BUKHARA
Musical Crossroads of Asia
Recorded, compiled and annotated by Ted Levin and Otanazar Matykubov.

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Credits:
Produced by Ted Levin and Otanazar Matykubov from their original digital field recordings.
Mastered by Joe Bresco, Master Cutting Room, New York City
Cover photo: Ted Levin
Cover design: Daphne Shuttleworth
Map: Hamza Institute of Art Studies, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Map showing location of Bukhara and regions mentioned in the notes.
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Smithsonian/Folkways SF 40050
Bukhara, Musical Crossroads of Asia
Recorded, compiled and annotated by Ted Levin and Otanazar Matykubov. Research sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution’s Office of Folklife Programs and the USSR Ministry of Culture.

The richness and diversity of the Bukharan sound world is impossible to represent through a single recording. Here, we have chosen to focus on three traditional areas of Bukharan musical greatness.

The first of these is the art of female musicians known as sozanda (Tajik: “musician”), or in earlier times, as mutrib (in Iran, motreb, both from Arabic: tarab “merriment”). The music of the sozanda is centered around the cult of the toi or “celebration.” Bukhara, one might say, has a fetish about celebration and festival. Virtually any event can provide the excuse for a toi. The most important of these—a birth, a circumcision, or a marriage—can call forth an enormous gathering of relatives and friends. Lesser occasions—a child’s first day at school, a boy’s first haircut, or in former times, the first veiling of a girl—are observed in smaller family gatherings.

Whatever the size of the toi, two elements are obligatory: victuals and libations, called dasturkhon (literally: “tablecloth”), and live music to entertain the guests. The music is provided by an ensemble usually consisting of between three and seven sozanda. These formerly all-woman ensembles may now include men as well. Tofakhon, whose ensemble is presented on this recording, is arguably the most respected and busiest sozanda currently working in Bukhara.

The second of our three musical areas comprises selections from the shashmaqam, a canonized repertory of art songs and instrumental suites that flourished in the court of the Mangit Uzbek emir who ruled the feudal kingdom of Bukhara from the late 18th century until 1920, when the last emir fled (eventually to Afghanistan) to escape a Bolshevik firing squad. As a music whose primary function was to entertain a courtly class, the shashmaqam became an aesthetically sophisticated repertory that demanded virtuosity from performers, and a connoisseur’s understanding of poetry and music on the part of listeners.

Under the aegis of Soviet cultural policies, the shashmaqam was increasingly shunned as a symbol of “feudal” life until the early 1960’s, when, in the guise of “national” folk music, it began to experience a comeback. Nowadays, a rising generation of serious young musicians has taken up the shashmaqam within the context of the official music education system. The booklet includes a department of Oriental Music in the Tashkent State Conservatory.

The third component of the Bukharan sound world illustrated on our recording is liturgical and para-liturgical traditions that have been cultivated by the Amu Oarya religious establishment that included Sufis, Shi’ites, and a variety of Sufi (mystical) brotherhoods. While Islam has been the dominant spiritual force in Bukhara, Jews who consider themselves to be of Persian and Babylonian origin have lived there since at least the 12th century, and have come to be known as Bukharan Jews.

Seventy years of Soviet rule has shrunk formal religious practice to a shadow of what it once was. Yet, throughout these years, the chain of religious tradition has not been broken. Moslems and Jews in Bukhara have each maintained their own local practices of liturgical and para-liturgical traditions that, in their essential content and structure, are reflected respectively, to Islam and Judaism.

Within these traditions, one can indeed speak of “Jewish cantillation” or “Islamic chant.” However, beyond the walls of synagogue or mosque, Jewish and Moslem musicians have been steadfast partners in Bukharan musical life. For instance, many of the greatest performers of the shashmaqam have been Jews, even though the shashmaqam is a repertory whose origins are in a musical and poetic world that could be broadly called “Islamic.” Moreover, the service of Jewish musicians in the court of the Emir of Bukhara was not an anomaly in the Near East and Central Asia. Jewish musicians served in the musical establishments of the Moslem rulers of Baghdad, Cairo, Teheran, Damascus, and other cities in the “core” Moslem world.

