CENTRAL ASIA IN FOREST HILLS N.Y.,
Music of the Bukharan Jewish Ensemble Shashmaqam
Produced in collaboration with the Ethnic Folk Arts Center Project directed by Ethel Raim and Martin Koenig
Annotated by Ted Levin

1. Obloim  3:50
2. Ghairi Khudo Yar Nadoram
   ("We Have No Friend But God")  2:31
3. Jon-e Manam ("My Soul")  5:53
4. To Bodi Sabo  3:57
5. Dostanra Gum Makun
   ("Don't Lose Your Friends")  3:09
6. Biyo Yak ("Come Once")  3:12
7. Medley of Songs from Wedding Repertory:
   Yar-Yar,
   Abru Kosh Dumi Mor,
   Shastu-Shastu Chor,
   Chashmi Siyah Dori,
   doire interlude,
   Mahvashi Nozuk
   Badanam, Orzu  5:40
8. Talqin-i Bayat  5:11
9. Nasr-i Chargah  7:31
10. Ushshaq-i Samarkand  5:29
11. Qalandari  3:12
12. Yalli  3:29
13. Azerbaijani Segah  4:31

Shashmaqam brings to life the rich and diverse musical traditions of Central Asia, where Jewish and Moslem musicians long coexisted in a flourishing cultural symbiosis. Shashmaqam's repertory ranges from virtuoso Central Asian classical pieces to exuberant wedding and ritual songs. Now, as Central Asia's Jewish population is steadily reduced by emigration, New York City-based Shashmaqam has become the custodian of a threatened, yet remarkable, musical tradition.

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Map showing location of Bukhara and regions mentioned in notes.
Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

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Central Asia in Forest Hills N.Y.,
Music of the Bukharan Jewish Ensemble
Shashmaqam

Notes by Ted Levin

In the summer of 1977, a tiny restaurant named "Firuz" opened its doors, or more accurately, its door, in a shoebox-shaped space on the southwest corner of Manhattan's 3rd Avenue and 33rd Street. In Tashkent, where I spent a year studying Central Asian music, I had known a young woman named Firuza, and with that in mind, curiosity drove me into the restaurant one day for lunch. A smiling, slender woman with long, frizzy, black hair and dancing eyes greeted me in lurching English and showed me to a table. Surveying the menu, I asked her in Russian, the lingua franca of Soviet Central Asia, "Otkuda ti?"—"Where are you from?"

"Ya iz Dushanbe."—"I'm from Dushanbe," she replied with palpable excitement at my two words of Russian. And that was the beginning of a great friendship between Firuza and me, and of a wonderful discovery: in New York, lived a community of the very people who had originally drawn me to the other side of the world, to Central Asia: the Bukharan Jews. Bukharan Jews, as the name suggests, are associated with Bukhara, an oasis city situated about a hundred miles east of the Amu-Darya—the River Oxus of antiquity. The Amu-Darya flows down from the Pamir Mountains—the "Bam-i Dunya" or "roof of the world"—to the border between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, which it marks for hundreds of miles. Then it turns northward, passing west of Samarkand and Bukhara, and slightly east of Khiva and Urgench, before emptying into the Aral Sea. The area between the Amu-Darya and its sister river to the north, the Sary Darya, is known to geographers as Transoxiana, and it is in the oasis towns and cities of this arid region that the Bukharian Jews—so-called by both Jews and gentiles from the Russian north established themselves, and tossed in their fate with their Muslim neighbors.

Supposedly the descendants of Babylonian and Persian Jews who migrated—or were compelled to migrate—eastward, Bukharan Jews—Yehudi ("Jews" simpliciter)—as they call themselves, have ridden on the stormy history of Central Asia with remarkable resilience. In the 13th century, they survived the Mongol hordes who pillaged the cities of Bukhara's citadel with bodies before stampeding over them to massacre the city's defenders and then butchered in a single day 50,000 (or 70,000, depending on which historian's numbers are to be believed) of Samarkand's inhabitants.

In the following century, the Bukharan Jews survived the ravages of Tamerlane, while in the spirit of Mongol forebears, decimated the sedentary populations of Central Asia, leaving towers of skulls to decorate the cities he laid to waste. The Bukharan Jews survived, and to a degree prospered, under four hundred years of absolute feudal rule by a succession of Moslem emirs and khans, whose tax collectors ritually provided Jews with a humiliating slap across the face as a receipt for their taxes.

