

Music and Identity in Central Asia: Introduction

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This introduction gives a short overview of the four articles collected in this volume by leading Western and local scholars on the issue of music and identity in Central Asian cultures, surveying the past and present of music-making processes. The introduction also examines two phenomena in greater detail: the performer and the event as focal points of changing national identities. Taking examples from Uzbekistan and concentrating on the singer/wedding paradigm, the introduction explores the historical background and issues of change in musical and national identity over a period starting with Russian and Bolshevik rule over Central Asia and continuing up to the contemporary independent states.

Keywords: Central Asia; Ethnic Identity; National Identity in Music; Singer; Wedding

1 Background

The definition of Central Asia in the Western world has been twofold. First, the term describes in geographic and historical terms the vast area of Transoxiana stretching from Siberia to the Caspian Sea, and associated with the names of the Emperor Genghis Khan (12th–13th centuries), Emperor Timur (sometimes known in the West as Tamberlaine: 15th century) and the 16th-century founder of the Mogul Empire, Zahiriddin Mohammad Babur. Each of these men was closely tied to historically famous cities like Herat, Samarkand, Bukhara and Khiva. Babur, for instance, was born in Andijan, in the Ferghana Valley, and ruled an empire spanning today's Afghanistan, Northwest China, Pakistan, Northern India and parts of Iran.

Second, there nowadays exists a much smaller area carrying the name of Central Asia. Sometimes called “Soviet Central Asia”, this region is roughly ten times the size of Britain and groups Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and

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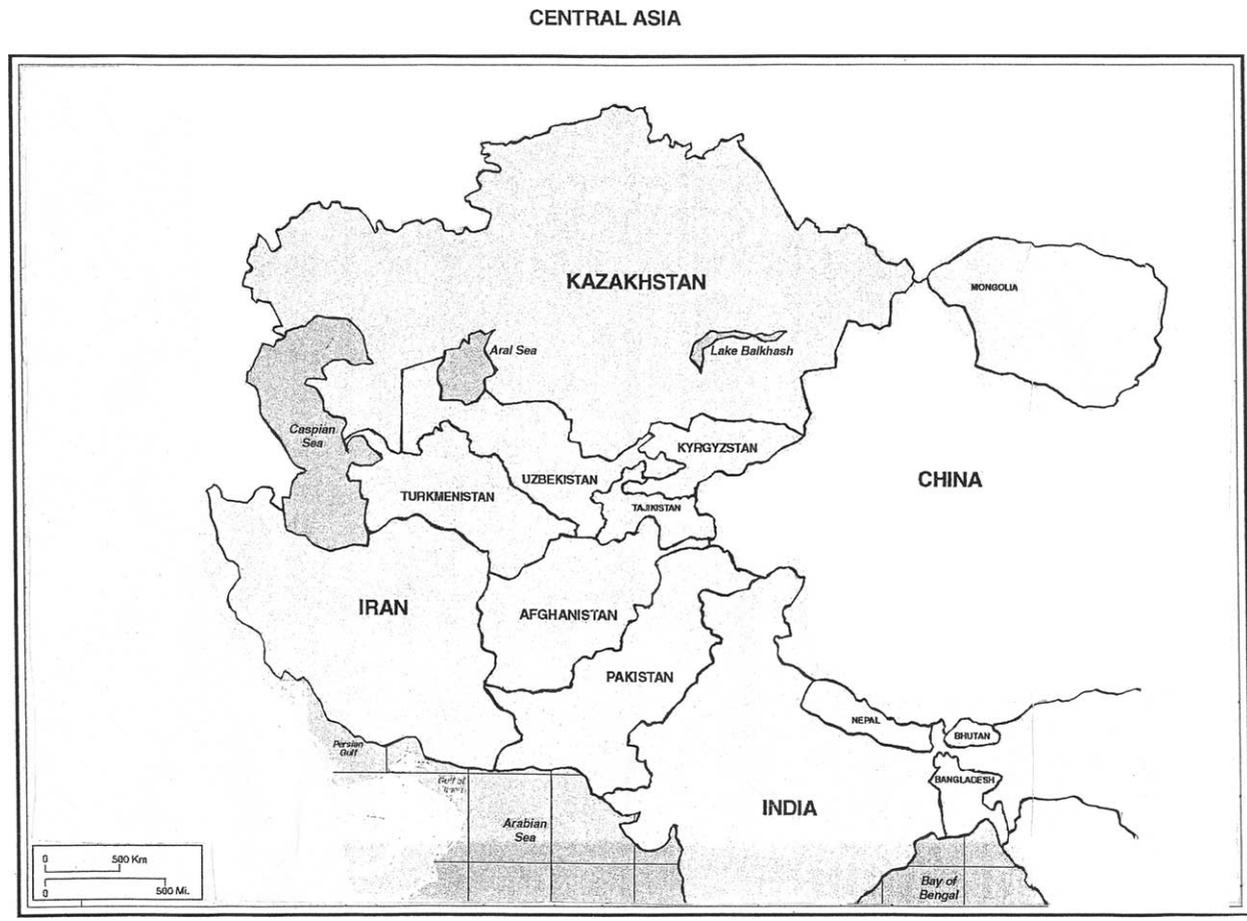