The world of the sozanda has also belonged to both Jews and Moslems in Bukhara. For example, Tofakhon (née Yafa Pinchassova; Tofa, a stage name, means “gift”), is a Bukharan Jewish ensemble includes both Jews and Moslems and she often entertains at Moslem, as well as Jewish, weddings.

In the context of a holy and thus strictly regimented, Moslem city, Bukharan Jews were subjected to restrictions that did not apply to Moslems. They were required to live in special quarters of the city, were excluded from certain professions (many were engaged in textile dyeing and in the silk trade, or worked as hairdressers or cobblers), and were permitted to ride donkeys, but not horses, so that they would not sit higher than a Moslem. Notwithstanding forced segregation and distinctions, Bukharan Jews have to a large extent assimilated the cultural identity of the Bukharan melting pot of which they are a part. One of the central features of this identity is bi-lingualism in Tajik and Uzbek.

Tajik is an eastern dialect of Persian that has long been spoken by the settled urban populations of Transoxiana - the region that lies between the Amu Darya (Oxus) and Sir Darya Rivers. Uzbek is a Turkic language that became widely disseminated in Central Asia through the 15th and 16th century conquests of Uzbek-speaking nomadic tribes. Uzbek

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Aesthetic hedonism was not restricted to denizens of the court. It is equally apparent in the abiding Bukharan cult of the tof: the devotion to festivity and hospitality is apparent in the beautifully sculpted gold and silver jewelry, in the variety of fruits and flowers, spices and sweets that were once widely available in Bukhara, and even in the myriad varieties of the native dish, plov (pilaf) that are prepared there. An old Bukharan aphorism advises "work like a slave to relax like a shah." Perhaps this hedonism is to some extent a form of compensation for the religious ascension that was also a part of Bukharian life.

The Bukhara of 1990 is no longer one city, but two. The first contains the remnants of Bukhara's times of greatness, now increasingly subject to conservation and restoration by a government that finds Bukhara a lucrative tourist attraction.

The second Bukhara is Soviet Bukhara, a city of concrete apartment blocks, smoky industrial complexes, and wide boulevards that slices through parts of the old town that still remain. With the cultural and commercial center of Soviet Central Asia now firmly implanted in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, Bukhara has become an atmosphere of a dusty, provincial center. But the spirituality and festiveness that was an essential ingredient of Bukhara's greatness has not died. On the contrary, it is now springing back to life as public religious observance becomes acceptable in the USSR.

In keeping with the heterogenous spirit of the Bukharian sozanda, Tofakhon has brought together in "Nozanzin" singers, instrumentalists, dancers, and poets of various ages, ethnic origins (Tajik, Uzbek, Bukharan Jewish, Iranian, Turkmen) and social groups. Mixed male and female ensembles like Tofakhon's are a relatively recent innovation in Bukhara.

The sozanda's repertoire is designed to provide extended periods of entertainment. Performances may last as long as eight hours, with only occasional breaks. Part of the sozanda's skill is in assembling lengthy blocks, or suites, of songs, and instrumental pieces from the components of her repertoire. These suites are built on the principle of accretion from slow tempo to fast, and combine various rhythms, or usul-s, played on the doira: 6/8, 3/8, 5/8, 5/4. Antiphonal call-and-response between leader and chorus is an integral part of the sozanda style. In this performance, the chorus of four voices does not match the vocal power of Tofakhon singing alone. (On the recording, the chorus has slightly less presence than it did in actuality because of the need of mute Tofakhon's loud doira playing by placing microphones close to her mouth. NB: Tofakhon's music, overall, is quite loud; for maximum authenticity in listening, playback should be at a high dynamic level.)