More recently, they survived the bloody turmoil of the 1920's, as Basmachi resisters, loyal to the deposed Emir of Bukhara, fought the Bolsheviks and the establishment of Soviet rule in Russian Turkestan while hundreds of thousands of Central Asians died of starvation. Some Bukharan Jews fled, making their way to Palestine, where they established a Bukharan community in Jerusalem. Those who remained survived the politics of Stalin, for pro-collaboration, forced collectivization, industrialization, the mass exile of minority groups, the Great Terror.

Far east of the war zone, the Bukharan Jewish community survived the Nazi stranglehold on Russia, Byelorussia, and the Ukraine, although many men lost their lives at the front. Following the War and the death of Stalin, they survived the bungled agricultural policies of the Krushchev years and the social and economic stagnation of the Brezhnev era. But in the 1970's when Leonid Brezhnev opened the hermetic borders of the USSR to Jewish emigration, Bukharan Jews joined their brethren from Moscow and Leningrad in leaving the Soviet Union to seek a better life in Israel and America.

The first Bukharian Jews of the so-called "Third Wave" to emigrate to the United States came to New York, settling mostly in the Forest Hills section of Queens alongside new Jewish emigres from other parts of the USSR. While precise numbers are not available, it is estimated that in 1991, about 3000 Bukharian Jews live in New York City.

Firuza Yagudaeva, the chef at "Firuz," was one of the first Bukharian Jews to arrive in New York City. An accomplished dancer as well as an upstart restauranteur, Firuza knew several musicians in the small Bukharian enclave and invited them to accompany the traditional Central Asian dances with which she entertained customers in a make-shift cabaret in the basement of her restaurant. From these sessions, a loosely-structured performing group emerged that also contributed music to social events in the Bukharan community and to occasional "world music" events around New York City.

Throughout the late 1970's and early 1980's, a steady trickle of Bukharan Jews arrived in New York. Among them was Fatima Kuinova, a powerful and evocative singer who abandoned a successful musical career in her native Tajikistan to seek greater opportunity for her children in America. Fatima Kuinova soon assumed a position of artistic leadership among the Bukharan musicians, who began to solidify their membership and rehearse a fixed repertory of pieces. They also took their present name, Shashmaqam, from the name of a venerable collection of classical Central Asian vocal and instrumental music that has furnished the group with an important part of its repertory.

Since 1983, under the aegis of the Ethnic Folk Arts Center, Shashmaqam has appeared at multi-ethnic music festivals and at events sponsored by Jewish community organizations eager to learn about the "lost" Jewish cultural traditions of Central Asia. These appearances inevitably stimulate animated murmuring among members of the audience that sometimes escalates into a lively give-and-take with the performers. The thought on everyone's mind seems to be some version of: "Well, these are Jews, but their music doesn't sound Jewish!"

Indeed, compared to the celebrated musical icons of Eastern European Jewish culture—Klezmer bands, Yiddish singers, fiddlers and accordion players—the music of the Bukharian Jews seems to emanate from far beyond the Pale. But the same cultural logic that links Eastern European Jews to the linguistic and musical world of their Slavic and Germanic neighbors has connected Bukharian Jews to the cultural identity of the Sunni Moslems of Iran and Turkic descent, who, for many centuries, have comprised the majority of Transoxiana's urban population.

The first language of most Bukharian Jews is Tajik, an eastern dialect of Persian that is widely spoken in Bukhara and Samarkand. Almost all are fluent in Russian, and many also know Uzbek, a Turkic tongue that is the official language of Uzbekistan, the Soviet republic stitched together from pieces of the old Central Asian empires. Yiddish has never been a part of Central Asian Jewish culture. Hebrew is confined to liturgical use, and the several still-functioning synagogues currently employ a prayer book printed both in Hebrew and in Tajik, the latter transliterated into the Hebrew alphabet.

As co-habitants of urban Transoxiana, Tajik, Uzbek, and Bukharan Jewish musicians have drawn from a common well of musical inspiration. Just as Jewish musicians in America participate in musical activities as diverse as symphony orchestras and rock bands, Bukharan Jews inhabit the same sound world as their Uzbek and Tajik neighbors, and the notion of a secular Central Asian "Jewish music" is as elusive as that of a secular American "Jewish music."

