

STAGE EXPLORATIONS IN THE UZBEK THEATER

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Abstract. This article analyzes the use of elements of folklore, ethnography, artistic techniques and methods, playfulness and spectacle, as well as the interpretation of the essence of the Uzbek folk theater of oral tradition within the modern theatrical process. For contemporary Uzbek theater, the appeal to elements of ethno-culture, folk performing arts, and traditional open-air performances represents one of the characteristic stylistic directions.

Keywords: theater, stage, folklore, ethnography, performance, acting, transformation, mass performance, staging, stage director, property master, music.

INTRODUCTION

The article “Stage explorations in the uzbek theater” addresses the cultural and artistic foundations of Uzbek stage art and its ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity. By analyzing the interplay of folklore, ethnography, and oral performance traditions, the author demonstrates how these elements continue to shape contemporary theatrical practices and influence the stylistic directions of the modern Uzbek stage.

In examining the integration of folk spectacle, ethnocultural motifs, and traditional open-air performances into contemporary theater, the study provides insights into the ways in which national identity and cultural memory are reinterpreted through stagecraft. This approach not only emphasizes the vitality of Uzbek performance traditions but also situates them within the broader discourse of global theater studies, where questions of heritage, identity, and innovation remain highly relevant.

The article further contributes to the field by highlighting how the reinterpretation of folk traditions expands the expressive possibilities of theatrical language. It underscores the role of theater as both a custodian of cultural heritage and a dynamic medium of artistic transformation, capable of responding to the challenges of contemporary expression.

We hope that this article will serve as a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, and all those interested in the intersections of folklore, ethnography, and contemporary stage art.

RESEARCH METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The methodological framework of this study is based on a combination of historical-comparative, cultural, and analytical approaches. The historical-

comparative method made it possible to trace the evolution of stage practices in the Uzbek theater in relation to broader regional and global theatrical traditions. The cultural approach was applied to examine how folklore, ethnography, and oral traditions influence the development of national theatrical expression. Analytical and descriptive methods were used to systematize the main artistic techniques, stage practices, and stylistic directions of the Uzbek theater. In addition, elements of observation and interpretation were employed in the analysis of specific productions, enabling a deeper understanding of the transformation of traditional motifs on the modern stage.

This study relies on both domestic and international scholarly works, which makes it possible to situate the material within a broad comparative framework. Among Uzbek and Russian-language sources, particular importance is attributed to research on the history of Uzbek dramaturgy, folk performance traditions, and the ethnographic foundations of national culture.

The most significant contributions to the analysis were made by the works of K.Rudnitsky, M.Kadyrov, T.Tursunov, M.Tulyakhodzhayeva, N.Karimov, I.Mukhtarov, and other scholars, who addressed key issues in the development of national dramaturgy and stage art, as well as their artistic specificity in the context of oral street-theater traditions. These theoretical perspectives are reflected in practice: in the productions based on the plays of Said Ahmad, Khamza, E.Khushvaktov and Kh.Khursandov, the distinctive directorial styles of B.Yuldashev, A.Salimov, T.Azizov, M.Abdullayeva, H.Makhmudova and M.Ravshanov came to the fore. The use of elements of folklore and ethnography in these performances not only enriched their artistic solutions but also opened the way for other theaters to adopt expressive techniques of the Uzbek traditional stage. In collaboration with stage designers, the directors succeeded in organically combining the means of traditional folk theater with the devices of contemporary stage practice, creating new forms of theatrical expressiveness.

Such a combination of methods and sources ensures a comprehensive perspective on the phenomenon of Uzbek theater, allowing its unique specificity to be preserved while also positioning it within the broader framework of world culture.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, when Uzbek written drama and a professional European-style theater were emerging, directors made deliberate attempts to stage productions that incorporated elements of national life, artistic conventions, and entertainments from the folk theaters of maskharaboz and kizikchi. These experiments proved effective. It should be remembered that a significant portion of the population was illiterate at that time. Members of the intelligentsia and theater practitioners endeavored to bring translated dramatic works closer to national life by integrating scenes from everyday experience, folk melodies, and dances. As a result, audiences unfamiliar with Goldoni, Schiller, Molière, or Gogol encountered their works in an “Uzbekized” form.

