

Doira is an Integral Part of National Identity

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ABSTRACT

The doira, an emblematic symbol of Uzbek culture, is a traditional percussion instrument that holds a significant place in the musical heritage of Uzbekistan. Known for its rich, resonant sound, the doira serves as both an accompaniment and a solo instrument, bringing life to performances of folk, classical, and contemporary Uzbek music. This article delves into the history, construction, playing techniques, and cultural significance of the doira, highlighting its role as a cornerstone of Uzbekistan's musical identity.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 04 Nov 2024

Received in revised form
05 Nov 2024

Accepted 17 Dec 2024

Keywords: Central Asia, Middle East, shashmaqom, doira, drum, ancient culture, Persians, manuscript, Islamic Golden Age, folk music, weddings, festivals, ritual dances, celebratory gatherings.

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Historical Background. The doira, also spelled *dayereh* or *daira*, traces its roots back thousands of years and is prevalent across Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. In Uzbekistan, it is closely associated with the traditions of *shashmaqom* (a classical Uzbek and Tajik music genre) and folk music ensembles. Historically, the doira was not merely a musical instrument but also a cultural artifact used in ceremonies, rituals, and celebrations.

Early depictions of similar frame drums have been found in ancient artifacts and murals, showcasing their integral role in the music and spirituality of the region. Over centuries, the doira has evolved, yet it continues to embody the essence of Uzbek musical expression.

The doira is one of the most ancient and enduring musical instruments in Central Asia, with roots that stretch deep into the history of the region. Its evolution and role in Uzbek culture are intertwined with the broader history of music in Central Asia, and it is believed to have been used for thousands of years. The instrument's development and widespread use are linked to various cultural, religious, and social practices, solidifying its place as a central figure in the region's musical heritage.

The doira's origins can be traced back to the early civilizations of Central Asia, particularly in the ancient cultures of the Persians, Arabs, and Turkic peoples. Similar frame drums have been depicted in ancient artifacts dating back to the pre-Islamic period, and its use has been documented in texts as early as the 7th century. These early versions of the doira were likely simple drums made from animal skins stretched over wooden frames, a construction method that remains largely unchanged in traditional doiras today.

Artifacts such as stone carvings and ancient manuscripts from Central Asia show evidence of frame drums similar to the doira, being used in ritualistic and ceremonial contexts. This suggests that the instrument was not only a source of entertainment but also held a spiritual and sacred significance. These early drums may have been used in religious ceremonies, healing rituals, and cultural festivities.

Doira in Early Islamic Culture. During the Islamic Golden Age (8th to 13th centuries), the doira became firmly established within the musical traditions of the Persian and Arab worlds. In the early Islamic period, the doira was featured prominently in court music, religious ceremonies, and folk performances. The spread of Islam and its cultural practices through Central Asia facilitated the dissemination of the doira across a wider geographical area, including regions that now comprise Uzbekistan. During this era, the doira was commonly played in combination with other instruments, including stringed instruments like the rubab and tar. This period also saw the introduction of specific rhythmic patterns that became central to the musical tradition of Central Asia, and the doira, with its ability to produce a variety of dynamic sounds, was ideally suited to accompany these intricate rhythms.

The Doira and the Shashmaqom Tradition. In the 16th century, with the rise of the Timurid Empire and the flourishing of the shashmaqom music tradition in Central Asia, the doira began to occupy a central role in classical Uzbek music. Shashmaqom refers to a genre of highly refined classical music, involving a set of six interconnected suites that combine melody, rhythm, and poetry. The doira was a vital component of the ensemble, often used to accompany both vocal and instrumental parts, providing a rhythmic foundation that grounded the complex melodic structures.

At this time, the doira became recognized not only as an accompaniment instrument but also as a solo instrument capable of intricate performances. Maqom music, a form of art music that is still performed today, also utilized the doira in similar ways, contributing to its status as a sophisticated instrument within the classical music tradition.

The Doira and Folk Music. Parallel to its use in classical contexts, the doira has a strong presence in Uzbek folk music. It has been used in weddings, festivals, ritual dances, and celebratory gatherings, often accompanying other traditional instruments like the tanbur, dutar, and gijjak. In folk settings, the doira has an even more prominent social function. It is often played in ensembles for communal dances such as the halay and Lazgi, which are integral to Uzbek celebrations. Its rhythmic nature makes it a vital instrument in these social events, energizing the crowd and helping to synchronize movements.

The nomadic cultures of Central Asia also contributed to the preservation and development of the doira, as it was a portable instrument that could be easily carried from place to place. During periods of migration or war, the doira served not only as a tool for musical expression but also as a means of preserving cultural identity in the face of external pressures.

