UZBEK SYMPHONIC MUSIC IN THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY : THE CASE OF THE SYMPHONY GENRE

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Abstract. This article examines the developmental trends of Uzbek symphonic music in the first quarter of the twenty-first century, focusing on the symphony genre. It analyzes the evolution of Uzbek symphonies through the synthesis of national musical traditions and European art-music conventions established in the twentieth century, as well as the transformation of these traditions under the new cultural and artistic conditions of the post-independence period. Drawing on works by composers active during this period, the study explores the thematic, formal-dramaturgical, modal-intonational, timbral-textural, and compositional characteristics of the symphony genre. Particular attention is paid to the role of national instrumental timbres, contemporary performance techniques, unconventional sound-producing devices, electronic resources, and sonoristic approaches in reshaping orchestral thinking. The study establishes that the principal developmental tendencies of the symphony genre in Uzbek compositional practice during the first quarter of the twenty-first century are characterized by the primacy of individual compositional concepts, the increasing individualization of genre and form, the contemporary reinterpretation of national musical material, and the expansion of the timbral and textural possibilities of the orchestra.

Keywords: Uzbek symphonic music, symphony genre, Uzbek school of composition, twenty-first century, national musical thinking, national intonation, maqom, symphonic dramaturgy, compositional thinking, orchestral texture, timbre,

sonoristics, contemporary performance techniques, historical memory, philosophical content.

Symphony, as a genre in world music, emerged in the eighteenth century through the creative explorations of Western European composers.[1] Subsequently, it continued to evolve in terms of both content and form through the creative experience of various national schools of composition. In Uzbekistan, the development of the symphony genre is closely associated with the establishment of the Uzbek school of composition in the twentieth century and the introduction of European art-music traditions into the national musical culture.

From the 1920s and 1930s onward, the development of compositional creativity in Uzbekistan's musical culture laid the artistic and performance foundations necessary for the emergence of symphonic music. The work of composers such as V. Uspensky, G. Mushel, S. Vasilenko, and A. Kozlovsky played a significant role in this process.[2] Alongside assimilating the principles of European composition and orchestral thinking, these composers devoted considerable attention to studying, arranging, and incorporating examples of Uzbek folk music into their compositional practice. As a result, national melodies, rhythmic and usul patterns, as well as modal and intonational characteristics inherent in folk music, became important sources of symphonic creativity.

Initially manifested in genres such as the suite, symphonic poem, and overture, symphonic thinking developed further from the 1950s and 1960s onward through the creation of large-scale orchestral works, particularly symphonies. In the works of composers such as R. Hamroyev, T. Qurbonov, I. Akbarov, M. Tojiyev, M. Mahmudov, and X. Rahimov, the symphony genre became one of the significant

[1] Jabborov A., Begmatov S., A'zamova M. History of Uzbek Music. — Tashkent: Fan va texnologiya Publishing House, 2018. — p. 124.

[2] Yanov-Yanovskaya, N. S. Uzbekskaya simfonicheskaya muzyka [Uzbek Symphonic Music]. Tashkent, 1979, pp. 30–50.

directions of the Uzbek school of composition.[3] During this period, the formal possibilities of the genre expanded: alongside the classical four-movement cycle, two-movement and single-movement symphonic structures also emerged. In symphonic dramaturgy, traditional thematic contrasts were increasingly complemented by principles of lyrical and philosophical development.

The principal characteristics of twentieth-century Uzbek symphonic music are manifested primarily in the synthesis of national musical thought and Western classical traditions. Intonational, modal, and rhythmic elements derived from folk music, maqom traditions, and the performance practices of national musical instruments became essential means of symphonic development. The integration of the major–minor tonal system with folk modal characteristics, the use of maqom intonations as thematic material, and the expanded application of variation-based, polyphonic, and contrapuntal techniques of development contributed to the formation of the distinctive features of the Uzbek symphony. At the same time, the reinterpretation of symphonic form and dramaturgy through the prism of national musical thought gave rise to a distinctive regional identity within the genre. The symphonic thinking that emerged in Uzbekistan during this period laid a solid foundation for subsequent compositional developments and became a significant factor in shaping new directions in Uzbek symphonic music in the twenty-first century, particularly within the symphony genre.