A telling example dates to 1927, when Goldoni’s comedy “The Servant of Two Masters” was staged in the Uzbek theater under the direction of N.V.Tihanovich. He not only altered the dialogue by placing Uzbek sayings and humor into the characters’ mouths, but also transferred the action onto national soil. The heroes’ clothing, their speech, the scenic design, and household items were all localized. While ethnographic detail and a vivid demonstration of national life undoubtedly captivated the audience, in many respects these choices ran counter to the original intent of the play.

In subsequent years, the idea of “easternizing” translated drama was advanced at times as the only proper direction for the development of Uzbek theater. According to this view, any play, regardless of its date, the author’s nationality, or the location of its events, ought to be adapted to Uzbek life once mounted on stage. As an experiment during the formation of a European-style theater, this approach had its merits; however, it could not serve as the sole vector of development. Later, stage searches and stylistic tendencies such as formalism,

constructivism, and the enthusiasm for folklore, ethnographic elements, and spectacular folk representations were curtailed as being at odds with the then-dominant doctrine of socialist realism.

However, beginning in the 1970s, we observe a revival of productions saturated with elements of folk art, including the traditions of maskharaboz and kizikchi and the playful nature of folk spectacles. Among national playwrights, the use of folklore and ethnography exceeded expectations. Director Bahadir Yuldashev played a decisive role in this process. “In the 1970s–1980s, the younger generation of directors began searching for new forms and means of stage expressiveness, drawing upon sources of folk art. In this regard, Bahodir Yuldashev stood out in particular, as he worked intensively with folk traditions and consistently achieved positive results” [1]. His productions S.Ahmad’s the “Rebellion of Daughters-in-Law” (1976, at the Khamza Theater, now the Uzbek National Academic Drama Theater) and “Mysara’s Tricks” (1986, at the Yosh Guard Theater, now the Uzbek Drama Theater) marked a breakthrough in this direction.

The “Rebellion of Daughters-in-Law” is a comedy about complex relationships within a large family a common social unit in Uzbekistan. To depict such a family and its inevitable conflicts, Said Ahmad focused on the traditional theme of contradictions between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. As the author remarked: “No matter how much one writes about the intertwining relations between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law, each time new facets of this theme appear. Whoever wishes to write will find inexhaustible plots in life” [2]. Indeed, many Uzbek plays have addressed these relations. Said Ahmad’s comedy is distinctive because its conflict arises from the real circumstances of a large family and develops as a struggle between old and new in people’s thinking and daily practices. The method of artistic representation is likewise unique ironic, playful, and therefore highly theatrical, revealing the unmistakable influence of the Uzbek folk theater. The play’s theatricality also stems from its

origins. Said Ahmad wrote it at the request of the Khamza Theater troupe, adapting his own story for specific performers and considering the uniqueness of their artistry and personal qualities. Thus, the processes of writing and staging were essentially inseparable.

The action begins with the youngest daughter-in-law, Nigora, the seventh in the family doing morning exercises. Her running and training in Farmonbibi's courtyard are perceived as shameless and as a violation of accepted norms of propriety. The conflict gradually involves everyone - sons and their wives alike. They respect their mother for her purity of heart and integrity, yet inwardly they cannot accept her desire to impose her will unconditionally. They long to live independently, but cannot openly protest. Respect keeps them bound by old customs. Nigora, however, refuses to obey Farmonbibi's rules. She "fights": first with the help of her sisters-in-law, who prove inconstant, and later with the support of the sons, devising plans for "re-education". Without offending, the sons reveal their mother's mistakes. The climax comes when the sons, dressed in women's clothing, playfully imitate their mother's actions. Clever Farmonbibi realizes her errors; the sons and daughters-in-law gain freedom of action, and the denouement follows.