The Bukharan sound world includes a panorama of musical genres and styles. At one extreme is the shashmaqam, a repertory whose musical complexity and aesthetic sophistication calls for the interpretive skills of professional musicians and the listening skills of refined connoisseurs. At the other extreme are simple melodies—lullabies, laments, dances, folk songs—accessible to all.

In this sound world, Bukharan Jewish musicians have been jacks-of-all-musical trades. They were among the most distinguished of the musicians who entertained the emirs of Bukhara and their court retinues with virtuosic vocal performances drawn from the shashmaqam. During the Soviet period, when the social milieu of the shashmaqam has changed from feudal court to conservatory, concert hall, radio and recording studio, Bukharan Jews have continued to occupy a preeminent position as performers of indigenous Central Asian classical music. But the same "classical" musicians may also entertain at weddings—both Moslem and Jewish—where in different configurations of instruments and voices, they perform folk songs and dance tunes drawn from a large repertory of wedding music. This repertory includes not only music indigenous to Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent, but diverse musical styles and genres culled from neighboring Central Asian and Middle Eastern peoples—Azerbaijanis and Afghans, Iranians and Indians—through recordings, radio broadcasts, and personal travels.

Each of the members of Shashmaqam brought elements of this rich and diverse musical tradition to New York. And inevitably, the way in which Shashmaqam has reconstituted Central Asian music in New York reflects the social conditions in which the group's members now live. For example, the large urban population of Transoxiana could sustain a variety of ensembles distinguished by musical profiles, whereas the modest size of New York's Bukharan Jewish community has thus far supported only one—Shashmaqam. The Ensemble has responded by assuming a protean character, and musicians of distinctively different musical profiles have been welcomed into the group.
In 1989, a new and more restrictive United States immigration policy all but stopped the influx of Bukharian Jews to New York. Whether at its current size the Bukharian Jewish community can maintain its distinctive cultural identity or whether it will be gradually assimilated into some larger social entity depends in part on the leadership of Bukharian Jewish community groups and organizations, and in particular on the vitality of a musical ensemble such as Shashmaqam. Musical performance can express powerful symbols that continually recreate and reaffirm the identity and beliefs of a community of listeners. Shashmaqam was conceived in a generous and genial spirit of community sharing, at the same time, perhaps unknowingly, its members have become participants in the shared custody of a threatened, yet remarkable tradition. Let us wish them, as it is said in Bukhara, “dush khon mad bash”—success, good luck, Godspeed.

Shashmaqam: The Music

Note: Persian and Tajik classical and post-classical poetry is notoriously difficult to translate into English. The translations of song texts that follow are not intended to simulate the poetic style of the original, but simply to provide a sense of the meaning of the texts.

1. Obilom
Fatima Kuinova and Abubakr Aminov, vocals

"Obilom", a variant form of Alaim (Arabic: “my God”) illustrates a musical genre called haqqaoni [from Arabic: haqq, “absolute truth,” connoting “the absolute,” or “God”). Haqqaoni is particular to Bukhara, and is sung by, and for, Moslems as well as Bukharian Jews. Unlike most Bukharian music, haqqaoni is unmetered and is sung a cappella, with couples performed antiphonally by two, or occasionally three or more, singers. Singers hold their hands to the side of their mouths or use a plate, held or gently waved at an oblique angle to the mouth, to regulate and direct their voices.

The purpose of haqqaoni is to appeal to God and to facilitate inner purification: to renounce the physical world and become immersed in an inner world. In both musical style and texts, the haqqaoni genre demonstrates the strong influence of Sufi ideals, and indeed haqqaoni were formerly performed in the Bukharian Khanqah (dervish meeting places), as well as in the bazaar-i shab (night bazaar) and in other popular gathering places. They are still performed as a part of funeral ceremonies and commemorations of the dead, now more frequently by Moslem than by Bukharian Jews. A Haqqaoni is sung in the home just before the body of the deceased is removed to the cemetery. At both Jewish and Moslem burials, women traditionally sing for and among women, and men for and among men. Fatima Kuinova reports that haqqaoni are also sung during social evenings in private homes as an expression of a singer’s inner feelings.