Figure 1 Map of Central Asia.

Turkmenistan. Whereas the former broader definition takes into consideration the common historical Middle Eastern Islamic background, the latter refers to the more recent history of the 19th and 20th centuries and is associated with the Russian colonization of Turkestan, and consequently with the Soviet Communist legacy. This issue of *Ethnomusicology Forum* takes both definitions on board, including discussions from the full range of countries now or formerly defined as Central Asia.

During recent decades, the states of Central Asia have faced tough challenges from revolution (Iran), war (Afghanistan) and regime change (Pakistan) as well as the Soviet Union's collapse and painful process of gaining independence. Culture has reflected all these changes. The looming question "who are we?" inspired new developments in art and music, which accompanied changes in language and people's mentality, bringing to life a new set of values and refashioning ethnic identities across the region. Nevertheless, just because there are strong themes of shared history and culture in this region, we should not assume that the situation has progressed identically in each location. Contributors to this issue ask: how have the musical heritages of Central Asian countries been influenced by national outlooks and identities? And what role have they played in the process of nation building?

According to the United Nations, there are currently 185 million displaced people in the world. This global phenomenon has a special importance in Central Asia, where the collapse of the Soviet state, together with conditions of ethnic conflict, political ambiguity, new-found freedom of movement and economic change, has created waves of migration that are shaping the economic, political, social and security-related nature of the region and are significantly affecting local culture. Today the West and the East have become closer than we think: different countries and cultures are now interacting in ways ranging from (and simultaneously interleaving) conflict to economic union. New political realities have thus contributed to the new cultural images. Meanwhile, the changes taking place in the East have not been confined exclusively to the political realm (Afghanistan, Iran), but have also, to an extent, involved the modernization of culture, feeding innovation and conveying new paths of globalization. Some papers, therefore, directly address the issue of migration in the modern world.

Alongside migration, national identity in music is a key issue in this set of discussions. Musical idioms in daily life at a time of crisis, whether celebrations or musical scholarship and education, necessarily reflect the growing sense of nationalism expressed in a society, and lead to music that contains elements immediately recognizable as belonging to the culture concerned. Focusing on national identity in music, the articles in this issue provide a view on music in relation to the history and present situation of Central Asia. As such, the authors are also asking: "What is music in the Central Asian region today?" "What are the musical features of the new 21st century?" "How is 'the old', the 'traditional' in music rendered compatible with the 'new', with 'modern' qualities?" "What are the sources of new appearances in music: the media, new technology or new social events?"

2 Articles in this Issue

Now let us look at the four contributions to the present issue.¹ It is not incidental that all four articles point to the wedding as an event of primary importance for music making and social life in Central Asia. This is a focus that I return to below. For his part, Jean During traces changes within Central Asian music, arguing that there are different tools in the process of musical transformation, all of which carry symbols of national identity: a song's tune and its words; rhythm and intervals; the question of language; the reconstruction of musical instruments; the transformation of the image of the performer; forms of ensemble and group performance, following social and political change. During argues that "the *toi*, or wedding party . . . in Transoxania constitutes a fundamentally private and festive convivial space . . . Having turned traditional *tois* into official events, the state has intervened to regulate practices, attempting, among other things, to exert financial control over the musicians' essentially private activities".