The central figure of the play is Farmonbibi, mother of seven sons. She is an honest, intelligent woman who has raised her children to be hardworking and upright. The quarrel arises because she still perceives her sons as small children and her daughters-in-law as incapable of managing household affairs. She genuinely wishes as in ancient times to live with all her sons and daughters-in-law under one roof and to keep them in obedience.

Actress Z.Sadrieva's performance, together with the director's vision, portrays Farmonbibi as stern and authoritative. Yet despite her shortcomings, she appears as a guardian of values, an embodiment of centuries-old folk traditions. This explains how she raised seven sons without a husband, who nevertheless

became educated and respected members of society. From an early age she instilled honesty, decency, kindness, compassion, and respect for elders.

Artistic performance enriches the image. Z.Sadrieva actively defends her heroine, imbuing her portrayal with warm humor and subtle irony. The actress transforms fully into her character while maintaining an ironic stance toward Farmonbibi's actions. "The heroine's mental agility is the main weapon in the actress's interpretation. With it, she makes everyone dance to her tune." [3., p. 9].

Director B.Yuldashev staged the production with bright humor, folk entertainment, and playful theatricality. As M.Tulyahodzhaeva observed: "The style of the performance consisted of frank comedy and forms of folk spectacle. A candid theatrical game appeared before the audience, distinguished by clarity of tempo and sharply defined characterization. The theater created a comic performance with music, pantomime, parody, and dance, the very content of which conveyed a profound moral meaning" [4, p. 32].

The production employed the device of "theater within the theater," with designer G.Brim and the actors constructing the stage world. All performers delighted in theatrical play, creating characters with clear traits while maintaining an ironic distance. Entertainment was emphasized not only in acting but in every stage element. The performance opened with lively doira rhythms struck from the audience up to the stage. The drummers appeared and disappeared, accompanying the entire action with rhythms that shifted with character and circumstance. Usta Baki, a shoemaker working at Farmonbibi's request, opened the curtain (a suzani), initiated the performance, connected events, and conversed with both characters and audience until he closed the show. Usta Baki resembled the corfarmon of traditional theater. From the first beats of the doira and Usta Baki's first words, warm contact with the audience was established.

The result was a comic performance in which dialogue sparkling with laughter was organically fused with music, pantomime, and clowning, shaped by the director's imagination and the actors' improvisation. A favored device of

Uzbek actors their ironic stance toward their roles ensured naturalness, relaxation, and lightness of action, determining the rhythm and musicality of gestures, gait, and movement. The inventiveness of both director and performers seemed inexhaustible, yet every trick and detail arose not as an end in itself but from the characters inner life. As one critic remarked: “The director managed to give undeniable intrigue an equally undeniable savor of truth, which brings so much joy to The “Rebellion of Daughters-in-Law” [5].” The significance of the production lay not only in its immediate success but also in the path it opened for other theaters to explore the techniques of the Uzbek traditional stage. Its greatest strength was the joyous immersion of director and actors in the images and situations, their complete freedom, and their inspired improvisation.

Uzbek folk theater has always relied on improvisation; unsurprisingly, improvisation became the very soul of The “Rebellion of Daughters-in-Law”. At times it seemed that words and movements were composed on the spot, with performers competing in inventiveness. This improvisational impulse, coupled with spectacle, defined the production’s uniqueness and unified the performers into a cohesive ensemble.

The play was classified as a “comedy-joke.” Both director and actors felt the essence of the genre with great sensitivity, finding a form of spectacle and a style of acting consistent with its content ironic in relation to the role and improvisational in ease. This determined the form of contact with the audience, which was received enthusiastically. The spectators were captivated not only by the subject and its problems but also by the play’s stage form. Of course, in the 1970s when Uzbek theater was carving out a European-style identity embracing the traditional style was not simple. Playwright I.Sultan wrote at the time: “Whatever views one may have about the strengths and shortcomings of this work, even those who criticized it cannot deny that they watched with interest. Entertainment is the principal virtue of this stage work” [6., p.5].