The suits are usually introduced by short, meditative songs, frequently unmetered, called shod (Tajik/Uzbek: "joyous"). (The shod on this recording is metered and not particularly meditative.) Following the shod are dance-like movements generically called ufor. These, in turn, give way to concluding sections called tez ufor. Shod, ufor, and tez ufor form a mini-suite, a precursor of the longer sequences of songs that will follow.

Notes on the Music

1. Shod-i Uforshod and Ufor-i Tezah: Dilbaram Shumo ("You are my dear one")

Tofakhon (Yafa Pinchasova), b. 1928, Bukhara with members of ensemble "Nozanzin": Gulmira Rakhimova, Tamara Kandova, Gunchehka Mamedova, Raya Borukhova doira-s: Saifullah Abdulhusein, Hussein Kasimov

Tofakhon, the well-known Bukharan sozanda performs with four singers and two doira (frame drum) players drawn from the usual duration of a single

Since the usual duration of a single full-length performance at a sozanda is between one and two hours, we asked Tofakhon to construct a compact version for this recording that would nonetheless illustrate the flavor and formal principles of a longer performance. The result contains five contrasting "blocks," each with distinct melodic, rhythmic, and poetic contents. Tofakhon's texts are mostly drawn from anonymous, oral poetry based on syllabic prosody (in contrast to the metrical aruz system used for classical verse). Tofakhon is of two minds about her place in the sozanda tradition. On the one hand, she aspires to preserve the traditional form of sozanda performance, as, for example, on this recording, wherein singers are accompanied only by percussion instruments. In addition to the doira, these instruments may include kairak (castanets), zang (bells worn on the arms and legs by dancers), and plates or tea cups struck with a fingop pair. Normally, the doira-s are divided into three
groups; one holds an ostinato pattern; one plays a solo line, and one provides counterpoint to the solo.

At the same time, Tofakhon understands the importance of adapting her art to contemporary conditions. She has added modern songs and modern arrangements to her repertory and includes in her ensemble performers both of traditional Central Asian instruments such as rebab, tar, and qijak, and of European instruments like accordion, clarinet, synthesizer, and guitar. Her public includes varied constituencies with varied tastes, and in part, she preserves her widespread popularity by maintaining flexibility in the membership of her ensemble. For a full-blown solo, she will call on as many as fifteen artists to assist her.

4. Murghak (chicklet)
vocals and doira: Mahdi Ibdow with Tofakhon and ensemble

This song is also from the repertory of the Maarrigikhon, but is not part of a cycle, or suite. It tells a tale, a kind of chain reaction in the history of a chicken:

Bravo, chicken, poor chicken.
A farmer dammed up the water.
Which water did he dam up?
The water that put out a fire.
Which fire did it put out?
The fire that burned a stick.
Which stick was burned?
The stick that killed a dog.
Which dog did it kill?
The dog that ate a wolf.
Which wolf did it eat?
The wolf that ate the chicken.
Which chicken did it eat?
On top, it was a red chicken.
It gave two eggs at once.
The tail was white
And it had a comb
My grandfather bought it for 100,000 dinars
He housed it himself.
Bravo, little chicken,
Poor chicken, bravo.

5. Classical Music: Hebrew Religious Poem (Shi’ra) Yom I’Yom set to melody

Ochil Ibragimov is a gifted young Bukharan Jewish musician who has devoted himself to the study of the musical “great tradition” of Bukhara. At the heart of this tradition is the collection of six vocal and instrumental suites called shashmaqam.

The canonical songs of the shashmaqam are most frequently set to either Uzbek or Tajik classical poetry, is set to a metrical aruz pattern in the manner customary for the shashmaqam.

shashmaqam means in Tajik “six maqam-s.” In Central Asia, maqam has two meanings. The first signifies a mode or melodic type, i.e. a nucleus of melodic features that may include stereotypic

melodic motifs and intervals, conventionalized initial and final pitches, and a particular registral location within the central axis of the pitch ladder that comprises the tone world of the shashmaqam. In this sense of “melody type,” a maqam is melodically more specific than a mere scale, but less specific than a particular tune. Maqam also means a suite, or collection of pieces that displays its contents and sequence certain melodic and rhythmic organizing principles. Thus, shashmaqam means both “six collections of pieces” and “six systems of melody types.” Each collection is called by the name of the melody type that is featured in the opening piece of its collection of pieces: buzkuk, rast, newa, doira, segah, and iraq. In addition to its other subordinate melody types, called shu’ba (Arabic/Persian: “branch”) make cameo appearances in the suites.

