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From Creativity to Collaborations: Towards a Methodology for Maqom Theory Research

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Abstract

This article proposes to re-orient the study of music theory in Uzbek maqom from systematising models to a more dynamic, collaborative approach that draws on compositional creativity. While maqām-based traditions have often been analysed through tetrachordal structures and melodic pathways, these frameworks have not been able to account for contemporary modal practices in Uzbek *maqom.* Instead, Uzbek musicologists such as Is'hoq Rajabov, To'xtasin G'afurbekov and Ravshan Yunusov have shown that modal practice in Uzbek maqom and the related bastakor compositions depends heavily on borrowing and reworking melodies from extant pieces. The identification of source melodies as well as the techniques of reworking may however be open to interpretation. Drawing on Stephen Blum's notion of music theory as an assemblage, I suggest that this openness can be a productive space for future research in Uzbek classical music, including *maqom, xalq musiqasi* repertoire as well as *bastakor* compositions. This research will invite musicians to share how they interpret the creative process of the composers, based on their knowledge of the repertoire. By exploring their diverse response, it is hoped that we can arrive at a more dynamic, locally grounded theory on Uzbek classical music based on on-going engagement with creativity within the tradition.

Keywords: maqom, music theory, bastakor, creativity, assemblage

Аннотация

В данной статье предлагается переориентировать изучение теории музыки в узбекском макаме от систематизирующих моделей к более динамичному, совместному подходу, основанному на творчестве композиторов. Хотя традиции макама часто анализируются через тетрахордовые структуры и мелодические пути, эти рамки не способны объяснить современные модальные практики в узбекском макаме. Вместо этого узбекские музыковеды, такие как Исхак Раджабов, Тохтасин Гафурбеков

и Равшан Юнусов, показали, что модальная практика в узбекском макаме и в связанных с ним композициях бастакор сильно зависит от заимствования и переработки мелодий из уже существующих произведений. Однако идентификация исходных мелодий, а также техники их переработки могут быть открытыми для интерпретации. Опираясь на концепцию Стивена Блума о музыкальной теории как об ассамбляже, я предполагаю, что эта открытость может стать продуктивным пространством для будущих исследований в области узбекской классической музыки, включая макам, репертуар *xalq musiqasi*, а также бастакорские композиции. Это исследование приглашает музыкантов делиться тем, как они интерпретируют творческий процесс композиторов, основываясь на своем знании репертуара. Изучая их разнообразные отклики, надеемся прийти к более динамичной, локально укоренённой теории узбекской классической музыки, основанной на постоянном взаимодействии с творчеством внутри традиции.

Ключевые слова: макам, теория музыки, бастакор, творчество, ассамбляж

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada o‘zbek maqomi bo‘yicha musiqa nazariyasini tizimlashtiruvchi modellardan ko‘ra, bastakorlik ijodiga asoslangan yanada dinamik va hamkorlikka yo‘naltirilgan yondashuvga o‘tkazish taklif etiladi. Maqomga asoslangan an’anaviy musiqiy meros ko‘pincha tetraxord tuzilmalari va ohang yo‘llari orqali tahlil qilingan bo‘lsa-da, bu doiralar zamonaviy o‘zbek maqomidagi modal amaliyotni to‘liq qamrab ololmaydi. Buning o‘rniga, Is’hoq Rajabov, To‘xtasin G‘afurbekov va Ravshan Yunusov kabi o‘zbek musiqa bilimdonlari, maqom va unga bog‘liq bastakorlik kompozitsiyalarida modal amaliyot mavjud asarlardan kuylarni olib, ularni qayta ishlashga asoslanishini ko‘rsatganlar. Biroq, asl kuylarni aniqlash va ularni qayta ishlash texnikasi talqin uchun ochiq bo‘lishi mumkin. Stiven Blumning musiqa nazariyasini “assamblaj” sifatida talqin qilish tushunchasiga tayangan holda, bu ochiqlik o‘zbek an’anaviy musiqasini, jumladan maqom, xalq musiqasi va bastakorlik asarlarini o‘rganishda istiqbolli ilmiy yo‘nalishga aylanishi mumkin. Ushbu tadqiqot musiqachilarni o‘z repertuar bilimlariga tayangan holda bastakorlarning ijodiy jarayonini qanday talqin qilishlarini o‘rtoqlashishga taklif qiladi. Ularning turlicha javoblarini o‘rganish orqali, biz o‘zbek an’anaviy musiqasini mahalliy madaniyatga asoslangan, ijodiy jarayonga doimiy aloqada bo‘luvchi yanada dinamik nazariya tomon yo‘nalishga umid qilamiz.

