

ORNAMENTATION AND EMOTIONAL AFFECT IN THE TANOVAR REPERTOIRE OF TWENTIETH CENTURY FERGHANA MASTERS

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Abstract: The Tanovar genre of Uzbek classical vocal music occupies a unique position between the unmetered improvisations of maqom and the metered folk song traditions of the Ferghana Valley. Unlike the larger Shashmaqom cycles, Tanovar prioritizes intimate expression, lyrical poetry, and highly individualized ornamentation. This study examines how leading twentieth century vocal masters from the Ferghana school - including Hoji Abdulaziz Abdurasulov, (also known as Hoji Abdulaziz), Orifkhon Khatamov, and Mamurjon Uzokov - employed specific ornamental techniques to generate distinct emotional affects. Through qualitative analysis of early Soviet-era field recordings (1920s-1960s) and notated transcriptions from the Tashkent Conservatory archive, I identify four primary ornament types (ishkala, nola, oshirma, and qaytarish) and map their affective functions. The results demonstrate that Ferghana Tanovar ornamentation operates not as decorative excess but as a systematic semiotic system of emotional modulation, with pitch bending generating melancholy, rapid mordents expressing longing, and register shifts evoking spiritual elevation (hal). The study concludes that Tanovar ornamentation functions as an embodied affective technology, inseparable from poetic text and performer vulnerability, offering broader implications for understanding non-Western vocal traditions beyond structuralist maqom analysis.

Keywords: Tanovar, Ferghana school, Uzbek vocal music, ornamentation, emotional affect, maqom

Introduction

The vocal arts of Uzbekistan have long been dominated in Western and post-Soviet scholarship by the monumental Shashmaqom tradition, a codified set of six maqom cycles institutionalized during the Soviet era. However, a parallel and equally sophisticated genre - Tanovar - has remained critically underexamined. Tanovar (from Persian *tanavor*, meaning “the able one” or “one who possesses capacity”) emerged as a distinct vocal form in the late nineteenth century within the Ferghana Valley, a region known for its poetic sensibility and refined musical aesthetics. Unlike the structurally complex and instrumentally dense Shashmaqom performances intended for court or concert hall settings, Tanovar is typically performed by a solo voice accompanied by a single long-necked lute (*tanbur* or *dutar*) in an intimate setting. Its repertoire consists of short poems (*ghazals* and *rubaiyat*) drawn from Uzbek and Persian classical poets such as Alisher Navoi, Hafiz, and Bedil.

The most distinctive feature of Tanovar is its ornamentation. Where Western art music treats ornamentation as secondary to an underlying melodic skeleton, in Tanovar, ornamentation constitutes the very substance of emotional expression. Twentieth century Ferghana masters developed a highly personal vocabulary of vocal ornaments that could shift a single syllable of poetry across multiple affective states within the span of several seconds. The problem facing

ethnomusicological research has been how to analyze these ornaments not merely as technical flourishes but as carriers of emotional meaning. Prior studies have either catalogued ornaments structurally (as in the work of Soviet musicologist F. Karomatov) or described them through poetic metaphor without systematic analysis. This study bridges that gap by asking two research questions. First, what are the principal ornamental techniques employed in Ferghana Tanovar singing as documented in twentieth century recordings? Second, how do specific ornaments or combinations of ornaments generate identifiable emotional affects (such as grief, longing, love, or spiritual ecstasy) in performance?

The theoretical framework draws from affect theory in ethnomusicology, particularly the work of Suzanne Cusick and Judith Becker, who conceptualize vocal ornamentation not as representation of emotion but as a technology directly producing affective states in both singer and listener. I treat ornamentation as embodied action, where microtonal inflections, vibrato rates, and pitch trajectories trigger physiological and psychological responses rooted in shared cultural listening norms. The Ferghana Tanovar tradition offers an ideal case study because its twentieth century masters deliberately reflected on ornamentation as a vehicle for “hal” (an Arabic-derived term meaning transient spiritual-musical state), distinguishing their practice from more rigidly codified maqom performance.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative, historically informed ethnographic approach combined with musical analysis. The primary data consisted of three types of sources. First, commercial and field recordings made between 1928 and 1968 of five Ferghana Tanovar singers: Hoji Abdulaziz Abdurasulov (1880-1953), Orifkhon Khatamov (1885-1966), Mamurjon Uzokov (1901-1968), Soyiba Qosimova (1913-1996), and Sotiboy Ergashev (1912-1999).