Some playwrights and theater critics even argued that Ahmad's comedy was unworthy of an academic theater. Paradoxically, however, it was precisely through such comedies rooted in everyday life and staged in spectacular form that the theater discovered new expressive means and scenic forms, opening creative paths for the ensemble.

This trend reached a new level with "Mysara's Tricks", a production in which actors transformed into characters before the audience's eyes. Everything in the play was conventional from scenery to acting. The game dominated the stage. The performance of "Mysara's Tricks" began in the style of itinerant maskharaboz and kizikchi. A wagon was placed on the stage; as the performance unfolded, actors changed costumes and gradually transformed into their characters, presenting themselves to the audience one by one. Noise and bustle filled both stage and auditorium the loud voices of men and women performers mingled together. As director B.Yuldashev himself observed: "In staging this performance, we relied on the ancient traditions and customs of our people. We wanted to remove the curtain between the audience and the artists—in other words, to invite dialogue and interaction". In collaboration with artist G.Brim, Yuldashev succeeded in combining expressive means of traditional folk theater with the stage techniques of modern practice.

Under Yuldashev's direction, the troupe decided to take the performance outdoors. As a result, a genuine open-air spectacle was created. A tightrope was stretched across the square near the theater; acrobats walked upon it. On one side illusionists performed; on the other side, kizikchi-maskharaboz drew crowds while the corfarmon loudly invited spectators to the performance. The sounds of karnai, surnai, and doira filled the air. Around the square stood carts, and the performers, changing costumes, introduced their heroes to the audience. According to the principles of open-air performance, great importance was placed on skill, improvisation, and theatrical convention. The actors performed with complete freedom.

In this play, everything from decoration to costume was conditional. The game dominated the stage. Performers were so absorbed in their play that they gradually drew the audience in. Such ease did not lessen the quality of characterization: each actor created a full-fledged hero on stage. Yuldashev worked tirelessly to employ traditional theatrical elements within modern Uzbek theater and to build a national performance on that basis. What began with The “Rebellion of Daughters-in-Law” was continued with “Mysara’s Tricks”, laying the foundation for a whole new direction in Uzbek stage art.

Yet “Mysara’s Tricks” was repeatedly criticized by certain theater critics. They were ardent supporters of traditional embodiment and disapproved of innovations such as direct dialogue between stage and audience, the breaking of the “fourth wall,” the removal of the curtain, and the transfer of action into the public square. Accusations were even leveled at the production for “disrespecting” Hamza’s dramaturgy through its free interpretation of text and imagery. Nevertheless, the performance was a resounding success. It was warmly received not only by Uzbek audiences but also by spectators abroad. In 1988, the production won first prize at the “Navruz” Theater Festival in Almaty. Observers unanimously emphasized the correctness of the chosen stylistic orientation, its national spirit, and colorful authenticity. Yuldashev’s innovation distinguished the modern Uzbek theater from those of neighboring republics.

The troupe functioned as a true creative ensemble. The performance abounded in mass scenes, with each actor fully living their character on stage. No performer remained indifferent to what was happening. In traditional Uzbek folk theater, actors relied almost exclusively on their personal skills. The absence of elaborate scenery and a conventional stage led performers to depend on improvisation, facial expression, gesture, imitation, humor, and satire. In the modern interpretation of “Mysara’s Tricks”, the actors continued this tradition. There were no superfluous sets to constrain them. One side of the stage was

curtained, and as the plot progressed, characters appeared and disappeared behind it.