Mogulcha-i Dughah is a piece in melody type dughah performed in the usual, or metro-rhythmic genre mogulcha, a 5/4 rhythm normally marked on the doira, but absent in this performance. Like other pieces in the shashmaqam, Mogulcha-i Dughah is a fixed composition—albeit originally fixed through oral tradition—and melodic improvisation plays a limited role in performance.

Ochil Ibragimov emigrated from Tashkent to the United States in late 1990 and presently lives in Queens, New York.

Suleiman Takhalov, who is Tofakhon’s brother, was Ochil Ibragimov’s musical mentor in Tashkent, and on this recording, accompanies him on the kashgar rebab. He is Senior Instructor of tar and kashgar rebab at Tashkent State Conservatory.


Izro Malakho is accompanied by the Uzbek tanbur player Mahmadjan Tojiboev, who plays in the style perfected by his teacher, Turgun Alimov. The tanbur, which is considered to be the centerpiece of the Indian sitar, is a long-necked lute whose strings are plucked with a special plectrum worn on the finger. Brass strings ride relatively loosely over high, movable frets, allowing players to create a variety of fluid, microtonal intervals by depressing the strings more or less firmly behind the frets.

Moslem and Jewish Liturgical Music:

7. Azan

SaifullaJan Musaev, b. 1955, Bukhara

The azan (Arabic: adhan) is the Islamic call to prayer. At mosques throughout the Islamic world, a muezzin chants the azan in Arabic before the five daily prayers, and at the beginning of the Friday service that marks the Moslem sabbath.

The azan contains seven textual formulas, of which the sixth is a repetition of the first, as follows:

1. Allah-u akbar (“Allah is most great”) [4 times]
2. Ashhadu anna llaah-a illa Allaha (“I testify that there is no god besides Allah”) [2 times]
3. Ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasul Allah (“I testify that Mohammed is the apostle of Allah”) [2 times]
4. Haya’ala ’l-salat (“Come to prayer!”) [2 times]
5. Haya’ala ’l-falah (“Come to salvation!”) [2 times]
6. Allah-u akbar (“Allah is, most great”) [2 times]
7. La ilah-a illa Allaha ("There is no god besides Allah") [2 times]

The azan is not chanted to any standard melodic formulas or melody types, although in the past several decades, the Egyptian performance style has been adopted in many parts of the Islamic world.

Saifullajan Musaev learned his rendition of the azan from his father, a native of Bukhara. The melody reflects the Turco-Arabic melody type (maqam) rast, commonly the modal basis of the Egyptian performance style. It is not clear how, or when, this performance style found its way to Bukhara.

By the mid-1980’s, Moslem religious life had become barely visible in Bukhara. Only four mosques were open for prayer. However, the softening of Soviet ideological opposition to organized religion has resulted by the end of 1990 in the reopening of thirty mosques and the building of two new ones. Eleven more mosques are said to be currently under construction. Religious knowledge and practice that was forced underground for decades has emerged in Bukhara, and increasing interest in Islam has created a burgeoning demand for Moslem clerics. Saifullajan Musaev is a first-year student at the Mir Arab Medressah (religious school), where he is studying to be an imam. However, with his fine voice and his family tradition of Islamic spirituality, he has already been pressed into service as a muezzin at the Hoja Zainiddin mosque.