Kalit so‘zlar: maqom, musiqa nazariyasi, bastakor, ijodkorlik, assamblaj

The limits of systematic music theory for research on maqām-based music

There has been growing interest in maqām-based music-making in the Euro-American world in recent years, with the proliferation of offline workshops, online platforms teaching not only the performance of instruments like the oud or qanun, but also 'maqam theory'. These typically include analysis of classic pieces in terms of different tetrachordal structures, their combinations and resulting melodic pathways, as well as models and templates to quickly try improvising. All of these rely on what we can call the 'systematising' of music theory.

However, systematisation is not without controversy. One of the most influential yet contested attempts at systematisation of maqām music theory was the Cairo Congress in 1932, where the Arabic maqām was theorised as combinations of tetrachords (ajnas). This served as a revival of medieval Arab music theory on the one hand, and a way of creating a 'scientific theory' on the other [1]. However, later musicians, especially in Syria, have considered this a simplification of the system that "ignores important aspects of its dynamism as a performance principle" [2]. In Iran, there has also been a longstanding controversy between conceiving of the dastgāh as abstract modal frameworks, as in the system of the composer and musicologist Ali Naqi Vaziri (1886–1979), or more melodically and without systematisation, as supported by the poet and composer 'Aref Qazvini (1882–1934). The former believed his system would preserve the Iranian musical tradition by meeting the needs of mass education, but the latter believed that this system downplayed the importance of traditional melodies from the Qajar court tradition, threatening the integrity of the tradition [3].

Rethinking 'Music Theory'

These debates encourage us to rethink what "music theory" is. In Euro-American classical music pedagogy, theory is often understood as naming and explaining aspects of musical experience, and turning such explanations into tools for music-

making [4]. However, there are also other models. The American ethnomusicologist Stephen Blum proposes that we think of theory not as a finished product, but as a human activity: theorising. Theorising can include the recognition of resemblances, the analysis of interrelations, the reflection on their implications and the evaluation of new possibilities [5]. These activities may not be strictly written or oral, verbal or non-verbal; they can include performing, demonstrating, listening, or hearing [5]. How theory is expressed depends on context—a teacher might explain a concept differently depending on the student or occasion. Blum proposes that we understand theory as an assemblage: a dynamic, evolving constellation of partial models and situated knowledge.

A Creativity-based Approach to Modal Theory in Uzbek Classical Music?

This notion suggests new approaches to modal theory in Uzbek classical music—including maqom, xalq musiqasi repertoire and bastakor compositions. Scholars such as Ted Levin and Jean During have attempted to analyse the modal structure of the Shashmaqom by identifying "melodic resemblances" across similarly named pieces [6], or by defining modes in terms of pitch hierarchies, unstable tones, and modulation points [7]. Yet, both conclude that modal identity in Shashmaqom is elusive; their models cannot consistently explain the repertoire. If external modal frameworks are limited in their explanatory power, might there be locally grounded ways to theorise modal theory in Uzbek classical music?

It is in Uzbek-language scholarship that suggestive insights can be found. Is'hoq Rajabov's *Maqomlar masalasiga doir* (1963) includes a section on creativity ("Shashmaqom va xalq ijodiyoti") that highlights melodic interpenetration between Shashmaqom and xalq musiqasi. Rajabov discusses how bastakor composers draw from the maqom repertoire to create new works. For instance, he notes that Doni Zokirov's composition *Ey Sabo* begins with a melody taken from the Tajik version of *Nasri Ushshoq taronasi I*, adding the avji turk at its climax [8]. Similar examples

appear in To'xtasin G'afurbekov's analysis of Haji Abdulaziz Rasulov's *Guluzorim* and its derivation from *Eshvoy* [9]. In Ravshan Yunusov's biography of Fattohxon Mamadaliev, we find both direct borrowings (e.g., *Netay* from *Qashqarchai Savti Chorgoh*) [10] and subtler references (e.g., *Oqibat* drawing on melodic material "specific to maqom Iroq" set to the chapandoz rhythm) [10].

These analyses suggest new models for research: instead of looking for systematic modality, we may ask: How do musicians today recognise such borrowings or interpenetration across different pieces? Do they agree on sources, or are there competing interpretations? What makes certain melodies more recognisable? In asking these questions, the researcher will need to collaborate with different musicians, inviting them to theorise together, through verbal dialogue or performative demonstrations. When different musicians arrive at different conclusions, instead of resolving their disagreement, the researcher may find exploring different musicians' backgrounds and musical experiences a productive space to reflect the richness and dynamism of Uzbek classical music that allows for multiple interpretations.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that attempts to explain the melodic aspect of maqom as systematic music theory do not account for how it is understood among musicians as a living practice. Drawing on Blum's concept of theory as assemblage, I propose that further research on modal theory in Uzbek classical music can draw on local musicians' understanding of the interpenetration of musical materials among maqom, xalq musiqasi repertoire and bastakor compositions, through a collaborative research model that emphasizes both verbal and embodied knowledge. It is hoped that this will lead to a greater understanding of both modal theory and creativity in Uzbek classical music from a local, practice-based perspective.

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