Alexander Djumaev, meanwhile, sets out "to trace the evolution of the concept of 'musical heritage' as it occurs in Uzbek musicology; and to reveal the principal sources of a national musical identity's formation in the public consciousness, artistic/creative work, as well as emotional-aesthetic perception of a certain stratum of the population of Turkestan-Uzbekistan". His research is based on "written texts, including historical manuscripts, the main contemporary national studies and samples of traditional music notated according to the Western staff system". Djumaev proceeds by discussing the most important public figures of the history of Uzbek music, the books and transcriptions published under the auspices of national cultural institutions, and the core melodies of the national repertoire: *Tanovar*, *Munojot*, *Navo*, *Ushshoq*, *Chuli Iroq*, *Segoh*, *Ajam*, *Nasrulloi*, *Chorgoh*, *Eshvoi*, *Qaro quzum*, *Bayot*, *Gir'ya*, *Q'oshchinor* and *Qalandar*. One should point out that all these famous melodies are today still widely performed at weddings.

Federico Spinetti explores the notion of national identity in relation to Tajik pop music. He argues that "Europeanization has entailed both the installation of European art music and the reformulation of local musics according to European models". Taking as an example the synthesizer, the author makes observations on its development in Tajikistan within the last quarter of a century: "in the 1980s, when synthesizers were first being largely adopted to play music at weddings . . . much of the wedding repertoire was often transferred altogether onto the multi-track, orchestral capability of the new medium and, initially at least, synthesizers actually tended to supersede all other instruments (traditional and not)". Later in the 1990s, as Spinetti points out, "traditional instruments have increasingly been reintroduced and regained their former importance. Wedding music has gradually provided the ground for experimenting with new combinations of traditional and pop instruments as well as idioms".

John Baily starts from the main criterion of identity aspects in language use in music to provide a deep analysis of music and migration. National identity, he states,

is sensible of the place of nation. When the community moves it changes. Studying questions of continuity and change in two cities with significant Afghan refugee populations (Peshawar, in Pakistan, and Fremont, in California), the author argues that music is bound up with identity and memory. Even in these diasporic contexts, “the main venue for live music making was the wedding party”. Changes affecting communities have brought a new image to the style of wedding parties. As proof, Baily brings an example from the American Afghani refugees’ life. “In Fremont weddings were expensive affairs, costing \$27–30 per guest. A good wedding party, for about 500 guests, cost \$20,000–30,000. It was a modernized version of the Kabuli weddings of the past, held in a luxurious Afghan-owned function room, with women and men mixed together in a single space, everyone smartly dressed in Western clothing.”

So, what are the common issues or threads of changing national identity discussed in these articles? Several of the articles touch on language development, tradition versus modernity, the dynamic interaction of ethnic/cultural neighbourhoods (whether Uzbek/Tajik or Urdu/Pashtun), the relationship of music to religion (including matters of state policy) and the preservation of cultural heritage both in Central Asia and in the diaspora. Two focal points, where all these threads are reflected and united, are mentioned in all four articles. The first of these is the role of the performer, principally the singer, as the main artistic figure in Central Asia. The second is the setting of the wedding, which is the primary traditional musical and ritualistic event in Central Asian culture. In the remainder of this introduction I would like to stress and develop these two points of reference a little in relation to the case of changing national identity in Uzbekistan.

3 The Singer

I am writing these words shortly after 13 May 2005 when my native city of Andijan became briefly famous because of the massacre where hundreds of people, including women and children, were killed by government security forces. The refugees fled to the nearby Kyrgyz border, where the local authorities met people with suspicion until the famous Uzbek singer Sherali Juraev, himself from the area, came to talk to the local Kyrgyz government, asking them to help the Uzbek refugees. Here we see the power of a popular singer: he was able to stand up face-to-face with the authorities and sort out the problem. Where presidents are helpless, the singer comes to the forefront. Is this a modern phenomenon or has it always been like that? What does it mean to be a singer in Uzbekistan? What does it mean for the Uzbek identity? Has the role always been the same, or has it changed with the circumstances of life? To answer these questions let us consult the record.