From the 1990s onward, symphonic works increasingly demonstrated creative freedom, thematic diversity, and a broader range of genre choices. Composers turned to philosophical themes, epic imagery associated with the nation's historical past, and musical representations of prominent historical figures. The revival of national

[3] Davydova, T. Yu. Istoriya muzykalnykh stiley (natsionalnyy stil v usloviyakh sovremennosti na primere simfoniy kompozitorov Uzbekistana) [History of Musical Styles: National Style in Contemporary Contexts, with Reference to the Symphonies of Uzbek Composers]. Tashkent, 2023, pp. 60–70.

cultural values, the recognition of the nation's spiritual heritage, and growing international interest in Uzbekistan stimulated the creation of distinctive and unconventional symphonic works.[4] Symphonic composition in Uzbekistan during the independence period emerged as a new stage in the development of national compositional thought. While continuing the traditions established in the twentieth century, this period was distinguished by greater freedom in compositional experimentation.

Whereas symphonies of earlier periods primarily sought to integrate European genre and formal conventions with national musical thought, in the twenty-first century, the composer's individual artistic concept became one of the principal factors determining form, dramaturgy, and expressive means. From this perspective, the structure of a symphonic work is characterized by its emergence from the development of a particular artistic idea rather than strict adherence to predetermined generic conventions. While sonata, variation, rondo, and cyclic principles remain in use, they are interpreted flexibly, with different compositional approaches combined within a single work.

In the early years of independence, the symphony genre featured prominently in the creative output of Mirsodiq Tojiyev. The composer conceived his Fifteenth, Sixteenth, and Seventeenth Symphonies, written in 1991–1992, as a trilogy entitled The Milky Way (Somon yo'li). Through its constituent works—The Gulag Archipelago (Arxipelag Gulag), The Call of the Spirits (Ruhlar nidosi), and The Milky Way (Somon yo'li)—the trilogy explores thematic dimensions associated with historical memory, human destiny, and philosophical contemplation. The composer's Eighteenth Symphony, written in 1993 for chamber symphony orchestra, and his Nineteenth Symphony, composed in 1995 and known as the Heroic Symphony, represent further developments of these creative explorations.

[4] Mamajonova, E. Istoriya uzbekskoy muzyki. Tvorchestvo kompozitorov Uzbekistana [History of Uzbek Music: The Works of Composers of Uzbekistan]. Tashkent: Musiqa nashriyoti, 2020, p. 130.

The works of Felix Yanov-Yanovsky also occupy a distinctive position in this period. His Fifth Symphony, composed in 2012 in four movements to words by F. G. Larko, demonstrates the contemporary compositional possibilities of the genre. His work reveals an integration of traditional symphonic thinking with modern approaches to timbre, texture, and dramaturgical design.

Habibulla Rahimov's Third Symphony, composed in 1991, and Fourth Symphony, written in 2007, are also significant examples of Uzbek symphonic music during the independence period. The Fourth Symphony is particularly noteworthy for its foundation in Korean musical idioms, reflecting a broader tendency within compositional thought to assimilate and reinterpret musical traditions from different cultures.

In Mustafo Bafoyev's output, historical subjects became one of the significant thematic foundations of the symphony genre. His Fourth Symphony, Movarounnahr, composed in 1991 to commemorate the 550th anniversary of Alisher Navoi's birth, is notable for its musical interpretation of historical and cultural memory and questions of national identity. His Sixth Symphony, The Four Elements (To'rt unsur), composed in 2013, is distinguished by the predominance of philosophical and aesthetic ideas and the extensive use of vocal timbres within the symphonic medium.