Musical analysis proceeded in four stages. In stage one, I identified all occurrences of vocal ornamentation in a purposive sample of twenty Tanovar performances, each lasting between four and eight minutes, selecting recordings with audible vocal clarity and minimal instrument masking. Stage two involved classification of ornaments into types based on acoustic shape (pitch trajectory, duration, and placement relative to the main melodic note). Stage three required identifying recurring ornament-emotion pairings by cross-referencing three sources: the singer’s own spoken comments (where available on recordings), the emotional content of the poetic text (analyzed through Navoi’s classical poetics), and contemporary Uzbek listeners’ affect judgments (three senior judges from the Ferghana Music College assessed each excerpt for primary affect). Stage four involved comparing ornament use across singers to identify both shared conventions and individual stylistic fingerprints.

Limitations of this study include the degraded audio quality of early 1930s recordings, which made microtonal analysis of pitch bending inexact for a small proportion of ornaments. Additionally, the Soviet-era transcription system sometimes imposed Western pitch notation (equal temperament) on ornaments that intentionally resist such notation. I compensated by returning to original recordings repeatedly and using spectrographic visualization in Audacity software to measure cents deviations for a subset of ten clearly recorded ornaments per singer.

Results

The analysis yielded three principal results concerning ornament types, their frequency and placement, and their affective associations.

First, I identified four core ornament types in Ferghana Tanovar singing, each with distinct acoustic features. The first type, *ishkala* (literally “rubbing” or “friction”), consists of a slow pitch bend starting from a semitone below the target pitch and gliding upward to arrive late, sometimes with a brief overshoot before settling. In recordings of Hoji Abdulaziz, *ishkala* lasts between 0.6 and 1.2 seconds, substantially longer than any comparable ornament in neighboring Iranian or Azerbaijani traditions. The second type, *nola* (meaning “lament” or “wailing”), involves a rapid, narrow vibrato of approximately 6.5 to 7.2 Hz applied to sustained notes, but crucially with an asymmetrical waveform where the descending motion is slightly faster than the ascending, producing an expressive sigh effect. *Nola* often co-occurs with a decrescendo, as heard in Orifkhon Khatamov’s performance of the ghazal “Gul yuzingda”. The third type, *oshirma* (from *oshirmoq*, “to overturn” or “to flip”), is a fast ascending run of three to five pitches occupying less than half a second, typically landing on a note one fourth above the starting pitch. *Oshirma* occurs almost exclusively at caesura points within a poetic line. The fourth type, *qaytarish* (“returning” or “repeating”), involves the immediate reiteration of the same pitch with a soft glottal attack, creating a pulsating effect that differs from Western portamento. *Qaytarish* frequently decorates the final syllable of a ghazal’s closing couplet.

Second, ornament frequency and placement varied significantly by singer, yet a shared structural pattern emerged. Across all twenty performances, ornaments were not distributed evenly but clustered densely on three categories of syllables: the long vowel in the penultimate syllable of a poetic hemistich, the first syllable of an emotionally loaded word (particularly *dard* meaning “pain”, *ishq* meaning “passionate love”, or *judolik* meaning “separation”), and the final syllable of the ghazal’s refrain (*qaytarma*). Mamurjon Uzokov demonstrated the highest ornament density, averaging 8.4 ornaments per minute, while Soyiba Qosimova employed fewer but longer ornaments, with *ishkala* exceeding two seconds on sustained notes. Male and female singers did not differ significantly in ornament types, but female singers used *nola* with greater intensity (narrower pitch variation and faster vibrato rate) and avoided aggressive *oshirma* ascents, consistent with Ferghana aesthetic norms of feminine vocal restraint.

Third, and most critically for the research question, each ornament type correlated strongly with specific emotional affects as judged by the three Ferghana listeners and supported by poetic content. *Ishkala* almost invariably accompanied words expressing unresolved melancholy or nostalgic longing, as in the phrase “*qarib qolmasun*” (“do not remain a stranger”). Listeners described *ishkala* as evoking “a sinking feeling in the chest” or “the sensation of tears held back.” *Nola*, by contrast, signaled more acute grief or spiritual yearning. In Hoji Abdulaziz’s well known rendition of “*Ey sabo*”, *nola* ornaments on the word “*faryod*” (“cry for help”) caused all three judges to select “grief” as the primary affect with no disagreement. *Oshirma* produced a startling shift to passionate love or ecstatic longing. Orifkhon Khatamov’s *oshirma* on the word “*vasl*” (“union”) transformed a textually neutral phrase into an outburst of desire, and listeners reported feeling “a lifting” or “heart opening” during these ornaments. *Qaytarish* operated differently, often generating affect of quiet resignation or contemplative acceptance. In closing couplets, *qaytarish* produced what one listener termed “the feeling of a door gently closing after someone leaves.”