Uzbek traditional music of the recent past (at the beginning of the 20th century) was represented by professional court music in a form of *Shashmaqom* (Six Maqams), *katta ashula* (large song) and folk music. Singers were the bearers of the oral musical tradition. One of the most prominent singers of that epoch, Mulla

Tuychi Toshmuhamedov (1868–1943) belonged to the professional court musical culture. His main repertoire consisted of songs on Sufi poems of Navoiy, Mashrab, Mukimi and Haziniy. His songs were a kind of Islamic liturgy, praising God and his beauty according to the custom of Sufism (a mystical dimension within Islam). In Sufi tradition there are two types of *ghazals* (classical poetical forms): those devoted to “*ishqi mutlaq*” (absolute love) and those describing “*ishqi majozi*” (symbolic love). The first type of *ghazal* appeals directly to God, whereas the second type is about love for women but can also be read as about a divine love. Mulla Tuychi’s repertoire consisted of both types of song. If before the October Revolution of 1917 the first type of *ghazal* dominated his singing, after the Revolution Mulla Tuychi did not give up the traditional Sufi repertoire but turned more to the second type of ambivalent *ghazal* on symbolic love.

Even in the early Soviet years Mulla Tuychi performed traditional Uzbek song, but with time Bolshevism took its toll. Pure traditional artists like Mulla Tuychi were being undercut by Soviet conformists like the Uzbek poet and composer Hamza Hakim-Zade Niyazi (1889–1929). Hamza started to create a number of new revolutionary Uzbek Soviet songs in the 1920s. He is thought to have produced about 90 such songs in all. Hamza’s songs were played by orchestras and sung by choirs. Their melodies sound closer to European and particularly to Russian idioms than to Uzbek tunes, and though Soviet propaganda imposed them forcefully, nonetheless ordinary people in *choykhana*s (tea-houses) sang the songs of Mulla Tuychi.

Another important figure was Mamurdjan Uzakov (1904–63). He was an outstanding Uzbek singer and performer, an “Artist of the People” (1939), who learned his performing skills by singing *maqom* and *katta ashula* and through studying *dutor* (long-necked plucked lute) from the first-rank musicians Boltabai Hafiz Rajabov, Mamatbuva Sattarov and Hasan Kori. From 1939 he lived in Tashkent, working for the Mukimi Theatre as a singer and composer, for the Uzbek Radio (1950–2) and in the Uzbek Theatre of Estrada (popular art; 1952–62). He was invited to perform for numerous great state occasions like the festivals or “decades” of folk arts held in Moscow (1937, 1959), for the opening of the Great Ferghana Canal (1939) and the opening of Farhad Hydro-electric Station.

If Mulla Tuychi dominated the Uzbek singing scene for the first part of the century, Mamurdjan Uzakov symbolized the singer in the mid-century. In traditional singing he was no less talented than Mulla Tuychi, and maintained the tradition of *katta ashula*, as well being given the title “Hofiz”, a title which was initially given to people who memorized the Koran by heart, but in the due course also came to refer to a great singer. However, if Mulla Tuychi confined himself to traditional Uzbek music, leaving the Soviet Bolshevik reality with its new music to people like Hamza Hakim-Zade, Mamurdjan Uzakov’s repertoire combined the classical songs with “communist” texts. He sang plenty of them, such as those about a collective farm set to Sufi melodies: *Ming yil yashang kolxozchi o’rtoqlar* (Live a thousand years, comrade

collective farmers). He also sang songs where the Communist Party replaced the Divine Absolute.

There is a story of Mamurdjan Uzakov playing the role of a hero named Farkhad in a musical play “Farkhad and Shirin”, which was created in 1930s as an ideal example of the Uzbek Soviet art. The Uzbek Communist Party boss Usman Yusup was watching a preview/rehearsal of it. According to the play script, which was based on a love story, the hero Farkhad should have moved towards his beloved Shirin, singing a song of love. But, despite expectations, Mamurdjan remained motionless while singing. After the performance finished, the First Secretary asked Mamurdjan Uzakov why he had not moved, and he confessed that, due to his old-style traditional training, he could either sing or move but never both simultaneously as was required in the Western style.