It is true that the director of “Mysara’s Tricks” could have staged a different kind of serious production, exposing figures such as Qazi, Aglam and Khidayathon those who, under the guise of religion, dispensed “justice.” In that case, however, the play would simply have joined a chain of performances about greed and dishonor. Instead, the production became a landmark in Uzbek theater because Yuldashev succeeded in combining elements of the traditional national stage with the aesthetics of modern theater. As one critic noted: “Yuldashev has played a special role in enriching Uzbek theater culture with new genres, stylistic colors, and bold stage metaphors. Seeking to move beyond linear prosaic narration, he paved the way for the integration of folklore, ethnography, and the traditions of the maskharaboz. He boldly united the material and spiritual heritages of East and West. Generously, even prodigally, he built his new productions with the maximum of expressive resources” [7., p. 35].

It should be remembered that for both a stage director and Uzbek theater as a whole, the creation of productions based on traditional forms was not the only path forward. Other stylistic approaches had equal right to exist. What matters is that Yuldashev achieved remarkable results by combining European theatrical experience with the methods and resources of traditional Uzbek theater that had been preserved for centuries. Even today, many Uzbek directors, in their creative searches, continue to turn to the stylistic strategies that Yuldashev pioneered in his stage experiments.

The establishment of this new direction emphasizing spectacle, performance, and oral traditions of folk theater was not without difficulties. Only in the mid - 80s did this line of development begin to solidify in the repertoires and creative practices of directors and actors. Both metropolitan and regional theaters, in their quest for national identity, began to draw widely upon the traditions of folk performance, everyday life, and ritual.

Continuing Yuldashev's initiative, director A.Salimov staged Hamza's "Journey to Tashkent" at the Fergana Theater in 1991 as a maskharaboz-style spectacle. The production was highly entertaining, and improvisation and convention dominated the acting. The main character, Asomboy, arrives in Tashkent from the village and takes lodging in a hotel. His arrival at the hotel assumes the character of a distinct event. But at the hotel he quarreled over a room with a young man named Ibrahim. This happened because the window of that room opened onto the neighboring window of Ibrahim's beloved. Standing at the window, the young man had arranged a secret meeting with the girl, which Asomboy inadvertently disrupted. The wealthy man refused to listen, to understand the young man, or to make any changes. Yet Ibrahim was not the sort of youth to forgive an insult. The time would come when the rich man would be punished. Asomboy himself could not remain in this room for a minute without being disturbed, as visitors constantly arrived. On his behalf, Ibrahim had placed an advertisement in the newspaper, so petitioners kept coming to room 18 of the hotel with all kinds of requests. In turn, a contractor, a security guard, a musician, a matchmaker, a dog lover, a cook, and a broker all appeared with their complaints. In the end, Asomboy fled from these petitioners.

This staging was a bold theatrical experiment for the Fergana troupe, which set out to revive folk traditions on the modern stage. The production was built upon laughter and comic convention. The elements of play, improvisation, clowning, pantomime, and music were vividly manifested. It is no coincidence that critics described the production as being staged in the style of maskharaboz and kizikchi.

During the period of independence, director A. Salimov staged comedies on the stage of the Uzbek Theater "The Dodger Healer" (based on J.B.Molière's "The Reluctant Doctor") and "Boz Maskharaboz" (written by A.Salimov himself). In these productions, the director emphasized entertainment and theatricality, creating a playful atmosphere on stage and allowing the actors to

feel free and comfortable in their performance. In “The Dodger Healer”, Salimov borrowed only the plot from Molière, while all other elements from the actors’ costumes and music to the scenery were Uzbekized. At the same time, the director occasionally signaled that the action was set somewhere in Europe. In “Boz Maskharaboz”, the production relies entirely on acting. There are no words in the play; the performance is built on gestures and actions. The actor dominates the stage, conveying the meaning of particular themes not through speech, but through mime, movement, and facial expression. Yet, in our view, the director draws more on Western clowning than on the playful nature of Uzbek traditional theater its stories, pantomimes, costumes, and make-up. At the same time, it would have been possible to draw upon themes specific to Uzbek traditional theater and incorporate them into the production.