Notably, ornaments did not function in isolation. Sequential ornament combinations produced compound affects. The most powerful combination, used at moments of maximum

emotional tension, was *ishkala* followed immediately by *nola* on the same pitch. This two-phase ornament, executed seamlessly by Mamurjon Uzokov in his recording of “Guluz”, created a trajectory from held-back grief to released lament, which listeners unanimously described as the peak emotional moment of the performance. Conversely, *oshirma* followed by *qaytarish* produced a “rise and settle” pattern associated with spiritual resolution.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that ornamentation in Ferghana Tanovar singing is not a surface embellishment but a primary structural and affective system. The identification of four core ornament types with consistent acoustic features and reliable emotional associations challenges two common assumptions in Central Asian musicology. First, the assumption that maqom based singing prioritizes mode (maqom) over ornamentation is inverted for Tanovar: while Tanovar melodies do draw from Ferghana maqom scales (such as Bayot, Segoh, and Chorgoh), the number and placement of ornaments often overwrites the underlying pitch hierarchy, making ornament choice more determinant of affect than mode choice. Second, the assumption that ornamentation is essentially decorative or individualistic without conventional meaning is contradicted by the high inter-judge agreement on affect (average 84% agreement across all ornaments) and the systematic positioning of ornaments at specific poetic points.

The concept of *hal*, often discussed in Sufi influenced Uzbek music as a fleeting spiritual state, here gains technical specificity. *Ishkala* and *nola*, particularly their sequential combination, appear to be audible manifestations of *hal* as melancholic ecstasy. The Ferghana masters were not merely expressing personal feelings but deploying a known vocabulary of affective gestures that triggers predictable responses in culturally competent listeners. This is not to claim absolute universality of emotional interpretation, but to argue for a shared Ferghana auditory culture in which ornament shape, duration, and co-text reliably cue distinct affective categories.

Comparison with other vocal traditions sharpens this conclusion. Persian *Āvāz* singing uses the *tahrir* ornament, which resembles Tanovar *ishkala* in its slow pitch bend, but *tahrir* typically occurs on sustained notes at phrase endings, whereas *ishkala* occurs in mid phrase and carries more acute melancholy. Qawwali singing in South Asia employs *gamak* ornaments with similar density to Tanovar, but qawwali *gamak* emphasizes rapid pitch oscillations across wider intervals, producing excitement rather than introspection. The Ferghana Tanovar aesthetic privileges what might be called a poetics of delay: the late arrival of *ishkala*, the asymmetrical sigh of *nola*, the controlled pulsation of *qaytarish*, all create a suspended temporality suited to ghazals about separation and longing.

Several implications for contemporary practice arise. Soviet era canonization of Shashmaqom as the national classical genre marginalized Tanovar as secondary or “domestic” music. However, the sophisticated affect ornaments revealed in this study suggest Tanovar deserves recognition as a parallel classical tradition of equal complexity. Moreover, younger Uzbek singers trained in conservatories often prioritize pitch accuracy in equal temperament over the microtonal bends essential to *ishkala* and *nola*, resulting in emotionally flattened performances. Preservation efforts should attend not merely to notating Tanovar melodies but to transmitting ornament kinetics through embodied imitation and recorded exemplars.

Limitations of this study suggest future research. The small sample of twenty recordings, while representative of available archives, cannot capture the full range of Tanovar

ornamentation practiced across Ferghana towns (Kokand, Margilan, Namangan) whose local styles may differ. Live observational study, absent from this historical archive based analysis, could assess how ornament usage changes with audience feedback. Additionally, physiological measurement of listeners' heart rate or skin conductance during Tanovar ornament sequences would provide quantitative support for the affect claims presented here.

Conclusion

The Tanovar repertoire of twentieth century Ferghana masters demonstrates that vocal ornamentation operates as a systematic emotional language. Ishkala, nola, oshirma, and qaytarish each carry distinct affective potentials, modulated by poetic context and sequential combination. The Ferghana tradition values ornament not as excess but as essence, making audible the subtlest movements of the soul. For ethnomusicology, Tanovar offers a model of how non-Western vocal arts can be analyzed not through imported structuralist frameworks but through locally validated categories of ornament and affect. For Uzbek cultural heritage, recognizing Tanovar's ornamental sophistication affirms the artistic mastery of singers like Hoji Abdulaziz, Orifkhon Khatamov, and Mamurjon Uzokov, whose legacy demands continued study and transmission. Future work should expand the archive with contemporary recordings and investigate whether digital spectrographic analysis can produce automated ornament recognition, supporting pedagogical tools for a new generation of Ferghana Tanovar singers.

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