Another figure on the same scale is Sherali Juraev (b. 1947), mentioned above, a famous wedding singer whose name has become today a symbol of the well-to-do wedding performance. He absorbed the best traditions of Uzbek traditional vocal schools, elaborated by Mamurdjan Uzakov, Jurahon Sultanov and others. He studied at the Uzbek State Institute of Theatre Art, performing mostly in theatre. Later he became a special kind of Uzbek professional artist, who devoted himself to wedding musical performance, making each wedding a unique presentation with dramatic flavour. His repertoire includes about 600 songs, half of which are his own compositions. He works in a wide range of styles, including Uzbek classical songs on the poetry of medieval poets with a mystical flavour and modern lyrical songs, which are often hits, dance songs, and songs influenced by the music of neighbouring countries like Afghanistan, India, Turkey and Pakistan.

In the Uzbek tradition the wedding singer assumes the role not only of performer, but also of composer, an instant improviser of a song on a certain situation in the wedding reception (like an epic singer). He should be a chairman of the event, an entertainer, an artist able to perform instantly without rehearsal, and even a producer of the whole wedding programme. Sherali does all this perfectly. That is why he is so widely known in Uzbekistan. Sherali Juraev was among those who promoted Uzbek national identity and national pride in the 1970s. One of his famous songs is called “O’zbekim” (My Uzbek):

Tarihingdur ming asrlar,
O’zbekiston, o’zbekim,
Senga tengdosh oqsoch Pomir
Keksa Tiyonshon, o’zbekim.

Menga Bayron bir jahonu,
Menga Pushkin bir jahon,
Lek Navoidek bobom bor,
Ko’ksi qalqon o’zbekim.

Your history lasts thousands of centuries,
My Uzbekistan, my Uzbek,

Your twins are summits of the Pamirs
And of the ancient Tianshan, my Uzbek.

For me Byron is a world,
For me Pushkin is a world,
But I've got a grandfather like Navoiy,
So I'm full of pride, my Uzbek.

Though the epoch of Sherali is not yet over, it overlaps with the epoch of the Uzbek pop music “Queen” Yulduz Usmanova (b. 1963). Her music is an exceptional fusion of folk and international pop music. A graduate of the Department of Oriental Music at the Uzbek State Conservatory she composes on the basis of old folk songs that are still being sung in the villages of Uzbekistan. Traditional instruments, such as the *tambur* (long-necked lute) or the *doira* (frame drum), are combined with modern electronics. “When I started, I thought that this traditional music had to be preserved”, explains Yulduz. “It had to be made up-to-date, though.” In Central Asia, Yulduz Usmanova has advanced to the rank of superstar using this “ethno-crossover” idiom, and she has also entered the world music market in the West. But at the same time she has been more decisively moving towards the past in her lyrics, using not just Sufi motives, but also some purely religious texts set to modern tunes, as in songs like “Ber Ollohim, bergil” (Give, My Allah, give) and “Korsat jamoling” (Show your beauty). In 1999 in Ferghana Valley there was a story of a militant Islamic outbreak, during which the militants fired at governmental troops singing Yulduz’s song “Seni osmoning olib ketaman . . .” (I’ll take you to my heaven . . .).

So, when we look at the transformation of the iconic figures over the last century, we see that even traditional music was subject to change under the external pressures of the time. If earlier, at the beginning of the 20th century the Uzbek song was abstracted from real life, later it slowly but surely started to reflect the current political and ideological situation. A song became a snapshot of the socialist reality in the middle of the century while in the second half of the 20th century it started to return to its roots, though being already transformed in the Soviet era.