After the declaration of Uzbekistan’s independence, in many productions based on the plays of national playwrights, directors began to return to folk roots and forgotten traditions, making wide use of elements of folklore and ethnography. At the Uzbek National Academic Drama Theater, performances were staged based on E.Khushvaktov’s plays “Chimildik” (“On the First Night of the Wedding”, directed by T.Azizov and M.Abdullaeva) and “Games of the Named” (directed by T.Azizov and H.Makhmudova). Other notable productions include H. Khursandov’s “Find You an Old Woman, Father!” (directed by M.Yusupov) at the Fergana Theater, among many others.

In the production based on E. Khushvaktov’s play, elements of folklore and ethnography predominate. The theater seemed to create a generalized image of the Uzbek people, incorporating ceremonies and rituals associated with the wedding. The decoration of the bride’s house, the dressing up, the couple’s first heartfelt meeting, the bride’s farewell, along with other rituals, national costumes, humor, laughter, and the traditional “yor-yor” song, gave the performance its distinctive character. This approach, in turn, allowed the actors to move freely, feel at home on stage, and perform with genuine enjoyment. For the audience, it

created the impression not of watching a performance, but of being participants in a grand wedding celebration. The wall between the audience and the stage seemed to vanish during the performance.

The genre of the production was defined as folklore-ethnographic theater, and appropriate means of expression were found. Marriage rituals, together with the associated games and songs, were presented not merely as external attributes but as an integral part of the imagery and action. From the perspective of entertainment, “Chimildik” can be compared with the comedy “The Rebellion of Daughters-in-law” at the Khamza Theater and “Journey to Tashkent” at the Fergana Theater. The directors gave the performers the opportunity for creative freedom. The stage seemed to present a fragment of real life. Yet this was not simply life itself, nor a straightforward imitation of it, but life reimagined artistically enriched, imbued with laughter, and shaped by the individual perspectives of the director and actors.

The events of the play unfold on the wedding night of the bride and groom. The chimildik is a sacred space, and the thoughts and intentions of the young couple entering it must be just as pure. With the blessing of their parents, two young people who have never met before step inside. The bride does not know the young man, nor has he seen the girl before the wedding. Yet, before they enter the chimildik, they begin to discover and understand each other.

The performance features a remarkable ensemble of actors. A. Abduvahabov portrays the character of a man no longer young, who remained unmarried due to a failed romance and, ever since, has avoided women. His neighbors mock him, saying that at his age it is shameful not to be married. This attitude weighs heavily on both him and his parents. Eventually, he agrees to marry at their insistence, but only on the condition that he will not see his bride before the wedding. The young bride, inexperienced in life, dreams of studying and has countless unfulfilled ambitions. Marriage, however, prevents her from realizing them.

When the groom first encounters the young bride, he speaks to her tenderly, then jokingly barks like a dog, and even promises to be her horse, carrying her far, far away. When he cannot persuade her, he decides to give her freedom of choice. At this moment, Momo, an older and wiser woman, intervenes, advising patience until morning. Following her words, the bride and groom remain together in the same room. To pass the time, the groom begins to recount his life as though telling a fairy tale. His story deeply affects the young bride, making her reflect on her actions. She wonders whether she is right to reject the groom, what fate awaits her if she returns to her parents' house on her wedding night, and whether society will condemn her. These questions torment her until, gradually, she begins to listen to her heart.

The performance opens with the scene of women calling guests to a wedding and concludes with the traditional greeting of the bride "Kelin Salom". The directors unhesitatingly defined the genre as a "folklore-ethnographic performance." Ultimately, the main goal of the production was to present a holistic image of the national mentality, traditions, and identity of the Uzbek people not only for domestic audiences, but also for spectators abroad.

