

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CONDUCTING ART IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract

This article analyzes the historical development and formation of the art of conducting in Uzbekistan. The author examines the emergence of conducting practices based on national musical traditions, their evolution during the Soviet period through professional music education, and the new phases following the country's independence. The article also discusses the role of prominent figures and institutions in shaping the modern Uzbek conducting school, as well as its interaction with international experiences.

Keywords: Conducting, Uzbek music, national art, theater orchestra, music education, conducting school, historical development.

Introduction

Conducting is a creative and organizational activity aimed at centralized management of musical performance. While this field fully emerged in European music during the 19th century, in Uzbekistan it developed as a dialogue between traditional and modern musical culture.

The formation of conducting in Uzbekistan is closely tied to the advancement of musical performance, as well as to the development of cultural institutions such as theaters and orchestras. The aim of this article is to explore how this field took shape with a national character and to present its current state.

Early Steps and National Traditions

Uzbek traditional music—featuring the classical maqom system, folk instruments like the doira, tanbur, dutar and vocal storytelling—provided the early organizational models for group performance. In traditional settings, a lead musician would often direct tempo, dynamics, and transitions, functioning similarly to a conductor. This early non-verbal guidance is considered a precursor to modern conducting.

The early 20th century marked a transition from exclusively oral traditions to stage-based performance. The growth of cultural centers and regional music ensembles such as the Karmana Ensemble and Bukhara Maqom Ensemble demanded increasingly coordinated performance. Archival records from the Turkestan People's House (circa 1910) mention the use of signal gestures and rhythmic cues by ensemble leaders.

The institutionalization of music through music clubs (muzklubi) and national theater in the 1920s further contributed to the development of structured ensemble leadership. These developments reflected the beginning of a shift from spontaneous group play to organized orchestral practice. Uzbekistan's rich musical heritage—maqoms, traditional ensembles, and



the art of composition—forms the roots of conducting practice. In early ensembles, the role of leading instrumentalists in coordinating other musicians can be considered a prototype of conducting.

At the beginning of the 20th century, multi-instrumental performances at the Turkestan exhibitions and on theater stages created a growing need for synchronized performance, thereby necessitating the emergence of a conductor.

The Soviet Period and the Professional Conducting School

The Soviet period saw the official institutionalization of music education and performance. In 1936, the Tashkent State Conservatory was founded with dedicated faculties for orchestral conducting, composition, and instrumental training. This led to the emergence of the first professionally trained Uzbek conductors.

Renowned figures during this period included Pavel Bendel, who conducted both opera and symphonic music, and Evgeny Bril, who played a central role in establishing standardized methods for teaching conducting. Sherali Jo'rayev, one of the first Uzbek national conductors, helped introduce local folk elements into academic orchestral settings.

During this period, state theaters such as the Navoi Opera and Ballet Theater and Philharmonic Orchestras in Samarkand and Fergana emerged as central platforms for conductor development. Radio and television orchestras also created opportunities for performance and experimentation.

Pedagogical materials from the 1950s and 60s emphasized the combination of gesture technique, score analysis, and national interpretation, laying the groundwork for the unique Uzbek conducting style that fused classical rigor with emotional expressiveness. During the Soviet era, cultural policy led to the establishment of a professional music education system in Uzbekistan. The founding of the Tashkent State Conservatory in 1936 laid the foundation for formal conducting education.

Renowned figures such as Pavel Bendel, Evgeny Bril, and Sherali Jo'rayev played significant roles in establishing orchestras and symphonic ensembles while forming their own teaching methodologies.

This period also saw the emergence of opera and ballet theaters, radio orchestras, and ensembles under the Ministry of Culture.

Independence Era and Modern Stage

Following independence in 1991, Uzbekistan's cultural policy prioritized the revival of national identity, including in the arts. The Ministry of Culture, the State Conservatory, and regional music academies launched programs to train new generations of conductors with both local and international competencies.

Notable institutions such as the National Symphony Orchestra, the Youth Symphony Orchestra, and the State Chamber Orchestra flourished. These ensembles became not only cultural symbols but also practical laboratories for testing contemporary and traditional conducting methods.

Modern Uzbek conductors have participated in international competitions such as the Gergiev Festival and the Takt International Conducting Forum. Names such as Shahobiddin Zulfikorov,



Kamoliddin Urinboev, Muqaddas Nazarova, and Gulbahor Mamatqulova represent a new wave of conductors who combine Uzbek musical intuition with advanced global training.

Additionally, the use of digital technology and virtual score analysis tools in conservatory classrooms has transformed how conducting is taught, making it more interactive, visual, and collaborative. Since 1991, Uzbekistan has undergone reforms in various cultural sectors, including conducting. The main features of this period include training new specialists, expanding international cooperation, and embracing innovation while preserving national style. Institutions such as the State Symphony Orchestra, the State Chamber Orchestra, and creative laboratories under the Conservatory require highly qualified conductors.