4 Weddings

When I was studying in the Moscow State Conservatory one of the all-Soviet TV editors wanted me to collaborate on a TV programme on ethnic music. She invited me to write a script on an Uzbek performer/band, their life, performance style, habits and images without mentioning the fact that they performed at weddings. “Please find a typical Uzbek band with a singer, who DOES NOT SING at weddings!” said this famous editor. She did not know what she was asking. There is no such thing as a traditional singer who does not participate in weddings. They are born as singers at weddings. They grow up at weddings. They fight at weddings in their tough competitions to become an icon, a hero. The wedding is their world: the scene, the audition, the audience and even the source of their livelihood. In Soviet times

weddings were neglected by official policy, which considered those events relics of the old feudal system, but the *toi* was and still is the most important life occasion in Uzbekistan and Central Asia. It reflects the traditional concept of life and keeps many ancient customs and rituals alive.

There are many types of *toi* celebrated throughout an Uzbek's life, starting from *Beshik toi* (putting the baby into a cradle) and finishing with *Payg'ambar yosh toi* (celebration for achieving the Prophet's age). We will concentrate on the wedding party as the greatest ceremonial celebration in Uzbek and Central Asian community life. The wedding celebration has a certain fixed structure involving the whole community in a networking process, with meetings with future family members and farewells to friends and relations. These parties can differ from place to place, but the common elements are:

1. the process of matching
2. engagement, "*non ushatish*" (dividing bread), when the bride's and groom's relatives divide a small loaf into two parts
3. the wedding *toi* itself, which has its own structure:

Ertalabgi osh – morning pilav (the main Uzbek meal)

Qiz chaqiriq – meeting of girls with the bride

O'g'il chaqiriq – meeting of boys with the groom

Nikoh – registration by the Mullah and official organization

Bazm – a culmination, climax; the musical party

4. events for the second day of wedding, popular in some areas of Uzbekistan:

Kelin salom – (welcoming the bride), a performance for the bride's relatives

Chorllar – a meeting for old people.

Music at the *toi* plays an exceptionally important role. It serves as a mirror of the social and political situation, a symbol of happiness; a means to pay tribute to the social system, as the young couple enter society in a traditional, joyful way and a means to respect the religious system, to please the ancestors as did the previous generation. It is a collection of different sides of culture – court culture, market art, mosque rituals, pop music – and a uniting instrument, which keeps up the feelings and provides a sense of wholeness to the event.

As for genres of music performed at the *toi*, a huge variety is represented there: solo and ensemble songs; instrumental music (performed between other acts when the place or the action changes); religious prayers and praise for the parents, advice to the young, ritual religious poems (performed by *Otin-Oys*, who are religiously educated women), and songs as dialogue in form of questions and answers (*Otin-Oy* and all guests).

Different parts of the wedding are celebrated at the houses of the bride and the groom. For example, in 1992 I attended a wedding that took place partly in Samarqand (the ritual part of the wedding) and partly (a secular party) in Tashkent.

The music followed the progression of the event itself, from the groom's house, to the bride's house, to a restaurant. It involved very different genres, from the mystical poetry of medieval Sufi poets like Navoiy, Mashrab and Djami, to local pop hits. All those genres fit certain stages of the wedding. For example, performed at the beginning of event are the song-signals "Yor-Yor" (My darling) "Toilar muborak" (Congratulations on the wedding) to proclaim the wedding. The whole event can take from two to ten hours. The wedding I attended in 1992 in Samarqand was 12 hours long with more than 500 guests and visitors.

So, wedding music differs according to the place and time of the performance. The music in a bride's house is mostly religious, whereas in the restaurant pop music or folk music with a modern interpretation is commonly played. The order of performing is pre-fixed. One section is sacred in type and function, another one is ordinary, profane. In the first stage the music includes joyful, inspiring songs, as well as the "protective" ones. Only the central part of the performance is taken by popular songs and music without special lyrical content but with dance rhythms.

Who are the heroes of this performance? Certainly the groom and the bride. But their role in this performance of the Uzbek wedding is passive. More active are the visitors from both sides, the relatives. They are the producers of this performance. They are involved in all its stages. However, a compulsory feature of the wedding is segregation by gender. Thus, women have to represent the environment of the bride and men that of the groom. They even separate themselves physically. Visitors of the bride are seated in one place and those of the groom in another. They join together only at the end when the *bazm* starts. The *bazm*, or feast, is a culmination, a climax of the performance and it is here that the professional musicians arrive on stage.