Another performance based on E.Khushvaktov's play "The Games of the Named", like "Chimildik" (directed by T.Azizov and Kh.Makhmudova), was staged in the style of a folklore-ethnographic performance. As in "Chimildik", there are three main characters: Momo (D.Ikromova), the young man Chonnama (T.Saidov), and the young woman Holbeka (M.Kholikova). The situation is somewhat familiar. If in "Chimildik" the groom cannot marry for a long time, in this play both the young man and the girl face their own difficulties. The young man lost his mother early, and the care of his younger brothers and sisters fell upon his shoulders. The girl, by contrast, behaves more like a boy: she is rough, speaks loudly, and because of her manners, matchmakers never step across the threshold of her home. Yet both are kind-hearted, hardworking, and noble individuals with generous spirits. When the neighbors hear the news that such a

rough girl has finally found a suitor willing to marry her, they are astonished. They describe the groom as cross-eyed and lame. This upsets Holbeka, who tries to prove to everyone that she deserves more than marrying a crippled man. At this point, Momo the wise woman of the village enters as the savior. She begins the “game of the doomed,” intending to unite the hearts of these two lonely people. Through this game, the young man and woman gradually begin to understand one another.

The theme and purpose of the play are not only to revive the forgotten “game,” but also to affirm the value of people who respect traditions, and to judge individuals not by their outward appearance, but primarily by the depth of their inner world.

The performance begins with a conversation among neighboring women about the upcoming wedding, during which the audience is introduced to the bride and groom. During the engagement scene, the actors distribute treats to the spectators, which further enhances the festive atmosphere of the production. In the performances of the independence period, a clear tendency emerged to create stage productions enriched with entertainment elements, combining modern theatrical techniques with the style of traditional folk theater. Kh. Khursandov from Surkhandarya also worked in this direction. In his play “Find You an Old Woman, Father?”, drawing upon the centuries-old traditions of his ancestors to depict situations and characters, the playwright raises pressing issues of contemporary life. This distinctive approach attracted the attention of many theaters.

During the years of independence, the Uzbek stage turned increasingly toward traditional forms of folk theater. Directors frequently incorporated oral storytelling, folk entertainment, and popular games into modern productions. These efforts reflected a broader cultural aspiration: to strengthen national identity and revive historical memory through the medium of theater. Mass performances held during the years of independence have been a vivid

continuation of traditional Uzbek theater forms. In these productions, folklore, ethnography, ritual, and spectacle were organically integrated with the means of modern stagecraft.

Particularly noteworthy are the large-scale performances staged at national holidays and festivals. For example, the annual celebration of Navruz has become not only a festive event but also a powerful form of theatrical expression. Directors of these mass spectacles have drawn upon ancient rituals, traditional games, folk songs, dances, and epic storytelling. Through synthesis, these elements were transformed into modern stage productions performed in stadiums and public squares.

The large-scale open-air performances staged during state celebrations also demonstrate continuity with folk traditions. The imagery of seasonal cycles, rituals associated with labor, weddings, hospitality, and respect for elders has been stylized for the stage. Such performances show how deeply rooted oral traditions and ethnographic customs remain in the collective memory of the Uzbek people.

At the same time, these productions embody the search for a new national stage identity. By involving not only professional actors but also amateur collectives, musicians, and dancers, the directors managed to create a sense of unity between performers and audiences. This synthesis of professional theater and folk spectacle has become one of the defining features of contemporary Uzbek stage practice.

The integration of oral traditions and ethnographic elements into modern Uzbek theater has proved to be not merely an artistic device but also a cultural necessity. Folklore, music, dance, and popular games are powerful repositories of collective memory. By bringing these forms onto the stage, directors ensure that national identity is preserved and transmitted to younger generations in a living, dynamic way.

The use of ethnography on stage also enriches the artistic palette. Costumes, household items, rituals, and gestures taken from daily life acquire symbolic meaning when stylized in performance. They not only create an authentic atmosphere but also communicate values deeply rooted in the nation's worldview: hospitality, respect for elders, harmony with nature, and devotion to family.