By the 19th century, the doira had firmly established itself as a central instrument in the musical traditions of Uzbekistan. It became a key feature in both solo performances and as part of the ensemble in various genres, including ceremonial music. Its role in traditional Uzbek weddings, festivals, and religious ceremonies continued to evolve, and it was often used in the accompaniment of poetic performances, particularly those featuring the shashmaqom or maqom music genres.

During the Soviet period (1920s–1991), the doira faced new challenges as the state promoted a blend of local and Russian musical traditions. However, it continued to be an integral part of Uzbek folk culture, surviving as a symbol of national identity even as the political landscape shifted. The Soviet government sought to standardize many aspects of regional cultures, but the doira remained a distinct element of the musical heritage of Uzbekistan, often featured in folk performances, national celebrations, and festivals.

Modern Resurgence and International Recognition. In recent decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in traditional Uzbek music, including the doira. The instrument has found its place in modern Uzbek performances, both as a solo instrument and as part of contemporary fusion ensembles. International interest in Uzbek music has also contributed to the revitalization of the doira, with performances at global festivals and cultural exchanges showcasing the instrument's rich cultural significance.

In 2008, UNESCO recognized *shashmaqom*, a genre closely associated with the doira, as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, further cementing the importance of the instrument in preserving Central Asian musical traditions.

Today, the doira is not only an integral part of Uzbekistan's national identity but also a symbol of the enduring connection between the past and the present. It remains a testament to the vitality of

Uzbekistan's cultural heritage and its continuing relevance in the modern world.

The doira's journey from ancient civilizations to contemporary performances highlights its evolution as both a musical instrument and a cultural symbol. Its presence in ceremonial contexts, folk celebrations, and classical ensembles underlines its versatility and enduring significance. As Uzbekistan moves further into the 21st century, the doira continues to connect the past with the present, serving as a reminder of the rich musical legacy that has shaped the country's cultural landscape.

The doira is a type of frame drum, circular in shape, and typically made from natural materials. Its construction includes:

1. **Frame:** Traditionally crafted from durable woods like mulberry or walnut, the frame provides the instrument's structural base. Modern doiras may also use metal or synthetic frames.
2. **Drumhead:** The membrane is made from animal hide, usually goat or fish skin, which is stretched tightly over the frame. It produces the distinct tonal qualities of the instrument.
3. **Metal Rings or Jingles:** Small metallic rings are attached to the inner side of the frame, creating a jingling effect when the instrument is played. This feature distinguishes the doira from other frame drums, adding rhythmical complexity and vibrancy to its sound.

The size and weight of the doira can vary, with larger instruments used in traditional ensembles and smaller versions preferred for solo performances or portability. Playing the doira requires skill, precision, and rhythm. It is traditionally played with the fingers and palms, and the techniques involve a combination of striking, tapping, and rolling motions. Common techniques include:

- **Bass Taps:** Using the palm to strike the center of the drumhead for a deep, resonant sound.
- **Finger Rolls:** Rapid finger movements along the edge of the drumhead to produce continuous, shimmering sounds.
- **Jingling Effects:** Shaking or striking the frame to activate the metal rings, adding a dynamic layer to the rhythm.

Doira players, known as *doirachi*, often display remarkable dexterity and creativity, incorporating complex rhythms and improvisations. Mastery of the instrument is considered an art form, requiring years of practice and dedication.

Cultural Significance. The doira is more than just a musical instrument; it is a cultural icon of Uzbekistan. It is widely used in:

- **Traditional Music:** In both solo performances and as part of ensembles for shashmaqom and maqom music.
- **Folk Celebrations:** During weddings, festivals, and other social gatherings, where it energizes dances and communal singing.
- **Rituals and Ceremonies:** Its rhythmic beats are believed to have spiritual and meditative qualities, making it a key element in certain religious and cultural rituals.

The doira also plays a role in modern Uzbek music, where it is incorporated into contemporary compositions and fusion genres, bridging traditional and modern styles. In recent years, the doira has gained recognition on the global stage, thanks to international festivals, cultural exchanges, and performances by Uzbek musicians. UNESCO has recognized *shashmaqom* and other Uzbek musical traditions, which often feature the doira, as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Conclusion. The doira embodies the spirit and soul of Uzbekistan, resonating with its history, culture, and artistry. Its unique sound and versatility make it a treasured instrument, connecting generations and bringing Uzbek music to audiences around the world. As both a symbol of tradition and a tool for innovation, the doira continues to inspire and captivate, standing as a testament to the enduring richness of Uzbek culture.

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