The haqqaoni’s antiphonal performance style fosters a certain tension wherein each singer strives for maximum self-expression in order to create the desired spiritual atmosphere. The singers may sing from a single text or combine different texts that provide the proper imagery.

The presence of an Uzbek strophe at the end of “Obilom,” which is otherwise sung in Tajik, confirms the tradition of Uzbek and Tajik bilingualism in the repertory of Bukharian singers.

Oh, my soul, my God, I am your slave.

Woman: Eh, my friend, my soul, I take you by the hand.
I kiss your ruby lips, I long for your full-roasted laughter.
I’ll take you in my embrace tonight.
I’ll saturate myself in the marrow of your bones.

Man: Eh, I ache, oohh. Come to my cabin, joy of my soul, I’ll fly around your head.
Without you, I cry day and night, I’ll fly around your head.
My chest is constantly torn-apart by your suffering.
I’ll fly around your head.
Come for one night to this poor soul, I’ll fly around your head. /.

Woman: Oh, my soul, my God. I am your slave.
As long as I am alive, I want to see your face.
When I become ashes, let me become a piece of dust at the foot of your mountain.
With raised arms, I’ll pray that for you, the end of the world will never come.

Man: Eh, I ache, oohh, as long as I can’t be around you rivals will sit alongside you.
Eh, branch of a fresh blossom, I am the nightingale of this garden.
How blessed am I if I can be in the shadow of your eyebrows.

Woman: Oh, my soul, my God, I am your slave.
(Uzbek text).
If you give me a goblet, give me a full one, I’ve had enough half-full cups.
If you give me a friend, give me a soulmate,
I’ve had enough who aren’t.

Salaamatti ("be well")

2. Ghairi Khudo Yar Nadoram ("We Have No Friend But God")
Iosif Abramov, tar and vocal; Shumiel Kuyenov, doire

This song represents a simplified folk version of a widely-known ghazal from the Divan-e Shams of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi, the 13th century Sufi sheikh and sublime poet who inspired the Mevlevi, or “whirling” dervishes (the full song text is printed in Jean Dinges’s Musique et Mystique dans les Traditions de l’Iran, p. 219-220). The fact that the singer of the present version, Iosif Abramov, ascribes the source of the text to the Torah and perceives it as Jewish spiritual poetry illustrates the interaction of Jewish and Islamic musical, spiritual, and linguistic traditions in Central Asia.

In the two worlds, we have no friend but God.
We have no occupation except remembering God.
We’re a tall, thin branch in this little corner of the world.
We have nothing to do with the good and the bad of others.
We’re a modest part of this little corner of the world.
Even if someone casts stones at us, we won’t pay attention.

3. Jon-e Mumah ("My Soul")
Borukhia Davraev, vocal; Iosif Abramov, tar; Shumiel Kuyenov, doire

The black birth-mark on the face of my beloved.
Whose dagger-like eyebrows pierce my soul.

Don’t say for nothing that she makes my heart joyful.
I am held in the power of my heart, when will my heart be in my power?

Him: Graceful one, from you comes the fragrant scent musk.
Her: When will this fragrant musk be my mood?
Him: Graceful one, don’t kill your beloved one, less coquetry!
Her: I’ll kill my beloved, how long do I have to live?
Him: You who speak sweet words, a black snake is standing on your neck.
Her: What do you mean, a snake; it’s my unkept hair.
Him: Ahmadi Jamil glowing in love like a candle.
Her: What do you mean like a candle; you glow like the moon.

4. To Bodhi Sabo
Iosif Abramov, tar and vocal; Shumiel Kuyenov, doire and vocal

To Bodhi Sabo is a clearly expressed example of the ghazal, a lyrical form of poetry that was popular in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu literature from the 8th century onward, and that became entrenched in the poetic and musical expression of Bukhara, Samarkand, and other Central Asian cities. The text plays with the characteristic symbols and imagery of love and wine, mystically understood. In the last couplet, the poet—here, Maqfi—signs his name.

You must see the flower garden before the morning winds come.
The meadow birds will fly there.
Don’t lose hope in your fate.
For every sunset, there is a sunrise.
We’ll come, we’ll sit, today the song of the poor nightingale.