8. Na’t

Dervish Orif Bobo Hamro Ogl, b. 1907, Bukhara

A na’t is a poem praising and expressing devotion to the Prophet Mohammed. The na’t has served as a vessel for classical poetic forms and musical structures, as in the great na’t of the Ottoman composer Itri, which figures prominently in the whirling ceremony of the Mevlud Dervishes. The na’t may also assume a more modest musical and prosodic form in which it serves as a personal devotional prayer, as illustrated in the present recording. Here, the principle of aud—culturalization—is less developed than in the virtuosic performances of shashmaqam. Still, the melody of the na’t observes the form characteristic of Bukharan (as well as other Uzbek and Tajik) classical folk songs: gradual expansion through a series of increasingly higher pitch levels with a descent at the end to the initial pitch.

Orif Bobo Hamra Ogl, eighty-three years old when we met and recorded him, lives alone in a starkly furnished two-room dwelling in the old section of Bukhara. He refers to himself as a dervish, although he does not belong to, and has never belonged, to an organized dervish tarigar. He amazed us with his wide knowledge of Islamic history and theology, and with the copious quality of religious poetry that he recited from memory in Uzbek and Tajik with great oratorical style.

9. Yah Ribbon Olam (Arabic: “Lord of this World”)

Rakhim Yakubov, b. 1927, Bukhara

Yah Ribbon Olam, a prayer for Sabbath eve, according to Idoelsohn (Jewish Liturgy, p. 153) “is the work of Israel Naja (Safed, 1550 - lived in Damascus and died in Gaza about 1620). Although in Aramaic, this song gained widespread popularity throughout the Jewish world. After relating the wonders of God’s creation, the poet concludes with a prayer that God may redeem his people and lead them to His chosen sanctuary where the souls will rejoice with songs and meditations. This song was set to innumerable tunes.”

Yah Ribbon Olam is widely sung by Bukharan Jews. In this recording, Rakhim Yakubov provides the first two stanzas, each in Aramaic, followed by a translation into the Bukharan vernacular, Tajik. An English translation is provided below:

Lord of this world and worlds all to be/Thou art supreme in Thy majesty/Thy mighty work and marvelous ways/Thrice and inspire my soul in Thy praise.

Evening and morn Thy praises I sing/Holy art Thou who made every thing/All mortal men and angels and high Beasts in their den and birds of the sky.

As Idelson noted, the prayer is set to a variety of tunes that reflect the musical vernacular of particular communities. This setting, while not representing a specific Bukharan maqam melody type, displays familiar Bukharan features of scale and melodic progression. The melody expands by step-wise motion through a lower registral area, then skips to an upper registral area where it reaches a point of culmination before descending to a cadence at the initial pitch level.

10. Reading from the Torah

Yakub Meer Ochildev, b. 1907, Margilan

The Torah reading is from the book of Genesis, Chapter 41: 11-21. The text tells of Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream (see Hebrew text in figure 1).

11) We had dreamed the same night. he and I, each of us a dream with a meaning of its own. 12) A Hebrew youth was there with us, a servant of the chief steward; and when we told him our dreams, he interpreted them for us, telling each the meaning of his dream. 13) And as he interpreted for us, so it came to pass: I was restored to my post, and the other was imprisoned.

14) Thereupon Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was rushed from the dungeon. He had his hair cut and changed his clothes, and he appeared before Pharaoh. 15) And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have had a dream, but no one can interpret it. Now I have heard it said of you that for you to hear a dream is to tell its meaning.” 16) Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, “Not if God will see to Pharaoh’s welfare.”

17) Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream, I was standing on the bank of the Nile, 18) but when out of the Nile came up seven sturdy and well-formed cows and grazed in the reed grass. 19) Presently there followed them seven other cows, scrawny, ill-formed, and emaciated—never had I seen their likes for ugliness in all the land of Egypt! 20) And the seven lean and ugly cows ate up the seven first cows, the sturdy ones; 21) but when they had consumed them, one could not tell that they had consumed them, for they looked just as bad as before. And I awoke.