Today, conductors such as Shahobiddin Zulfikorov, Kamoliddin Urinboev, and Muqaddas Nazarova are active both in Uzbekistan and on international stages.

International Cooperation

Since the early 2000s, Uzbek conductors have engaged in intensive international exchanges. Partner institutions such as the Moscow Conservatory, the Berlin Philharmonic Academy, and the Tokyo College of Music have hosted Uzbek fellows, offering exposure to varied styles and performance techniques.

Annual masterclasses and residencies with conductors from Austria, France, and South Korea have created a hybrid teaching model at the Uzbek State Conservatory. This has allowed emerging Uzbek conductors to gain insights into European baton technique, American orchestral psychology, and Asian traditions of musical leadership.

Exchange programs funded by UNESCO and the Goethe-Institut have allowed joint concerts, cultural diplomacy projects, and even co-written orchestral works that fuse Central Asian and Western idioms.

Furthermore, foreign conductors performing in Uzbekistan—such as Valery Gergiev and Mischa Damev—have inspired structural and interpretive shifts in local orchestral practices, enhancing quality and expanding repertoire choices. Uzbek conductors have established experience-sharing ties with countries such as Russia, Germany, Japan, Turkey, and South Korea through international festivals and master classes. These connections offer valuable opportunities for students at music schools and conservatories.

Results

The research reveals that the development of conducting art in Uzbekistan followed a distinct trajectory influenced by national traditions, Soviet educational systems, and modern global integration. Key findings include:

- Conducting practices in Uzbekistan can be traced back to traditional ensemble leadership in maqom and folk music.
- The Soviet period laid a strong institutional foundation through conservatory education and state-supported orchestras.
- Since independence, there has been a visible diversification of conducting styles, including the integration of digital technologies in pedagogy.
- Uzbek conductors have successfully entered the global music scene, participating in international festivals and masterclasses.



The blending of local and foreign methods has resulted in a hybrid Uzbek conducting school with unique expressive characteristics.

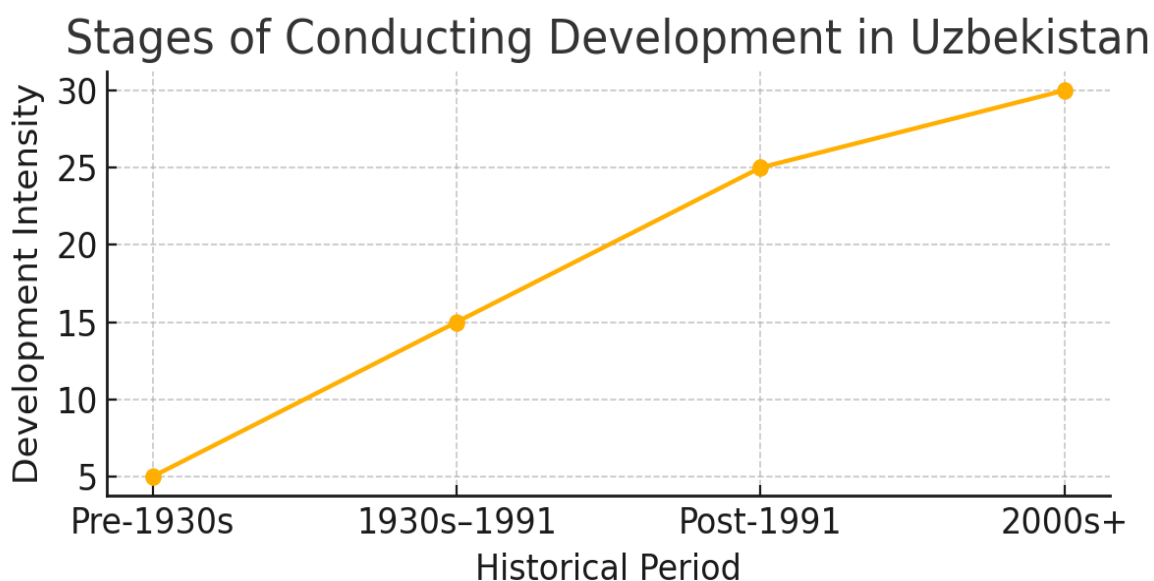


Figure 1: Timeline representing the evolution of conducting practice in Uzbekistan.

Conclusion

The art of conducting in Uzbekistan has emerged through a dialogue between national musical heritage and global experience. Its historical development reflects the influence of traditional culture, the Soviet conducting school, and modern global trends. A new generation of conductors is now preserving and enriching this legacy.

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