Tells of my soul’s suffering.
If my thirsty lips don’t taste the wine of union with you.
My eyes will shed tears from the sorrowful pain of my love for you.
My eyes are on the caravan trail that is redolent with the fragrance of union with you.
When the morning wind brings news of you, my thoughts are constantly about you.
Don’t arouse everyone to learn the secrets of the soul.
Others are constrained, reserved, but you are from amongst the rulers.
Don’t awaken all of these things in the heart of Maqfi.
Think that there is just one (God) other than you.

5. Dostanaa Gum Makum ("Don’t Lose Your Friends")
Fatima Kuinova, vocal; Iosif Abramov, tar; Shumiel Kuyenov, doire

A folk melody set to a text by Mirza Tursun-Zade, a well-known Tajik poet of the Soviet period. The poem is a ghazal, written in the spirit of popular didactic poetry.
While you can, don’t lose your friends. Don’t lose the friends who are close to you. Without friends, it is very difficult to be in this world. Don’t lose those who lighten your troubles. Learn how to tell your real friends from the mass of friends. Don’t lose friends who are famous to the whole world. The beauty of the garden depends on the charm of the flowers. Don’t lose people who are charming like flowers. If a friend comes, embrace him. Don’t lose friends who are famous to the whole world. The folk are our only source of inspiration. Don’t lose the folk who are famous to the whole world. While you can, don’t lose your friends. Don’t lose the friends who are close to you.

6. Blyo Yak (“Come Once”) Fatima Kuinova, vocal; Iosif Abramov, tar; Shamie Kuyenov, doire; Yascha Kakuriyev, clarinet; Mikhail Abramov, accordion

Blyo Yak is a Tajik version of the ubiquitous counting song: “Come once, come twice, come three times...” Each number is at the same time a play on words or a metonymy: “one” means “my one and only;” “two” means “the one with two eyes;” “three” is the same as the beginning of the word for “apple,” and so forth. It is in the poetic form called du-baatti, a form typical of Tajik folk poetry.

May the folk’s evil eye not witness your intoxicated eyes. May your intoxicated spring not be sorrowful.

We ask of God this wish: let your happy times not be destroyed. May everyone live, may no one die.

Come once, come once, my only one. Come twice, come twice, my two songed-for eyes. (refrain)

My young flower I will kiss your ruby lips. My pure bride, don’t lament too much. You have an eternal friend, you have happy times.

Come three times, come three times my apple, my pomegranate Come four times, come four times. I don’t have any patience left.

Come five times, come five times, my palm. Come six times, come six times, my wine goblet. (Refrain)

Come nine times, come nine times, the light of my eyes. Come ten times, come ten times, I’ll take on all of your problems.

7. Medley of Songs from Wedding Repertory: Yar-Yar, Abru Koshi Dumi Mor, Shashtu-Shastu Chor, Chashmi Siyah Dori, doire interlude, Mahvashi Nozuk Badanam, Orzu.

the Ensemble; Fatima Kuinova, vocal solo; Shamie Kuyenov, doire solo

I’m embarrassed by your black eyes. I don’t have anything to give back to you. The only treasure that I have is my life, and I’ll sacrifice it for you. (refrain)

e) Mahovski Nozuk Badanam, Orzu

My graceful one, like a moon, orzu (I want you)

I want to come closer to you, orzu My graceful one, like a moon, orzu I’ll say a word in your ear, orzu My words will become dear to you, orzu I’ll talk to you so that you will want me to go on talking, orzu Let it be, so, orzu You speak with sweet words, orzu You have an ant-like waist, orzu Your eyebrows are like a bow, orzu My graceful one, like a moon, orzu.

8. Talqin-i Bayat Iosif Abramov, tanbur and vocal; Shamie Kuyenov, doire

Talqin-i Bayat is a classical piece from the shashmaqam, the collection of six long vocal and instrumental suites that is at the heart of the musical “great tradition” of Bukhara. Shashmaqam means in Tajik “six maqams.” In Central Asia, maqam has two meanings. The first signifies a mode or melody 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 part of the pitch ladder that comprises the one 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 in its content and sequence certain melodic and rhythmic organizing principles. Thus, shashmaqam means both “six collections” 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: buzkist, rast, nawa, dugah, segah, and iraq. In addition to these six melody types, other subordinate melody types, called shabbe (Arabic “branch”) make cameo appearances in the suites.