Shahrisabz, a venerable city of Bukhara with an old Bukharan Jewish community, was home to Chaim ben Eliezer, Ochil Ibragimov’s maternal grandfather. From Chaim ben Eliezer, Ochil learned to chant the Shalom Aleichem, recited on Sabbath Eve upon return from the synagogue, and the Kiddush, recited before the Sabbath meal. The Bukharian Siddur (prayer book) reserves one of the key phrases of the Kiddush for Festivals: “Kiyun bokh karta v’otanu gidashta mikal-ha-nigum: Thou hast chosen us among all peoples to sanctify us.” It is omitted in the present rendition of the Kiddush, which is for Sabbaths that do not coincide with a Festival.

12. Qanlandar

Muhammad Aminjon Nasriddinov, b. 1927, village of Karatak (Tajikistan); from 1937, lived in Bukhara Region

Qanlandar is a genre of devotional poetry and songs associated with wandering dervishes, also called qalandar-s, who in former times chanted for bakshesh (alms) in public places such as bazaars, and at various gatherings and celebrations. Historically, the qanlandar-s were connected to a loosely organized ascetic movement whose origin was in Khorasan and Turkestan and which, while

Islamic, embraced elements of Buddhism and Hinduism.

The legacy of the qanlandar-s in Central Asia is the corpus of qanland songs which are chanted to the accompaniment of a soft tapping of fingers on the doira. Mukhammad Aminjon Nasriddinov remembers the qanland songs from his childhood. Aminjon-aka is a blind singer with a deep interest in Islam. He told us, “Since childhood, I’ve been a believer. Although I’m a Communist, I’m also a believer. I was helped by a man who lived in our neighborhood. His name was Mirza Mubarak. He was about ninety-eight years old, but you never would have known it. He taught me about spiritual matters in the old way. I know the Arabic alphabet. He was a great man. All of Bukhara knew him. People would come to him for advice. They’d ask, ‘What do I need to do according to the Islamic faith in this situation or that?’ And people were happy that they received good answers to their questions.”

Here, Aminjon-aka chants a qanland dedicated to the Prophet Muhammad.

13. Excerpt from the Zohar

Issac Katzav, b. 1926, Karmon, Bukhara Region

The Zohar ("Book of Splendor") is a kabbalistic text, written in the last quarter of the 13th century and now generally attributed to the Castilian mystic Moses de Leon. It has been best preserved among Sephardic and Oriental Jewish communities. It is popular among Bukharan Jews, who recite from the Zohar on a variety of ceremonial occasions, in particular, commemorations of the dead. Traditionally, it is recited by men.

The original language of the Zohar is mostly Aramaic, but Issac Katzav reads here from a translation into Tajik. The recitation style is particular to the Zohar and reflects the Central Asian classical song structure described earlier: initial verses sung in a low tessitura, with subsequent verses pitched at registral levels a fifth and an octave higher, descending at the end to the initial pitch level. The flatted second in the melody calls to mind the Central Asian melody type bagat.

Isaac Katzav, the son of a rabbi, is an elder statesman among Bukharan Jewish musicians. He is a much respected performer of the classical shashmaqam, and has a wide knowledge of Jewish liturgy and para-liturgical texts.

Ted Levin and Otanazar Matyakubov

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Note: Specialists who would like copies of the song texts in their original languages along with complete English translations of all texts should send $1.50 for postage and handling. For the records sent to the Smithsonian Institution along with their name and address: to Bukharian Text, Smithsonian/Folkways Recordings, Office of Folklore Programs, 955 E. Plaza Suite 2600, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560, USA.

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In the Bukharan region of the USSR, north of the Afghanistan border, Uzbekistan, Jewish and Muslim musicians today create a unique sound world in an ancient city of rich and diverse cultural traditions. At various times Buddhists, Moslems, Hindus, Zoroastrians, Nestorian Christians and Oriental Jews kept common company in Bukhara's narrow streets and crowded bazaars. These high-quality 1990 digital recordings capture the beauty and substance of instrumental and vocal performances by some of the city's finest musicians. Extensive notes and map include an introduction to Bukharan music and descriptions of each item.

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