media-oriented genre influenced by global pop culture.

As Feld (2000) notes, musical traditions continually evolve through cultural exchange and technological mediation. Similarly, in Uzbekistan, singers have

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adapted traditional elements of *maqom* to contemporary contexts, while *estrada* artists increasingly draw upon classical techniques to enrich their artistry.

The aim of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of *maqom* and *estrada* singing styles to highlight how historical heritage and modern innovation interact in shaping Uzbekistan's vocal culture.

2. Historical Background

The *maqom* tradition dates back to the medieval period, when it developed as part of a larger system of Central Asian classical music. It is characterized by modal structures (*shashmaqom*, *ferghana-tashkent maqomlari*), complex rhythmic cycles, and a philosophical connection to Sufism (Levin, 1996). Historically, *maqom* performance was considered an intellectual and spiritual act, transmitted through the *ustoz–shogird* (master–apprentice) system.

Shashmaqom, "Khorezm *Maqoms*" and "Farg'ona-Tashkent" *maqom* paths." Based on the qualified perception and analysis of the specific "type" structure (syntax) of *maqom* melodies, it is possible to identify the musical layers of different periods harmonized within them. [7.1294-b.]

Conversely, *estrada* emerged in the mid-20th century under the influence of Soviet cultural modernization and global popular music (Slobin, 1984). With the rise of broadcasting and recording technologies, *estrada* became the voice of urban youth, emphasizing emotional directness, performance charisma, and accessibility. Today, *estrada* is the dominant form of contemporary vocal expression in Uzbekistan.

3. Vocal Techniques and Aesthetic Characteristics

3.1 *Maqom* Singing: *Maqom* singers (known as *xonanda*) employ intricate melodic ornamentation, controlled vibrato, and refined microtonal precision (Karimova, M. (2025). Breath control, diction, and deep emotional delivery are central to the performance. The singer's voice serves as both a musical and spiritual instrument — conveying ethical and philosophical meanings encoded in classical poetry (*ghazal*). Training is highly rigorous, involving years of oral mentorship and memorization of canonical repertoires.

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3.2 Estrada Singing: In contrast, estrada singing emphasizes modern vocal production: chest voice, dynamic projection, and stylistic versatility (e.g., pop, jazz, and R&B). Amplification, studio recording, and digital effects such as autotune or reverb are integral to its sound (Turino, 2008). Unlike maqom, estrada training often takes place in conservatories or through independent study, prioritizing stage presence and individuality over strict adherence to tradition.

4. Cultural and Social Functions

Maqom embodies cultural continuity and national identity. As a UNESCO-recognized heritage, it functions as a bridge to Uzbekistan’s historical consciousness and collective spirituality (UNESCO, 2003). Its performance often takes place in ceremonial, academic, and cultural contexts, emphasizing depth and moral reflection.

By contrast, estrada reflects the aspirations of a globalized and modern society. It addresses themes of love, freedom, and personal success, resonating with younger audiences. Through platforms like YouTube and social media, estrada singers have transformed into cultural ambassadors, presenting a modern image of Uzbekistan to the world (Borieva, K. R., & Burieva, K. R. (2022).

5. The Role of Technology

Technology serves as a crucial dividing line between maqom and estrada. While maqom traditionally values acoustic purity and live performance, digital tools are now used for archiving and preservation (Levin, 1996). Modern recording studios in Tashkent and Bukhara have made it possible to document and analyze the nuances of maqom performance for future generations.

Meanwhile, estrada thrives on technology — from sound engineering to visual presentation. The music video format has become an essential artistic tool for estrada singers, allowing for creative storytelling and visual symbolism that complement vocal performance (Turino, 2008).

6. Comparative Discussion

Aspect	Maqom Singing (Traditional)	Estrada Singing (Contemporary)
Pedagogy	Oral transmission (ustoz–shogird), apprenticeship	Institutional or self-directed learning
Function	Cultural preservation, spirituality	Entertainment, personal expression
Vocal Style	Modal, microtonal, ornamented	Tonal, rhythmically simple, amplified
Technology	Acoustic, archival documentation	Digital recording, multimedia integration
Audience	Local, intellectual, ceremonial	Mass, youth-oriented, global
Cultural Role	Symbol of heritage and identity	Medium of modernization and globalization

Despite these distinctions, both traditions demonstrate adaptability and resilience. Many contemporary Uzbek singers blend maqom elements into estrada compositions, creating a hybrid musical form that embodies both continuity and progress. Pirmatova, N. (2024).

7. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of maqom and estrada singing in Uzbekistan illustrates the ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity. While maqom sustains the cultural and spiritual legacy of the Uzbek people, estrada reflects their openness to global influences and technological innovation. The synthesis of these two vocal traditions represents not a conflict but a complementary coexistence — one that ensures the sustainability of Uzbekistan’s musical identity in a rapidly globalizing world.

Future research should focus on how educational institutions, digital platforms, and international collaborations contribute to the hybridization and preservation of vocal traditions in Central Asia.

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