“Talqin-i Bayat” is in melody type bagyat—a shabbe in the nawa cycle—performed in the usual, or metro-rhythmic genre talqin. Distinguished by its uneven, lurching beat, talqin is a genre common to the shashmaqam and to Central Asian art songs, called ashula, that are independent of the shashmaqam. In Central Asia, the usul of talqin is also known as lang (“lame,” as in Tamerlane, or Timurlang, i.e. “Timur the Lame”) and is related to the Turkish “limping” usul, called aksak.

Iosif Abramov accompanies his vocal line on the tanbur, a long-necked lute whose strings are plucked with a special plectrum worn on the finger. Brass strings ride relatively low, heavy or high, movable frets, allowing players to create a variety of fluid microtonal intervals by depressing the strings more or less firmly behind the frets. In this performance, Iosif Abramov matches the subtle microtonal inflections in his voice with identical inflections on the tanbur.

Even though you left me, you are still my beloved. Even though you are an enemy to my life, you are closer to me than my own life. Even if you will torment me, shooting me with the arrow of suffering, I won’t even throw at you the petals of soft blossoms. Your pushing me away is like assassination. Even if I were to die, I wouldn’t give you to anyone else. Endure a few more days, my life is coming to an end. When the end comes, I will give you my friend. When your happy drunkenness is filled with the sweet voices of a songstress, let the groans of my heavy suffering reach you.

9. Nasir-i Chargarh Abukhali Aminov, vocal and doire; Iosif Abramov, tar

Nasir-i Chargarh, also from the shashmaqam, is a piece in melody type chargarh—a shabbe in the dugah cycle—performed in the usual, or metro-rhythmic genre nasir, a 6/4 rhythm which in this performance is accompanied on the doire. Like other pieces in the shashmaqam, Nasir-i Chargarh is a fixed composition—albeit an oral one—and melodic improvisation plays a limited role in performance. The text was composed by the Tajik poet, Najib. Abukhali Aminov, the singer, learned it from his brother, the noted singer Serezh (Simkha) Aminov.

I brought you two hearts, both molten. I am burning in two fires, but each of these fires burns the sun. Your crescent moonlike eyebrows are reflected in the mirror-like water. With one movement of your eyebrows, you destroy them both. I had two vessels of your blood in my heart. With a wink, you destroyed them both. Coquettishly, you opened your two lips, and from them holy words began to flow. I made two requests of you, and in one place, I received an answer to both. I dedicated two couplets to your eyebrows But you never took notice of them. Even though each of them became a book. Your two curly locks which were curled by a manicurist. Each of your two locks became a noose for my soul. In the faith of my soul, Najib had two homes in two worlds. With one glance, the wine-pourer destroyed them both.

10. Usheq-shi Samarkand Fatima Kuinova, Borukha Davraev, Abukhali Aminov, Isak Baraev, vocals; Iosif Abramov, Arkady Davdov, tar Shamie Kuyenov, doire

Usheq-shi Samarkand is associated with the 19th-century Samarkand musician Hoji Abdulaziz. The title of Usheq-shi Samarkand derives from the Central Asian melodic type usheq-shi and is sung to a variety of Tajik and Uzbek poetic texts written in the classical quantitative verse style that is called araiz. The Tajik text used in this rendition, usheq-shi Samarkand is by Zebunisa, a 19th century female descendant of the Moghal emperor Babur.

Classical Central Asian songs characteristically begin in a low tessitura,
pass briefly through a middle range, and ascend through a series of increasingly higher sections to the awdij, or point of musical culmination. Following the awdij, the melody descends and finally concludes in the low register from which it began. The extensive melodic diapason of Usheqai-i Samarkand lends itself to virtuoso solo treatment, and indeed, the piece is known almost exclusively through the performance so that a perfectionist. However, Shashmaqam's rendition features not one, but four, vocalists, who enliven their performance by marking sections of the piece with different numbers and combinations of voices.

You with the painted eyebrows, come here.
With a warm glance, joy of my soul, come here.
Playing with your eyelashes, with a glare as hard as a diamond.
Here, the kings demand the Karbala desert.
Let human treachery not reach the paradisical garden of your smile.
You leave me, and I don't know where I am.
I leaped through the pages of all the Uzbeks books.
I saw your birthmark and said, "this is what I was looking for."
If you would pay a tribute to God for your beauty.
Come here, Zebunisa, for here I am the humble one who receives tribute.