We have much evidence of *bazms* in medieval times at the courts of the Timurids. In Alisher Navai's 15th-century series of epic poems *Hamsa* or in the book *Baburnama* (Diary of Babur) of Zahriddin Babur (16th century) one can find an account of lavish festivities with music. A 16th-century poem, *Husn va Dill* (Beauty and Heart) by Muhammadniyaz Nishoti, describes the *bazm* in a series of disputes between different musical instruments: *daf* (drums) and *chang* (zither), *nay* (flute) and *karnay* (trumpet), showing the competitiveness of the *bazm* as a musical event.

Closer to our times a great Uzbek writer Cho'lpon (1897–1938) in his novel *Kecha va Kunduz* (Night and Day) gives a picture of a *bazm* at the start of the 20th century:

When two women entered the door, with faces shining like stars, Zebi's "My black hairs" song was sweetly tickling the ears That was the night, when a drop turned into a sea. All girls of the *kishlak* [village] and young ladies were gathered here. Even the grannies of neighbouring houses came to join them. Two other *dutar* players apart from Zebi, and several dancers, caused all of the guests not to look at all at the table, but to be busy with *bazm*, forgetting themselves. Everyone turned into children. When a trio of girls was supported by the voices of others and the song flew into the sky, even the lads of the village started to gather at places beyond the reach of the lamp's light. They were sitting in the darkness breathlessly. (Cho'lpon 1991, 49)

I also remember a *Komsomol*, or young communists' weddings of my childhood, when our most traditional Uzbek neighbours invited our family to the nearest canteen, where the brass band was playing marches of Dmitry Dunayevski (a well-known Soviet composer), celebrating a marriage of two Komsomols. But still stronger are memories of numerous *bazms* with Sherali Juraev as the main singer of the event. In a way, the word *bazm* is for me intertwined with the name of Sherali.

So what can we conclude from the wedding as a musical performance? Wedding music is a musical performance that consists of many parts characterized by developing continuity. The participants play different roles. The main function of the performance is to celebrate the process of unifying of people through the uniting of bride and groom, which represents a sacred ritual. The structure of the wedding reflects more generally the universal structure of a Sufi ritual. As in a Sufi rite, *zikr* is a mystical way for a person to unify with God, so the structure and the stations or stages of the wedding develop as a process of the unifying of two separate parts into one, of two separate lives merged into another new life. As the culmination of Sufi *zikr* is *sama'* or ecstasy, when all participants fall into trance, in the case of the wedding, the same role belongs to the *bazm*, which is the culmination of the wedding.

An Uzbek singer at a wedding has become an archetypal role. There are hundreds of myths, anecdotes and stories of who said what or sang what at this or that wedding, and these stories are passed from generation to generation. I would like to end with a story told about Mamurdjan Uzakov's death. In the summer of 1966 several friends came to the wedding party of Mamurdjan's neighbour. The next day after the *bazm*, when some of them were struggling with their hangover, Mamurdjan invited them to the *choykhana* (tea house) of the city park. There, by a pond with a number of white swans, he told his friends of his dream the previous night. "I dreamt of swans who took my soul to heaven," he said sadly, and started to sing. When the song reached its climax, the birds in the pond started to show signs of impatience. They were noisy as never before and suddenly took off into the sky. At the same moment, in the middle of the song's climax, Mamurdjan's head dropped onto his chest. His friends thought for a moment that he was teasing them but then they discovered that he was dead. Such myths are typically associated with the great Central Asian musicians of the past, and they contain a strong Sufi, mystical element. How striking, and how indicative of the continuities underlying the change, to find the same type of myth told of a Soviet-era singer whose songs praised the comrade collective farmers. These myths fly on the wings of those swans over the generations.

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Note

- [1] Readers may note that in this issue authors use several different forms of related words, for example *toi* and *tüy*; *maqom*, *maqôm* and *muqam*; *rubôb*, *rubab* and *rawap*. Though the meaning of the word is basically the same, different spellings have evolved as local pronunciations have been fixed in the different transliteration systems adopted by the separate nation states. We have decided not to attempt to impose a unified system on our authors, and to respect national conventions and individual preferences.

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