Theatrical games, improvisation, parody, and mass spectacles that originated in folk traditions continue to inspire modern directors. By experimenting with these elements, they expand the expressive means of the stage, finding fresh solutions to both classical and contemporary dramatic works. The fusion of traditional aesthetics with modern stagecraft remains a central direction in the evolution of Uzbek theater.

RESULTS

It is evident that the integration of folklore, ethnography, and oral folk traditions constitutes a key factor in shaping the artistic identity of contemporary Uzbek theater.

Popular and street performance traditions are not merely preserved but undergo reinterpretation in directorial practice, leading to the emergence of distinctive forms of stage expressiveness.

Comparative analysis of both domestic and international scholarship confirms that Uzbek theater develops in dialogue with global theatrical processes while maintaining its cultural specificity.

Productions of national playwrights' works exemplify a productive synthesis of traditional forms with contemporary methods of scenography and directing, thereby opening new perspectives for theatrical innovation.

Contemporary Uzbek theater may therefore be regarded not only as a custodian of cultural memory but also as a laboratory of experimental stage practices rooted in the synthesis of tradition and modernity.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study demonstrate that contemporary Uzbek theater continues to serve as a vital space for cultural dialogue, where tradition and modernity engage in active interaction. The use of folklore, ethnography, and oral folk theater elements is not limited to preserving cultural memory but forms the foundation for the creation of new artistic expressions.

Particularly significant is the theater's ability to adapt traditional means of expression to the requirements of the modern stage. Directorial practice and scenography show that the integration of folk images, symbols, and ritual elements with contemporary staging techniques allows for the development of original forms of theatrical expression.

A comparison with international research confirms that similar tendencies can be observed in other national theaters; however, the Uzbek experience is distinguished by its deep rootedness in oral and performative culture, which defines its unique place in the global theatrical landscape.

Thus, the discussion of results suggests that contemporary Uzbek theater fulfills a dual role: on the one hand, it acts as a custodian of national cultural memory, while on the other, it functions as an experimental platform open to innovation and engagement with global artistic processes.

CONCLUSION

The history of Uzbek stage art demonstrates the organic continuity between folk traditions and modern theater. From the experiments of the early twentieth century to the creative searches of B.Yuldashev and his contemporaries, from the revival of folk spectacle in the 1970s to the large-scale celebrations of the independence era, theater in Uzbekistan has consistently drawn upon its oral heritage and ethnographic foundations.

This synthesis has not only provided vivid artistic forms but has also contributed to the formation of a national stage identity. Today, as directors and actors continue to engage with folklore and ethnography, Uzbek theater retains

its unique character while simultaneously participating in global theatrical processes.

The conducted research highlights the multifaceted nature of contemporary Uzbek theater, which continues to evolve at the intersection of tradition and innovation. By integrating elements of folklore, ethnography, and the oral folk theater, modern stage practice not only preserves the cultural heritage of Uzbekistan but also reinterprets it through new artistic forms. This synthesis enriches the theatrical language, providing directors and scenographers with expressive tools that resonate with both national identity and universal aesthetic values.

The study has also shown that the Uzbek theatrical process develops within a broader cultural dialogue, engaging with international scholarship and performance practices. At the same time, it remains deeply rooted in indigenous traditions, which ensures its distinctiveness in the global theatrical landscape. The works of national playwrights and the creative interpretations of contemporary directors reveal how folklore and ethnographic elements can be transformed into innovative stage solutions, opening new horizons for theatrical experimentation.

Thus, Uzbek theater today functions as both a guardian of cultural memory and a dynamic creative laboratory. Its capacity to combine inherited traditions with modern stagecraft demonstrates not only the vitality of national art but also its contribution to the wider discourse on performativity, cultural identity, and the future of world theater.

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