11. Qalandari

Iosif Abramov, tar; Shumiel Kuyenov, doire
Like Talqin-i Bagat and Nasr-i Chargaq, Qalandari belongs to the Central Asian classical music repertoire. The term Qalandar refers to a wandering dervish. The qalandar usul is the same as the limping usul of Talqin. Qalandar-s, are normally vocal pieces, but this one is played as an instrumental piece.

12. Yalli

Iosif Abramov, tar; Shumiel Kuyenov, doire
For Bukharan musicians, Azerbaijani music, from Azerbaijan across the Caspian Sea, is a form of slightly exotic cultural import. Yalli is an Azerbaijani collective dance performed by men and women, either together or separately. The music is usually played on the zurma and davul (bowl and drum). In the 1970s, Azerbaijani music became popular in the wedding music repertory of Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Bukharan Jews.

13. Azerbaijani Segah

Yasha Kakuriyev, clarinet; Mikhail Abramov, accordion; Isak Baraev, doire
Azerbaijan has its own counterpart to the classical shashmaqam, called mugam, a virtuoso repertory usually performed by soloists or small ensembles who may be vocalists or instrumentalists performing on the tar and kemanche (spice fiddle) and accompanied by a daf (frame drum).

Segah is the name of a melody type that occurs in both the Azerbaijani mugams and the Bukharan Shashmaqam. However, the link between the two segahs seems to be in name only; they are melodically quite dissimilar. Bukharan musicians have taken up the haunting Azerbaijani segah, not in the pristine form of classical mugam, but in a lighter, more popular style. Here it is performed on clarinet and accordion.

accompanied by doire. The opening section is an unmeasured improvisation on the clarinet built from the conventionalized melodic motifs and phrases of segah. This section segues into a rang, or dance movement, that features a fixed tune composed in segah.

Instruments

tanbur. The tanbur was traditionally the leading instrument of Bukharan classical music. It has three frets, three of which are used as drones while the fourth is plucked with a metal plectrum worn on the tip of the index finger. Frets are built of wood, and are built up from the neck of the fretboard, so that a performer can influence the plucked string sound with microtonal oscillations by varying the pressure on the string across the fret.

tar. The tar is an Azerbaijani instrument which was first employed in Bukhara at the beginning of the 20th century and has become especially popular there since the 1950s. In Azerbaijan, the tar player does not accompany his (it is always played by men) singing, while in Uzbekistan, as this recording shows, the tar frequently serves as an accompanying instrument, substituting for the more traditional tanbur.

doire. A large tambourine with a thick wooden rim and goatskin or sheepskin head, the doire is a much-used instrument in Bukhara. Commonly played by women as well as men, the doire can also perform a solo function in extended interludes between songs. This form of “singing” doire-playing is called safaelek. In the classical music of the shashmaqam, the doire is a required instrument inasmuch as the shashmaqam consists not only of canoned melodic types, but a canoned system of rhythmic formulas—the usul-s.

clarinet and davul (kettle drums). Like the tar, the clarinet and davul entered Bukharan music from Azerbaijan, as a part of the absorption of Azerbaijani musical styles in the Bukharan wedding repertory.

accordion. The accordion achieved popularity in Bukhara in the 1960s, a bit later than the tanbur. In wedding music ensembles, it has largely replaced traditional stringed and wind instruments such as the gijak (spice fiddle) and nay (wooden flute). It has also superseded the harmonium as a part of Daghdestani provenance that were used in Bukhara at the turn of the century.

The Musicians

Fatima Kulinova was born in Samarkand, but moved to Dushanbe in 1934 with her two sisters, who had married men after her father was jailed and murdered for his mercantile prosperity. She graduated from the Pedagogical Institute in Dushanbe and in 1942, joined a women's rebel ensemble and folk orchestra under the direction of the Dushanbe Philharmonia. She counts as her teachers Niyra Aminov, Faizula Babakhulov, Sharozar Shaibov, and Faizula Shakhshabov. In 1948, she was named a Merited Artist of the Tajik SSR. She came to New York in 1981, where she lives with her husband and two children.