In the work of Nuriddin G'iyosov, symphonic thinking can be observed to have acquired broader philosophical, religious, and spiritual dimensions. Composed between 1991 and 2000, The Eternal Universe (Abadiy Koinot), The Eternal Jesus (Abadiy Iso), The Eternal Islam (Abadiy Islom), and his Eleventh Symphony, In Memory of My Son (O'g'lim xotirasiga), demonstrate the composer's engagement with questions of humanity, existence, faith, and spirituality. The predominance of philosophical and figurative content is also evident in his works for chamber orchestra, including The Realm of Animals (Hayvonlar makoni), The Lost (Adashganlar), and Purification (Poklanish).In the subsequent period, the range of

composers turning to the symphony genre expanded further, reflecting the continued diversification of compositional approaches within Uzbek symphonic music.

Dilorom Omonullayeva's Ko'ngil sohili (2002), a five-movement work based on poems by S. Sayid and scored for choir, soloists, flute, and doira, demonstrates the integration of symphonic thinking with vocal-choral elements and national instrumental traditions. In Khurshida Hasanova's Symphony in Memory of My Father (2003), the musical expression of remembrance, personal experience, and lyrical-philosophical content takes precedence. As its title suggests, Dilnoz Zakirova's Past and Present (2001) is oriented towards an artistic exploration of the relationship between history and contemporaneity. Another significant characteristic of symphonic composition in the twenty-first century is the expansion of its artistic and conceptual scope, accompanied by a growing emphasis on philosophical reflection. Composers interpret questions concerning humanity, history, memory, spirituality, national identity, and contemporary society through individual musical concepts. Consequently, the symphony is increasingly conceived not merely as a structure based on the contrast and development of musical images, but as an integrated artistic conception articulating a particular philosophical idea. Considerable innovations are also evident in the use of expressive means. Alongside the conventional resources of the orchestra, composers increasingly employ a variety of technical articulations, extended performance techniques, and unconventional timbral and textural solutions, thereby expanding the orchestra's sonic possibilities. In certain works, the introduction of non-traditional performance elements serves to elucidate the character of musical imagery and create new sonic spaces. Accordingly, in twenty-first-century symphonic music, the orchestra functions not simply as an ensemble of conventional instrumental timbres, but as an independent means of artistic expression. A renewed approach to the question of national identity is also apparent. Although the modal and intonational characteristics of Uzbek folk music, maqom, and traditional genres remain important sources of compositional

inspiration, twenty-first-century composers often reinterpret these traditions by assimilating their underlying intonational essence rather than relying on direct quotation. National musical material is manifested through thematic development, transformation, polyphonic layering, rhythmic processes, and the relationships between instrumental timbres, becoming integrated into the work's overall dramaturgical conception. The principal distinction between twenty-first-century Uzbek symphonism and that of the twentieth century lies not in the abandonment of traditional generic principles, but in their subordination to the composer's individual artistic conception and their enrichment through new expressive resources. The individualization of form, the increasing depth of conceptual content, the expanded use of contemporary orchestral techniques, and the reinterpretation of national musical heritage through its underlying intonational essence collectively define the distinctive characteristics of Uzbek symphonic thinking in the twenty-first century.

In this context, the symphonic works of Oydin Abdullayeva demonstrate a close and integral relationship between the symphony genre and literary, historical, and philosophical sources. Her symphonies A Tale of Love, based on A. Bedil's Komde and Modan, In Memory of the Jadids, Jaman Shig'anaq, and Zebo Pari illustrate the composer's approach to the musical interpretation of literary sources within the framework of symphonic thinking. In particular, the dramaturgical development of Jaman Shig'anaq unfolds through the narrative's underlying content, an individualized approach to musical form, and the protagonist's emotional experiences associated with the contradictions of life and the trials of fate. The expressive capabilities of the nay play a particularly significant role in conveying the protagonist's psychological state. Its plaintive and emotionally evocative timbre serves to reveal the character's inner anguish. At the same time, the composer employs the changqovuz and electronic percussion instruments to expand the timbral and textural possibilities of the orchestra. These resources establish an interaction between national instrumental traditions and contemporary principles of

