



## **KATTA ASHULA AND THE HAFIZ TRADITION: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT, PERFORMANCE PRACTICES, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS IN UZBEK CLASSICAL MUSIC**

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### **Abstract**

The present study examines the historical development, performance practices, and psychological foundations of katta ashula, one of the most distinctive genres of Uzbek classical music, and its close association with the tradition of hafizlik (master vocal artistry). As an integral component of the oral-professional musical heritage of Uzbekistan, katta ashula embodies not only musical expression but also the aesthetic values, spiritual worldview, and emotional experiences of the people.

The study employs historical-comparative, musicological, and psychological approaches to investigate the formation of the genre, its artistic features, and the role of vocal psychology in performance. Particular attention is paid to ensemble singing practices, vocal interpretation, emotional expression, auditory perception, and artistic imagination. The research demonstrates that katta ashula is a complex artistic phenomenon governed by its own performance principles and aesthetic criteria. Furthermore, the concept of hafizlik is shown to encompass not only vocal mastery but also moral authority, pedagogical competence, and cultural leadership within the traditional music environment.

The findings reveal that successful performance of katta ashula requires the integration of musical literacy, vocal technique, ensemble coordination, emotional intelligence, and psychological preparedness. The study also highlights the significance of preserving traditional master-disciple pedagogical methods while adapting them to contemporary music education. Ultimately, the article argues that the preservation and scholarly promotion of katta ashula are essential for safeguarding Uzbekistan's intangible cultural heritage and ensuring its transmission to future generations.

**Keywords:** Katta ashula, hafiz tradition, Uzbek classical music, vocal performance, music psychology, oral-professional traditions, Fergana Valley.



## **Introduction**

Uzbek classical music represents one of the oldest and most sophisticated layers of the nation's cultural heritage. Its development has been closely associated with oral-professional performance traditions that have preserved and transmitted musical knowledge across generations. Among the numerous genres that constitute this rich musical system, katta ashula occupies a particularly significant position due to its artistic complexity, expressive power, and deep connection with the cultural identity of the Uzbek people. Historically, katta ashula emerged as a prominent vocal genre in the Fergana Valley and surrounding regions, where it developed within a highly refined environment of traditional performance practice. The genre is distinguished by its monumental vocal style, extensive melodic development, poetic depth, and collective performance traditions. Unlike ordinary vocal forms, katta ashula demands exceptional technical proficiency, broad vocal range, precise intonation, and profound emotional engagement from performers.

The concept of hafizlik became firmly established in Uzbek musical culture during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A hafiz was not merely a singer but a respected bearer of musical tradition whose authority derived from artistic excellence, spiritual maturity, and pedagogical experience. Through their performances and teaching activities, generations of hafizes contributed significantly to the preservation and development of Uzbek classical music.

Despite its cultural significance, contemporary interpretations of katta ashula often fail to fully appreciate its historical foundations, performance principles, and psychological dimensions. Therefore, a comprehensive scholarly examination of the genre remains necessary. This article seeks to analyze the historical evolution, artistic characteristics, and psychological mechanisms underlying katta ashula performance and the tradition of hafizlik.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The study utilizes a combination of qualitative research methods, including historical-comparative analysis, musicological investigation, and approaches derived from music psychology. Historical sources, scholarly literature, oral traditions, pedagogical practices, and performance experiences were examined to establish a comprehensive understanding of the subject.



The historical-comparative method was employed to trace the development of the concepts of hafizlik and traditional vocal performance. Musicological analysis was used to investigate stylistic and structural characteristics of katta ashula, while psychological approaches facilitated examination of vocal perception, emotional expression, musical thinking, imagination, and performer interaction.

Particular emphasis was placed on the collective nature of katta ashula performance, which requires close coordination among singers and the integration of individual artistic abilities into a unified musical expression.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The findings indicate that katta ashula constitutes a highly sophisticated performance tradition characterized by specific artistic, psychological, and pedagogical principles. First, the genre possesses an independent system of performance criteria that distinguishes it from other forms of vocal art. Successful interpretation requires not only vocal strength but also advanced musical thinking, refined aesthetic judgment, and a deep understanding of poetic content.

Second, the concept of hafizlik extends beyond technical vocal proficiency. It encompasses spiritual maturity, cultural knowledge, leadership within the musical community, and the ability to transmit artistic traditions to younger generations.

Third, psychological factors play a decisive role in performance. Vocal production in katta ashula is closely linked to emotional states, auditory perception, imagination, concentration, and artistic intuition. The singer's ability to maintain emotional balance while simultaneously controlling vocal technique significantly influences artistic quality.

The tradition of ensemble singing (jo'rovozlik) occupies a central place in katta ashula performance. Depending on artistic objectives, performances may involve two or more singers. Each participant must carefully coordinate breathing, phrasing, articulation, ornamentation, and dynamic expression with fellow performers. In this context, the ensemble functions as a single artistic organism in which individual voices contribute to a unified musical texture.

The development of katta ashula has resulted in several performance categories, including traditional duet performance, free interpretations of maqom branches (Yovvoyi Maqom), free-style song interpretations (Yovvoyi Ashula), solo vocal-



instrumental performance, and instrumental adaptations for traditional instruments such as the nay, surnay, tanbur, and gijjak.

An important milestone in the recognition of the genre occurred in 2009, when katta ashula was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This recognition confirms its significance as an outstanding manifestation of traditional musical culture.

The study further demonstrates that musical literacy constitutes one of the most important foundations of professional vocal performance. Traditional singers must develop comprehensive knowledge encompassing vocal technique, repertoire, improvisation, memory, pronunciation, stylistic interpretation, and artistic communication. These competencies form the basis for the successful preservation and transmission of musical heritage.

Contemporary vocal pedagogy can benefit substantially from integrating traditional master-disciple methods with modern educational approaches. In the teaching of complex genres such as katta ashula, technical exercises alone are insufficient. Equal attention must be devoted to the development of imagination, emotional intelligence, artistic sensitivity, and psychological self-regulation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Katta ashula and the tradition of hafizlik represent unique achievements of Uzbek classical music and constitute an invaluable component of the nation's intangible cultural heritage. Their historical development reflects centuries of artistic refinement, while their continued existence depends upon effective preservation, scholarly research, and pedagogical transmission.

The study demonstrates that successful katta ashula performance requires the integration of vocal technique, musical literacy, ensemble coordination, emotional sensitivity, and psychological preparedness. Performers must not only master the musical and poetic texts but also understand their historical, aesthetic, and cultural contexts.

Particular importance should be attached to the cultivation of collective artistic awareness, as ensemble performance remains one of the defining characteristics of the genre. The ability to perceive and respond to fellow performers in real time contributes significantly to artistic unity and expressive depth.



Ultimately, katta ashula represents a remarkable synthesis of historical experience, musical artistry, and psychological sophistication. Continued academic investigation and educational promotion of this tradition will contribute to the preservation of Uzbekistan's rich musical heritage and ensure its transmission to future generations.

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