Abukhai Aminov was born in 1951 in Samarkand. He learned music from his father, a tenor singer, and later from his brother, the noted singer Serezh (Simkha) Aminov. Later, he studied doire in Samarkand's music high school and worked in Samarkand House of Culture no. 7, where he directed a children's music ensemble. He came to the United States in 1989 and is currently employed at Streisats Matzos in Manhattan.

Borokhav Davraev was born in 1947 in Katta-Kurgan, a town in the Samarkand region. He attended the Samarkand music high school, but left after three years to work as a teacher in a middle school. He came to the United States in 1979 and is self-employed as a shoe repairman.

Shumiel Kuyenov was born in Samarkand in 1950 and lived subsequently in Dushanbe and Tashkent, where his father worked as a barber. He played the doire from early childhood, and was a student of Ustad Alii Kalandar, an important doire rhythm notation. In 1968 he became an accompanist in Tashkent's High School of Choreography and after service in the army, worked as a teacher and accompanist in the Theatre Arts Institute. In 1979, Shumiel Kuyenov emigrated to New York, where he worked for five years as a taxi driver. In 1984, he opened a jewelry store on Long Island, which he now manages. He lives in Queens with his wife and two daughters.

Yasha Kakuriyev was born in 1947 in Tashkent. He graduated from a music school in Tashkent, and from Tashkent's Music High School. He worked at the Tashkent Radio Station, playing clarinet and saxophone in a popular music ensemble and in 1982, became a teacher in Tashkent's Music School no. 22. In 1989, he emigrated to New York and presently works as a chauffeur for Phone-a-Car in Manhattan.

Iosif Abramov was born in Tashkent. He graduated from secondary school and from the High School for Young Artists, and then returned to Tashkent where he worked as an accompanist in the Choreography High School and in the Theatre Arts Institute. He emigrated to New York in 1989 and played his first concert with the ensemble Shashmaqam just two weeks after his arrival in the United States. Presently, he sells hot dogs from a pushcart while learning to be a watch repairman.

Firuz Bagaufuimva was born in Dushanbe. She started dancing at the age of seven, and later on continued her hobby with leading teachers in Tashkent. She taught Central Asian and international dance, as well as psychology and dance methodology in Tashkent and Dushanbe, and toured with the Lida Dance Ensemble. She emigrated to the United States in 1976 and for several years, ran the "Firuz" restaurant in which she performed, cooked, and presented visiting dancers. She now works as a teaching assistant in an elementary school.

Mikhail Abramov is a native of Ferghana. He graduated from Ferghana's music school and continued his studies in the Ferghana Musical Uchilashke (high school). He worked as an ensemble leader in a dom kul'turi (house of culture) and concurrently, as a chauffeur. Abramov emigrated to Israel in 1978, and in 1987, came to New York, where he works as a machine operator at Streisats Matzos.

Arkadi Davidov was born in Bukhara. He learned the tar and rebab as a teenager and studied in the Bukhara music high school. He maintained his rhythmic skills before moving to Tashkent, where he lived for thirty years, playing professionally in a folk orchestra. Subsequently, he immigrated to Israel, and in 1984, came to the United States. He lives in Forest Hills, Queens, and works at Streisats Matzos.

Isak Baraev was born in Tashkent in 1948. He is a graduate of the Tashkent Musical High School, and of Tashkent State Conservatory, where he concentrated on folk percussion instruments. In Tashkent, he taught percussion in Music School no. 23, and worked as a percussionist in the theater, in theater and dance institutes, in the Philharmonia Society, and in the radio station maqan ensemble. He came to the United States in 1989 and currently works as a chauffeur for Prime Time Limousine.

Credits:


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About the Ethnic Folk Arts Center:

The mission of the Ethnic Folk Arts Center (EFAC) is to promote cultural understanding and appreciation through research, documentation and presentation of community-based traditional performing artists. The Center has a 25 year history as a public advocate of cultural equity for the diverse communities in the greater New York area. Historically, the level of support available for these communities leaves them invisible to the public eye. Our concern is to support and nurture diverse traditional cultural forms that are in danger of extinction; forms that have traditionally bound members of ethnic groups together and provided the foundation for community life. Working on behalf of a local ethnic community and within the mainstream media and arts world, the Center creates a bridge that facilitates access to broader general audiences. But perhaps even more importantly, this outside affiliation is critical in helping to sustain and nurture the life of these traditions within the communities themselves.