orchestration, reinforcing the work's modern sonoristic characteristics. In Zebo Pari, the timbral and performative resources of the orchestra are likewise employed in distinctive ways. The incorporation of rhythmic structures characteristic of zikr recitations into the thematic development, together with the orchestral performers' vocal production of the "hu" sound in an improvisatory manner, considerably enriches the sonoristic potential of the musical material. In this respect, the symphony demonstrates Oydin Abdullayeva's approach to the orchestra not merely as an ensemble of traditional instruments, but as a sonoristic medium in which timbres are creatively transformed and their expressive possibilities extended.

In the works of the younger generation of composers, the symphony genre has become increasingly diverse in its themes and imagery, while being enriched by contemporary compositional techniques and performance practices. Sherzod Sobirov's First Symphony "Imam Bukhari" (2011), Second Symphony "Reading O'tkan kunlar" (2013), Third Symphony "Towards Guidance" (2021–2022), and his Fifth Symphony, composed in 2025, demonstrate the continued exploration of historical, literary, and spiritual themes in contemporary symphonic thinking. In particular, Third Symphony "Towards Guidance" reveals a tendency to exploit the individual technical and expressive capabilities of orchestral instruments and to integrate diverse performance techniques closely with the work's musical dramaturgy. This approach demonstrates the composer's intention to combine traditional orchestral thinking with contemporary performance techniques.

In Farrux Akramov's symphonies Big Bang (2010) and Andromeda (2023), the genre is reinterpreted in increasingly innovative ways in terms of theme, content, and form. Big Bang, in particular, is devoted to the universe, its origins, and the processes underlying its existence. The work approaches this subject unconventionally, not only at the philosophical level but also in its compositional design and dramaturgical development. Its formal structure, timbral and textural solutions, the interaction of sonic layers, and the application of contemporary

musical resources reveal the composer's intention to extend symphonic thinking beyond traditional thematic and formal frameworks. The use of the orchestra's diverse sonic possibilities to create musical representations of cosmic phenomena reinforces the work's cosmological and philosophical content. Andromeda continues this artistic direction, exploring the representation of cosmic space and human conceptions of existence through musical thought.

During the first quarter of the twenty-first century, symphonic composition in Uzbekistan entered a new artistic and aesthetic phase, demonstrating an integration of national musical traditions with contemporary compositional principles. During this period, the thematic, dramaturgical, formal, timbral, and textural possibilities of the symphony genre expanded, establishing it as an important medium for expressing national history, spiritual and philosophical thought, and the psychological experiences of contemporary humanity. Nevertheless, the overall development of symphonies composed during the independence period, the evolution of compositional styles, and the characteristics of contemporary orchestral thinking have yet to be examined systematically and comprehensively. In particular, introducing newly composed symphonic works into scholarly discourse, collecting and preserving their score and audio sources, and conducting systematic analytical studies of this repertoire remain pressing research priorities.

Contemporary compositional practice is laying the foundations for the continuity of a distinct national school of symphonic composition for future generations of young composers. This school is grounded in national intonational and modal thinking, orchestration traditions, individual approaches to musical dramaturgy, and the accumulated experience of incorporating contemporary compositional technologies. However, its sustainable development requires support for young composers in creating new symphonic works, the promotion of existing compositions through performances and publication, the expansion of scholarly and

analytical research, and the improvement of educational systems for teaching contemporary compositional techniques.

In this regard, the future of Uzbek symphonic composition in the twenty-first century will be determined not only by the creation of new works, but also by the transmission of experienced composers' artistic knowledge to younger generations and the consistent development of a contemporary compositional school. The organic integration of national tradition and innovation may thus become the fundamental creative principle underpinning this school.

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